

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Louisiana

Louisiana's approach to Phase One of the New Skills for Youth (NSFY) initiative was to build upon the implementation of Jump Start, the state's career readiness initiative. During Phase One, Louisiana completed a comprehensive inventory of career pathways being offered in every public high school, indicating areas of success as well as gaps in career pathways available to under-served students. This career pathway inventory highlighted opportunities to expand implementation support for rural schools, enrich industry engagement through micro-industry engagement strategies and develop direct-to-family communication tools.

Foundations for the Work

When Phase One of NSFY began, Louisiana was in the third year of a four-year statewide career readiness initiative called [Jump Start](#). Louisiana launched Jump Start in 2014 after completing an 18-month needs assessment. This needs assessment brought to light fundamental challenges and inequities in the state's existing Career Technical Education (CTE) system, particularly regarding an outdated high school career diploma and a mismatch between K-12 CTE and Louisiana's key industry growth rates and employment opportunities.

Early policy revisions under Jump Start launched the transformation of Louisiana's K-16 career readiness initiatives. Jump Start Regional Teams — industry stakeholders joined by educators, community leaders, and workforce and economic development experts — created [47 state-approved graduation](#)

[pathways](#) linked to high-demand industries that each culminate in an industry-based credential. The state also expanded its state high school accountability system to provide equal weight to student academic and career readiness achievements. Louisiana schools now earn equal accountability points whether a student achieves a top Advanced Placement test score or attains an advanced industry-based credential in high-demand sectors.

The goal of Jump Start is to make high school more compelling and relevant, equipping students with workplace and life skills that enable them to pursue both additional educational and additional career opportunities after graduation. While benchmark data on Jump Start student outcomes will not be available until 2017-18, which is the final year of implementation, program implementation is ahead of schedule.

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 Louisiana's experience and progress in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.

Work During Phase One

Louisiana approached the six-month Phase One grant period as an opportunity to build upon the foundation created by early Jump Start implementation efforts. The state's theory of change says that if industry, higher education and K-12 school systems collaborate to develop career pathways that culminate in credentials leading to employment in high-demand industries, students will be more motivated and will learn and achieve more through both college placement and lifelong economic success.

The Phase One needs assessment surfaced challenges related to data collection and implementation, including:

- The need for additional support for many rural schools to help implement a broader selection of career pathways;
- The opportunity to expand and improve industry engagement;
- The opportunity to expand CTE opportunities for students with disabilities; and
- The need to create direct-to-family communications to provide parents and students with information about the Jump Start pathways offered at each school.

Further, while the early years of Jump Start implementation had helped to catalyze regional relationships between school system and business leaders, Louisiana recognized in Phase One that more work was needed to encourage the use of Jump Start best practices within the state's public high schools.

Putting the Plan Into Action

The Phase One needs assessment allowed Louisiana to take early and meaningful actions. For example, one of Louisiana's early accomplishments was to implement a statewide automated text messaging system to provide information about career pathways available at every public high school. Students and families across the state — especially those in rural and hard-to-reach communities — can text a variety of keywords to a specific number to gain information about the career readiness opportunities available in their high schools and communities.

Insights from Phase One also revealed that the Jump Start program was not being implemented in all regions with fidelity to the state vision. In response, the team diverted resources to design and launch a pilot program called the Delta Region Teacher Training and Pathway Implementation Initiative, which aims to enrich professional development opportunities for teachers and instructional supports for program administrators in the Delta region. Early results have identified Jump Start ambassadors, who will be leaders in career pathway implementation at their schools, along with the need for more on-demand training to help teachers earn valued industry-based credentials.

Looking Ahead

Building on early success in Phase One, Louisiana identified 13 specific state action plan initiatives to address gaps in the Jump Start program, with a particular focus on stakeholder communications and employer engagement.

Louisiana intends to build on the platform of text messaging and Jump Start videos to put information in the hands of teachers; school counselors; and other community leaders who can help students and families make informed decisions about education, career and life plans. Additionally, Louisiana plans to align Jump Start pathways with four-year postsecondary programs, specifically in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); entrepreneurship; and early childhood education. By promoting these opportunities among college-bound students, Louisiana intends to dispel the myth that career readiness and college readiness are mutually exclusive.

Another area that Louisiana will focus on is strengthening employer engagement at the local level. Louisiana's strategy of micro-industry engagement aims to catalyze the formation of local mentor networks and expand the availability of web-based industry

engagement platforms like Nepris. This micro-industry engagement will provide Louisiana high school students the opportunity to benefit from individual relationships with workplace mentors. Louisiana also plans to form Education Subcommittees within local Workforce Development Boards. The subcommittees will create regional Jump Start goals for student and teacher credentials earned and local pathways supported — goals that will be aligned with regional employment and career opportunities.

While Louisiana faces a once-in-a-generation state budget crisis, elected officials and industry leaders continue to support this work. Members of the cross-agency planning team are exploring creative ways to leverage funding sources, including dedicated funding for CTE programs instituted by the Legislature during early Jump Start implementation, to support additional opportunities for underserved students and students with disabilities.