

2019 SNAPSHOT

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

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### OVERVIEW

YouthForce NOLA is an education, business and civic collaborative that prepares New Orleans public school students to pursue high-wage, high-demand career pathways in three industry clusters: health sciences, creative media and technology and skilled crafts.<sup>1</sup> YouthForce NOLA includes an extensive network of partner schools, employers, training providers and community organizations offering career pathway programs of study, which include expanded course options, career exposure, meaningful work experiences, soft skills training and employer-validated credentials.

Launched in summer 2015, the collaborative grew out of a confluence of events that prompted community leaders to come together to explore how they could strengthen the pipeline between high school and the workforce. One event was the approval of Louisiana's new Jump Start policy, which emphasized career readiness in graduate expectations and included funding and accountability incentives for career preparation and industry-based credentials.<sup>2</sup> Another event that spurred action in New Orleans was the release of two reports. One report, which was from the Cowen Institute, found that 64 percent of opportunity youth in New Orleans had earned at least a high school credential but were under-employed or unemployed, upending the perception that these youth tend to be high school dropouts.<sup>3</sup> The other major report, which was from the Urban League of Greater New Orleans, found that as of the 10-year anniversary of the levees breaking following Hurricane Katrina, there was a stark difference between the recovery of "white" New Orleans and "black" New Orleans.<sup>4</sup> The community leaders jointly developed a strategic plan for an initiative housed at Education Now!, which eventually expanded into the formation of a new non-profit, YouthForce NOLA. Today a host of philanthropic, corporate and government funds support YouthForce NOLA, including an investment from the JPMorgan Chase & Co. New Skills for Youth initiative to expand and enhance the organization's efforts to develop a pipeline of skilled workers for high-demand, high-wage jobs.

### JPMORGAN CHASE NEW SKILLS FOR YOUTH INITIATIVE

Launched in 2016, New Skills for Youth<sup>5</sup> is a \$75 million, five-year global initiative aimed at transforming how cities and states ensure that young people are career ready. The overarching goals of the initiative are to:

- Dramatically increase the number of students who successfully complete career pathways that begin in secondary school and culminate in postsecondary degrees or credentials tied to high-wage, high-demand jobs; and
- Catalyze transformational approaches to the design and delivery of programs and policies to increase students' career readiness and disseminate lessons learned around the world.

This snapshot is part of a series documenting the progress of the local investments from across the globe that aim to identify and implement the most promising ideas in career education, with a special focus on communities with the greatest needs.

# THE YOUTHFORCE NOLA INITIATIVE

The New Skills for Youth investment supports YouthForce NOLA in implementing a four-pronged strategy to prepare students for career pathways aligned to high-wage, high-demand regional industry clusters by:

- **Engaging employers: enlisting and preparing employers to host students in their workplace as interns, for awareness-building activities, and for part-time employment (including internships); partnering with employers to inform curriculum and career pathway development; and continuing a dialogue between employers and schools to ensure that high schools are responsive to industry demand as the regional economy shifts over time.**
- **Providing technical assistance to schools: supporting schools in redesigning their approach, integrating technical and soft skills into their curricula and forging meaningful partnerships.**
- **Increasing training provider capacity: ensuring an adequate supply of effective technical training providers to supplement schools' teaching of both soft and technical skills.**
- **Engaging families and community: supporting conversations with families and communities so that there is mutual understanding of opportunities and pathways to student success.**

YouthForce NOLA is finishing year three of a four-year implementation timeline for the New Skills for Youth initiative. It has made significant progress toward achieving the long-term goal of building a stronger pipeline from high schools to regional businesses and is approaching a tipping point on key indicators. In particular, three elements make the YouthForce NOLA initiative stand out: the intentional emphasis on cultivating collaboration and a collective vision among stakeholders, the efforts to build a robust third-party training provider landscape, and the focus on family and community engagement.

## *Expanding Access and Engaging Stakeholders*

By the 2019-20 school year, pursuing an industry-recognized credential will be an option for students in all 26 of New Orleans' open enrollment high schools. All 26 high schools will be offering a career pathway program of study to students, an increase from just two schools when YouthForce NOLA launched in 2015. Schools that are part of YouthForce NOLA join as either an affiliate or a partner. Affiliate schools work with YouthForce NOLA to design and implement a career pathway program of study. These schools receive in-kind support from the collaborative. Partner schools already have at least one fully articulated career pathway program of study and work-based learning experiences. They receive both financial assistance and in-kind support from the collaborative. All schools in the network receive coaching support, industry connections, internship programming, family engagement resources, planning tools, and access to student-enrichment events such as the Career Expo. Since the launch of the initiative, the number of New Orleans public school graduates earning statewide industry-recognized credentials in one of the three target clusters has increased fivefold and is on track to increase to sevenfold once 2019 graduates are counted.<sup>6</sup> For the graduating class of 2018, 23 percent of the credentials earned were intermediate or advanced credentials.<sup>7</sup>

