

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Kentucky

Kentucky has spent several years intensively implementing reforms in college and career readiness, including the incorporation of career readiness measures into its state accountability system. During Phase One of the New Skills for Youth (NSFY) grant, the state NSFY team built on those reforms by carrying out a thorough and transparent analysis of the availability of high-skill, high-demand career pathways. The team then built a strategic plan focused on a regionalized approach to improving career pathways and career readiness systems.

Foundations for the Work

Kentucky has prioritized college and career readiness reforms for several years, particularly since its participation in the Race to the Top federal grant program. In fact, the state was among the first to include multiple career readiness indicators in its accountability system. These indicators include the number of secondary students who obtain industry-recognized credentials or who pass a state-approved career readiness assessment. State report cards include data on enrollment and certifications earned by career pathway, as well as placement into employment, military or postsecondary technical training programs.¹

The state's focus on career readiness includes a history of reforms related to experiential learning as well. The Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK) model for pre-

apprenticeships is a collaborative effort of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), Kentucky Labor Cabinet and employer partners. The program begins in high school and culminates in an industry-recognized credential, paid work experience, and in many cases, advanced standing within a full registered apprenticeship. These accountability and experiential learning policies formed a base for new career readiness reforms.

Work During Phase One

The state team worked with an external reviewer to conduct a needs assessment of the state's career readiness system and to analyze student outcome data. The needs assessment cited strengths for the state in assessment and accountability as well as the state's history of and capacity for system-wide reforms and

Phase One of JPMorgan Chase & Co.'s New Skills for Youth grant extended from May to October 2016. With bold visions for improving career readiness in K-12 education, each Phase One state spent the grant period performing a diagnostic assessment of its career preparation system and preparing for implementation of a new action plan. This snapshot describes Kentucky's experience and progress in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.

¹<https://careertech.org/sites/default/files/MakingCareerReadinessCountUpdate-2016.pdf>

changes. As the team reflected on how it could maximize the impact of the Phase One NSFY grant, it became apparent that while the years of reforms helped the state make many gains, they also resulted in a somewhat disjointed Career Technical Education (CTE) delivery system. This disjointed system was confusing to parents and students. Therefore, the state team decided to prioritize the use of its Phase One NSFY grant to streamline the state's data and CTE delivery systems.

To strengthen the relationship between K-12 education and industry groups, the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) formed the Business Education Alignment Committee as a standing committee in May 2016. Members include business representatives and partners from the state's secondary and postsecondary agencies. The Committee regularly provides policy recommendations to the Governor's Office and the KWIB.

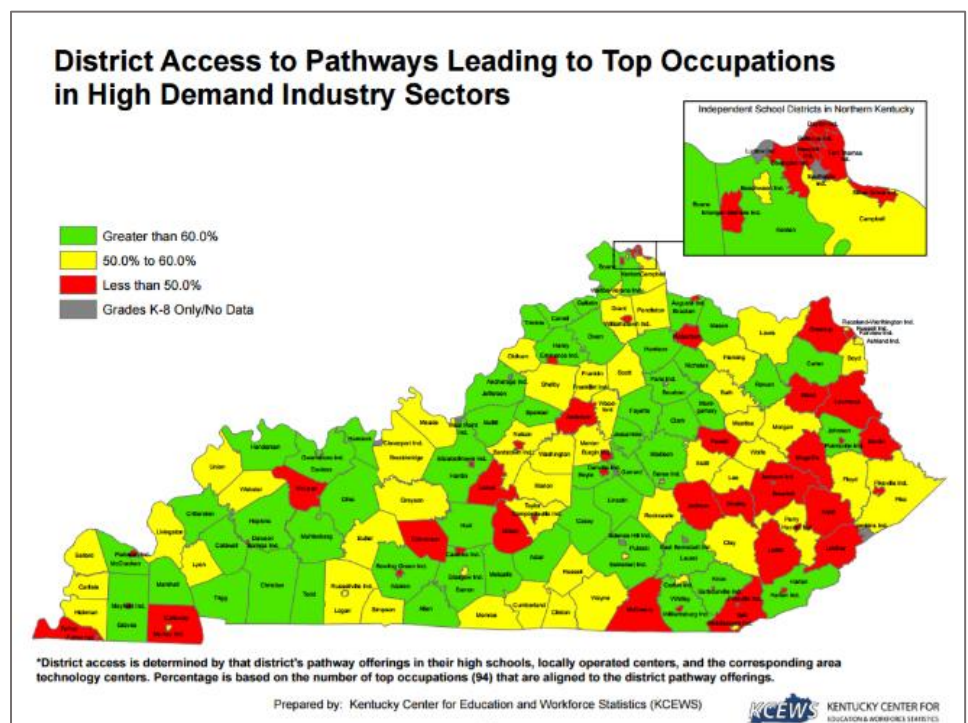
To signal the engagement of other partners in the cross-sector team, the state posted Memorandums of Understanding with partners on the [public KDE website](#). These partners include the Kentucky Labor Cabinet, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), and the Kentucky Center for Education Workforce Statistics (KCEWS).

