

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, Career/Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) schools provide students access to high-quality career pathways, exposing them to technical instruction, work-based learning experiences, career advisement and postsecondary opportunities. Yet high-quality opportunities are limited in the commonwealth's comprehensive and academic high schools, and the vocational technical system does not have the capacity to meet demand in the state. With this context in mind, the New Skills for Youth project team approached its work in Phase One with the aim of defining the core components of a high-quality career pathway and developing strategies to scale these career pathways statewide for all students.

Foundations for the Work

Secondary education in Massachusetts is provided through three delivery channels: CVTE schools, which students apply to; comprehensive high schools; and academic schools, which do not include state-approved Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and for the most part do not offer career pathways. The CVTE system — composed of 38 regional CVTE high schools that engage all enrolled students in CTE and 94 comprehensive high schools that offer CTE to some students — has been recognized for the quality and rigor of its programs that enable students to gain workforce-relevant skills in high-demand career pathways. Students participating in CTE programs graduate at higher rates and have stronger linkages to

postsecondary education and training than their peers, resulting in high demand and an enrollment waitlist for CTE programs in some parts of the state. Currently, 20 percent of Massachusetts students are CTE concentrators, the vast majority of whom are in the vocational technical system.

Enrollment in career pathways at academic high schools is limited, though students can still access career-relevant opportunities through other programs such as the state-funded [School to Career Connecting Activities initiative](#). The initiative leverages the state's 16 regional Workforce Investment Boards to broker work-based learning opportunities with local employers. In 2015, approximately 10,500 students — including many who were not enrolled in CVTE high schools — were placed

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

in work-based experiences provided through Connecting Activities.

In 2015, Governor Charlie Baker created the [Workforce Skills Cabinet](#) — which includes representation from labor and workforce development, education, and housing and economic development — to advise and align workforce development, education and training priorities in the state. The Cabinet meets monthly and is responsible for leveraging stakeholder input and data to recommend policies that align workforce development activities with the changing needs of the economy. Acting on recommendations from the Cabinet, Governor Baker successfully merged two existing grant programs to create the Skills Capital Grant that awarded \$9 million to support CTE technology and equipment. Additionally, funding of \$45 million over three years was set up for a new program to establish, upgrade and expand CTE programs aligned to regional workforce needs.

Work During Phase One

The project team's primary objective during the initial Phase One planning period was to develop a strategy for defining and scaling career pathways, focusing particularly on reaching the 80 percent of students who are not currently concentrating in a high-quality career pathway. This objective was reaffirmed by the Phase One data analysis, which illuminated the state's limited capacity for collecting and analyzing data for credential

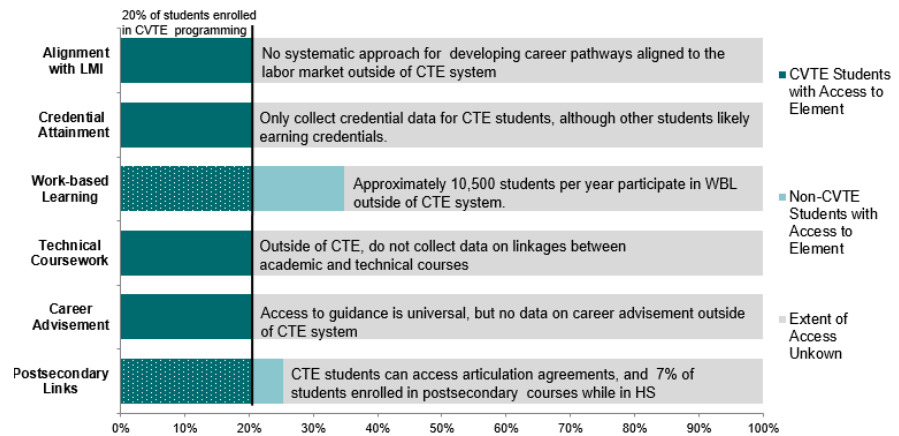


Figure 1: Massachusetts' Phase One data analysis

attainment, technical coursework, dual enrollment and career advisement outside of the vocational technical system.

The Phase One data analysis also brought to light enrollment gaps in high-demand industry sectors. In the three sectors with the largest projected job openings — business and consumer services, health services and education — the state identified a shortfall of nearly 115,000 students in career pathways.

Early recognition of disparities in access to high-quality career pathways across the state enabled Massachusetts to make early progress during Phase One. Notably, the Workforce Skills Cabinet and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education launched a subcommittee on data and accountability to address limitations in the state's data collection. The team aims to work to strengthen data collection systems, train local educators and administrators, and design a pilot program to incentivize school districts to produce more college- and career-ready graduates. Relatedly, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted a new program approval process for schools that receive Chapter 74 funds, which support

and sustain CTE pathway programs. With this rule change, districts must now demonstrate alignment to labor market needs and student interest to receive funding, enabling the state to strengthen pathways in priority sectors.

Another accomplishment during Phase One was the development of a CTE program quality assessment tool. The tool was designed to support continuous growth and program improvement through a modular self-assessment, including components related to student safety, program administration, materials and equipment review and more. The tool is one lever that the project team plans to use to encourage the alignment and adoption of quality practices.

Meanwhile, the Governor's Office launched a statewide campaign to engage science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) business leaders in expanding available work-based learning opportunities through Connecting Activities, committing \$100,000 to support marketing and outreach costs for the campaign.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, Massachusetts aims to build on the quality career pathways modeled in the CVTE high school system and leverage early

work and investments in Phase One to expand opportunities for the 80 percent of students not currently enrolled in quality career pathways. This plan includes adopting and promoting a definition for high-quality career pathways, including six key components:

1. Alignment to labor market needs;
2. Linkages between secondary and postsecondary systems;
3. Focused career guidance and advising;
4. Blended technical and academic learning;
5. High-quality work-based learning experiences; and
6. Credentials with labor market value.

To encourage widespread adoption of quality career pathways, Massachusetts plans to improve the state's data systems by enhancing local report cards — ensuring that career pathway completion, industry credential attainment and career advising data are available — and training local districts to use new data collection and analysis methods.

Additionally, the project plans to implement a competitive grant initiative to scale career pathways programs aligned to the state's six quality components. The state will issue requests for proposals in April 2017, with the plan to award funds in June.

Massachusetts' Charge: About 59,000 students, or 20 percent of Massachusetts' high school population, are enrolled in state or federally funded CTE programs at either the CVTE or comprehensive high schools, which offer the six components of high-quality career pathways. The other 80 percent, the substantial majority of high school students, are not. Designing methods for giving that large group access to all the core components of high-quality career pathways will transform the state's systems of career preparation.