Another metric of impact is that the number of students completing meaningful work experiences has met annual targets and grown from 18 students in 2015 to approximately 250 participants in summer 2019. At the outset of the program, YouthForce NOLA had to send reminders to prospective interns and extend deadlines. Fast forward to 2019, and applications for internships exceeded available slots by a ratio of 2:1. The program begins with 60 hours of pre-training, which includes soft skills, business etiquette, job-seeking skills, life literacies, industry exposure and program expectations, followed by 90 hours for the actual internship. Interns receive a \$1,200 stipend. Ninety percent

# PRIORITY CREDENTIALS BY EMPLOYMENT VALUE\*

HEALTH SCIENCES	DIGITAL MEDIA/IT	SKILLED CRAFTS
Certified Nursing Assistant	Adobe Certified Associate	AutoDesk AutoCAD
Emergency Medical Responder	CompTIA IT Fundamentals	
Certified Patient Care Technician	Operation Spark - Level I	AutoDesk Inventor
	Adobe Certified Expert	AWS - Level I
	Adobe Visual Design Specialist	NCCER - Level I (Carp, Elec, Welding, HVAC)
Emergency Medical Technician	CompTIA A+	AWS - Level II
Certified Clinical Medical Assistant	Operation Spark - Level II	NCCER - Level II (Carp, Elec, Welding, HVAC)
	Operation Spark - Level III*	

**YouthForce**  
NOLA

\*List current a/o 4/1/19. \*\*Half-day program in pilot this year.

BASIC

INTERMEDIATE

ADVANCED

of employers who have hosted interns rate the professionalism of their high school students as either favorable or similar to a typical entry-level employee; 86 percent would recommend the program to another business and host a future intern. Business leaders view these internships as an opportunity to help students find their passion, learn about what they like and what they do not like, enhance soft skills and start to build a professional network within the community.

Other successes include a plan for a large employer partner to adopt the YouthForce NOLA soft skills approach, taken from the MHA Labs Building Blocks framework, which focuses on communication, collaboration, personal mindset, plan for success,

**“We try to make sure we are giving students both windows and mirrors, so they see the opportunities available and see themselves in those environments.”**  
— *School Leader  
College Partner*

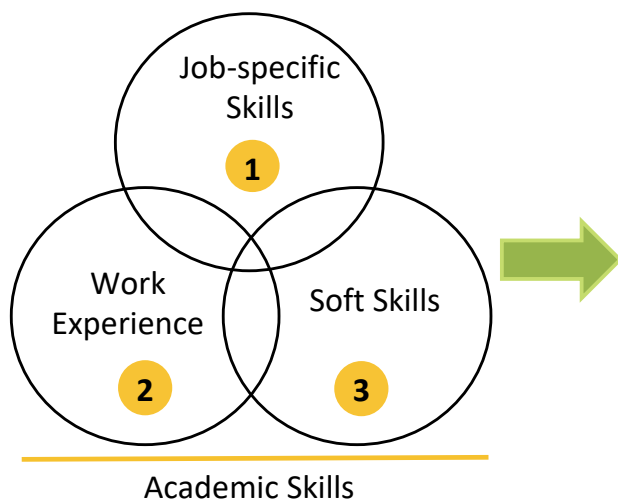
social awareness and problem solving.<sup>8</sup>

Also, YouthForce NOLA and Junior Achievement launched an educator externship program, which places teachers at employer companies for two days. For the first time since the program began, it had more applications than available spots for the 2019 spring cohort, including applicants from core academic subjects, not just individuals with CTE teaching responsibilities.

YouthForce NOLA is also expanding access to career exploration events. In partnership with Junior Achievement and Delgado Community College, YouthForce NOLA hosted the first annual Discover STEM Careers Day in January 2019.

# THREE GOALS FOCUS OUR EFFORT

## Components of Career Readiness



**YouthForce**  
**NOLA**

## YouthForce NOLA Goals

- 1 Credentials.** 20% of the Class of 2020 will earn industry-recognized, culminating credentials that will place them on high-wage, high-demand regional career pathways
- 2 Meaningful Work Experience.** 10% of the Class of 2020 will complete internships (aligned to student-selected pathway and coursework, includes 60 hours training and 90 hours of work)
- 3 Soft Skills.** More graduates will demonstrate employer validated, career-ready soft skills

More than 400 eighth grade students participated in interactive science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) career demonstrations led by Delgado instructors and industry professionals. In spring 2019, more than 2,200 students attended the third annual YouthForce NOLA Career Expo, presented by Junior Achievement of Greater New Orleans and sponsored by JPMorgan Chase & Co. More than 125 employers and training providers demonstrated high-wage, high-demand career pathway opportunities at interactive booths.