Identifying Priority Sectors

The Kentucky Education and

Workforce Cabinet, the KWIB, the Kentucky Economic Development Cabinet, KCTCS and CPE all used different systems for developing and interpreting their jobs forecast data. This use of different systems hindered the identification of priority sectors for the state. During Phase One, all agencies involved in education and workforce development agreed to use KCEWS as the single source for jobs forecast data. KCEWS will update its labor market information annually and post that information on its public website.

The team also held data work group sessions with regional Workforce Innovation Boards to examine the regional labor market and gain insights on the unique contexts of each region. Through these regional sessions and the data agreements created at the state level, the Kentucky team was able to facilitate a process to identify the five highest-demand workforce sectors and occupations within those sectors for the entire state. All of the state agencies involved in education and workforce agreed



on these priority sectors. KCEWS then used data provided by KDE to create heat maps showing the availability of career pathways that lead to occupations in the high-demand sectors.

The state team posted the findings from the regional analyses, as well as the full needs assessment from the external reviewer, on the public KDE website.

Regionalized Approach

The state team created a strategic plan for its career readiness reforms based on a regionalized model. The plan focuses on a system that is available to all Kentucky students and:

- Is employer-led through regional workforce areas and ensures cross-institutional involvement;
- Encompasses career pathways that have seamless transitions from secondary to postsecondary education;
- Involves shared resources and funding among all partners; and
- Provides valuable certifications and credentials that are recognized by business and industry.

The plan includes strategies for expanding work-based learning through the TRACK program, identifying priority sectors, phasing out low-performing programs, and increasing coordination across state agencies and district stakeholders. The state also plans to revise its CTE teacher certification options and hire new KDE staff to support improved CTE teacher induction.

Through a regionalized approach, the state will provide statewide guidance, support and

resources while encouraging regional collaboration among K-12 districts, postsecondary institutions and employers to implement career pathways and create career academies. In this model, the state will establish a policy framework that defines quality and maintains academic rigor. Regional partnerships, informed by state labor market data and supported with state funding and technical assistance, will build and implement career pathways that fit their context and meet the needs of their stakeholders.

To build awareness and buy-in, the state team held regional meetings with K-12 district superintendents to share its goals and strategic plan for the NSFY work. In these meetings, the state team shared state labor market data and held discussions on new career pathways that could be offered within the regions. The superintendents also discussed creating and maintaining relationships with regional employer partners.

Looking Ahead

The state team will continue its work of implementing its plan for career readiness reforms, including supporting districts as they align their existing programs with the new priority sectors identified through the labor market data analysis and regional work groups. Work will also continue to enhance state-level collaboration, including mapping funding streams related to this work.

The state will also explore ways to add non-academic measures to its existing career readiness accountability indicators. During Phase One, the commissioner of education formed an accountability work group on college and career readiness tasked with

developing indicators that incentivize dual credit, work-based learning, and rigorous career pathways and credentialing. Work

group members include CTE teachers and administrators, as well as representatives from employer partners.

