

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Montana

Despite Montana's size, this "frontier" state has one of the smallest student populations in the country, making regional access to high-quality career pathways a unique challenge. As such, the Montana state project team approached Phase One of the New Skills for Youth initiative with a plan to expand existing career pathway models in the health care and manufacturing sectors and leverage regional partnerships, distance delivery mechanisms and program review processes to scale statewide pathways and reach underserved student populations.

Foundations for the Work

Given Montana's rural geography, policymakers have adopted strategies in recent years that enable the state to provide quality Career Technical Education (CTE) programs while taking regional context into account during implementation. Two examples are the [HealthCARE MT](#) and [RevUp MT](#) programs, which provide education in health care and manufacturing, respectively. Both programs are funded through Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training Grants valued at \$40 million combined, and they are delivered through the state's community college system. HealthCARE MT and RevUp MT have demonstrated an effective model for connecting industry and education, engaging approximately 800 employers collectively.

The HealthCARE MT program is supported by a statewide advisory and delivery infrastructure.

At the state level, the program draws on input from the Healthcare Workforce Advisory Council, a group composed of more than 100 organizations that meets monthly and helps set the agenda for developing the health care talent pipeline. Regional workforce coordinators, who are housed within Area Health Education Centers, work locally to gather and disseminate labor market data, convene employers and educators, and implement health care career pathways within their regions. Recently, Montana leveraged this infrastructure to improve the quality of health care career pathways by aligning two-year health care curricula in 150 programs with National Health Science Foundation standards.

Similarly, RevUp MT has led to the launch or revision of 40 community college programs across the state. The initiative relies on input from employers in the manufacturing and energy sectors — which are high-wage, high-

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

demand industries in Montana — to identify the core skills and competencies needed.

Additionally, Montana is focused on expanding access to CTE and career pathways for students in rural communities through dual enrollment, virtual learning and other strategies. In the 2015-16 school year, more than 3,400 high school students (approximately 8.2 percent of the total high school population) earned dual credit, accelerated in part by initiatives such as an incentive program that waives tuition for teachers pursuing advanced education based on the number of postsecondary credits their students earn.

[Montana Digital Academy](#), a web-based instructional platform, offers more than 70 online classes and enables students in rural areas to access courses that are not available in their schools. Additionally, the state recently received funds to launch a Rural Healthcare Program, which would provide mobile health care services and help develop, recruit and support health care workers in regional communities.

Work During Phase One

The Montana New Skills for Youth project team focused its Phase One efforts on developing strategies to scale up best practices from the health care and manufacturing sectors and reach more learners in rural and frontier communities. The state's needs assessment confirmed the challenge of expanding career pathways to these communities, particularly in terms of resource delivery, ensuring fidelity to quality implementation and recruiting teachers. The state's plan had a

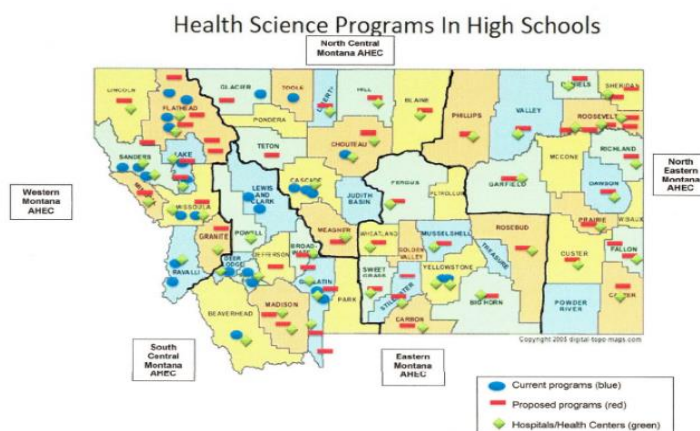
particular focus on American Indian students, who attend schools across seven reservations and 12 tribal regions across the state.

Although Montana experienced a few challenges at the outset that threatened the sustainability of the project, strong collaboration and cohesiveness at the state level enabled the team to make up for lost time. The team benefited from strong commitment across sectors and was able to leverage existing relationships from previous collaborative work to achieve early wins.

Scaling Model Career Pathways

Montana achieved early success in its efforts to build on the HealthCARE MT and RevUp MT programs and scale up career pathways in priority sectors. The state team worked to connect and extend postsecondary career pathways across sectors by inventorying health science programs in 22 high schools and garnering commitments from 54 other locations to implement new programs.

To support this work, Montana developed a blueprint for a program of study in health sciences that would draw upon statewide standards and culminate in an industry certificate upon graduation. The state also made moves to adopt statewide career



pathways in health care, manufacturing and information technology to replace the disconnected programs that currently exist in specific high schools and colleges. In order to support and strengthen such statewide pathways, the state redirected \$500,000 in funds from the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006.

To address regional challenges related to recruiting CTE teachers, Montana's Office of Public Instruction changed the requirements for the Class 4B state teaching licensure. This change enables an applicant with a valid industry-recognized credential and five years of documented work experience in his or her subject of focus to teach CTE courses, reducing the costs required to obtain further education to become certified.

Additionally, the Montana project team developed a working relationship with the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, which serves American Indian residents in 11 tribes across Wyoming and Montana. The Montana project team aims to support the Council's ongoing work to improve economic development and education for tribal communities, particularly by identifying work-based learning opportunities for students and expanding access to teacher training, virtual learning and dual enrollment programs.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, Montana aims to continue the work started during Phase One to define and scale high-quality career pathways across the state. The state's goal is to have all Montana schools provide state-approved health care, manufacturing and information technology

(IT) career pathways that are aligned across the secondary and postsecondary systems.

Despite challenges with regional delivery and local control, Montana identified strategies to promote uniformity and quality in career pathways implementation. For example, Montana has reduced the time needed for program review from five to three years, enabling the state to evaluate labor market information and workforce competencies for state-approved career pathways more frequently. With the state's recent decision to redirect Perkins funds toward statewide career pathways in health care, manufacturing and IT, the project team hopes state policymakers will be better able to monitor and strengthen program quality.

Montana's action plan also includes strategies to build and expand tools for increasing access within rural communities. The state plans to invest in distance delivery methods, including the web-based Digital Academy platform and virtual work-based learning to ensure that students in communities with limited resources or access to industry professionals can still connect with experts in their field of study. The project team already identified a two-course health science sequence within Digital Academy's course catalog that aligns with secondary, postsecondary and national standards. The team also hopes to continue to expand virtual course offerings within the system to ensure that rural and frontier students can access and complete statewide programs of study.

Finally, the Phase One timeline coincided with the conclusion of Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau's term-limited tenure and a statewide election to fill her

office. To ensure continuity and the sustainability of the work, the project team

engaged both candidates and secured commitments from each for this critical effort.