In addition to tracking measurable indicators aligned to program goals, YouthForce NOLA commissioned an independent study of implementation. MDRC is conducting the evaluation, which began in 2016. The main goals of the study are to assess the initiative's progress in putting key components in place and to document the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders. The first published report of findings, released in April 2018, revealed that the initiative is being implemented as intended and that stakeholders report positive feedback about the initiative.<sup>9</sup>

## *Cultivating Collaboration and Collective Visioning*

Since day one when community leaders developed the strategic plan for what would become YouthForce NOLA, the initiative has been driven by a steadfast commitment to the vision of supporting student success and a set of common, shared values that include excellence and accountability, transparency, collaboration and voice, student choice, equity and respect. YouthForce NOLA has an engaged steering committee that has remained largely intact since inception, in part because trust was built at the outset by providing members with the space to have deep, meaningful conversations with each other about race, class and privilege in New Orleans. Another reason is the intermediary role YouthForce NOLA plays, facilitating collaboration across the many stakeholders in New Orleans' complex and decentralized K-12 education system. The collaborative has avoided mission creep, staying laser focused on the five-year plan, and holds itself accountable for meeting targets. Further, the collaborative is not competitive; credit for key successes is spread out among partners.

# A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

## Students

<b>Schools</b> <b>22 High &amp; 7 Middle Schools</b>	<b>Employers</b> <b>150+ Employers</b>	<b>Training Providers</b> <b>6 Providers, 2 IHEs</b>	<b>Community &amp; Families</b> <b>Thousands</b>
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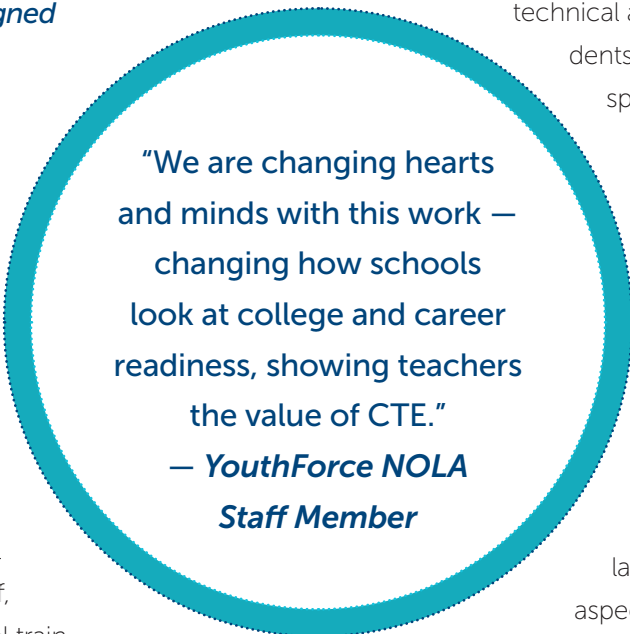
## Collaborative Steering Committee

## Backbone



### Building a Robust, Industry-Aligned Training Provider Landscape

YouthForce NOLA and collaborators are helping expand the number of training providers through a partnership with a newly launched third-party training center for high school students, the New Orleans Career Center.<sup>10</sup> The idea for the Career Center originated with an advisory group that was convened by the Recovery School District to evaluate the feasibility of, and vision for, a city-wide technical training hub. The Career Center opened its doors in 2018 to serve two functions: Directly provide students with high-quality training aligned to industry-based credentials and serve as a hub for like-minded, high-quality



**“We are changing hearts and minds with this work — changing how schools look at college and career readiness, showing teachers the value of CTE.”**  
**— YouthForce NOLA Staff Member**

technical assistance training providers. Students from seven partner high schools spend a half-day twice a week getting hands-on technical training to master skills and gain experience for in-demand jobs. The Career Center is slated to serve students from more than 15 high schools next year. Career Center programs focus on the YouthForce NOLA priority skill clusters, in addition to hospitality and tourism, particularly the administrative and business aspects of that career pathway. The Career Center recruits trainers, typically from industry, for the programs. All enrolled students are working toward credentials, and all are exposed to soft skills development in addition to technical training.

In addition to the direct programming, the Career Center serves as a hub for other third-party providers, such as Operation Spark.<sup>11</sup> The mission of Operation Spark is to present individuals who have barriers to the software development field with the fastest route to a career path that has more than 3,000 job openings in Louisiana alone. Operation Spark was launched as a pilot project in 2013 and now operates out of the Career Center space, offering programs to both adults and in-school youth, including a 60-hour Introduction to Programming Bootcamp; a three-month Immersion program; and the High School to High Wage program, designed for students with little-to-no programming experience.

Founded as a non-profit, the Career Center's funding for year one is drawn from a number of government and philanthropic sources, including per-pupil funding from participating schools. Student participants hail from different partner schools throughout the city, which presents a host of opportunities and challenges, with scheduling and transportation topping the list. On the plus side, students have access to career pathways that may not be offered in their home school and an opportunity to learn with peers from other schools, which plants the seeds for a professional network. Students view the Career Center as a game-changer: They are given adult responsibilities and are expected to perform, honing communication and time management skills and learning how to work well with others.

### **Engaging Families and Community**

Family and community engagement is a pillar of YouthForce NOLA's strategy for improving outcomes for students. To understand why, one need look no further than the governance structure of K-12 education in New Orleans. Eighty-six public schools serve just under 50,000 students, including Recovery School District charters, Orleans Parish School Board charters, Orleans Parish School Board network schools and Type-2 charters overseen by the

## **CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

- **Expectations for family and community engagement are clearly set and modeled by the school leader.**
- **Families are regarded as partners with schools in the education of their children.**
- **Family engagement efforts are linked to the broader academic goals of the school.**
- **A family engagement plan is in place with complementary evaluation protocols to assess its quality and effectiveness.**
- **Adequate resources and supports are allocated for family and community engagement efforts.**
- **School environment is welcoming and friendly to families.**

Source: Urban League of Louisiana

**"Families responded well to the idea that the 'new' CTE is the next phase of the 'old' vocational education many of them participated in — it is more technical and advanced."  
—Community Leader**

Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.<sup>12</sup> And that number does not include the 80-plus Catholic schools or private schools serving students in New Orleans.<sup>13</sup> Navigating the choice enrollment system is a heavy burden for parents and students, so much so that the Urban League of Louisiana (a member of the YouthForce NOLA collaborative steering committee) publishes a book on this topic each year; the listing of high schools alone totals more than 100 pages.

The work of the Urban League to help families navigate the choice system led to focus groups with parents from throughout the city to better understand barriers to family engagement, which included work schedules; distance between home and school; and school policies, in particular appointment requirements for parents.<sup>14</sup> The focus groups' findings led to the development of a toolkit released in 2017 focused on strategies for helping schools remove barriers for families to be engaged.<sup>15</sup> The Urban League, in partnership with YouthForce NOLA staff, hosts workshops for school staff on using the toolkit, providing school personnel with an opportunity to come together

and share ideas around successful strategies. The toolkit includes a family engagement satisfaction survey, a planning template for schools, a focus group protocol for use with families and sample survey questions about parent perspectives on CTE. Perhaps most telling about YouthForce NOLA's commitment to family engagement: Schools that wish to join the YouthForce NOLA network must include a family engagement plan in their application to become either an affiliate or a partner. More than 5,000 individuals, including families from the network, have joined the YouthForce NOLA listserv.

## LOOKING FORWARD

YouthForce NOLA is in the process of drafting a new strategic plan that extends through 2025. The plan acknowledges the strong foundation that has been built and progress to date. It also identifies the need to offer additional opportunities for students to build skills and the need to build stronger onramps into promising jobs. Before launching the next five-year plan, YouthForce NOLA is working on a handful

of new activities. One is mapping strategies for developing career awareness in middle school. Another is building an equity dashboard that includes student- and system-level indicators to refine the YouthForce NOLA mission statement and strategies to better capture the commitment to equity and the systems change efforts needed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Advance CTE would like to thank the YouthForce NOLA staff, along with key partners and stakeholders who participated in interviews and provided information on this project. The interviews were conducted in person during a two-day site visit in New Orleans, LA, on March 18-19, 2019. The interviews included discussions of key activities, successes and challenges to date. Supporting documentation was provided by staff and partners, when available.

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# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more information about YouthForce NOLA, see <https://www.youthforcenola.org>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about Jump Start, see <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/courses/all-things-jump-start/learn-about-jump-start>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thecoweninstitute.com.php56-17.dfw3-1.websitetestlink.com/uploads/OY-Data-Guide-2016-Revised-FINAL-1506966101.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://urbanleaguela.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/StateofBlackNewOrleans\\_TenYearsPostKatrina.pdf](https://urbanleaguela.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/StateofBlackNewOrleans_TenYearsPostKatrina.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> For more information about New Skills for Youth, see <https://www.jporganchase.com/corporate/news/stories/newskillsforyouth.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For more information about MHA Labs, see [mhalabs.org](http://mhalabs.org).

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/YouthForceNOLA\\_Main%20Text\\_final.pdf](https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/YouthForceNOLA_Main%20Text_final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For more information about the New Orleans Career Center, see <https://nolacc.org/#about>.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about Operation Spark, see <https://operationspark.org>.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.thecoweninstitute.com.php56-17.dfw3-1.websitetestlink.com/uploads/SPENO\\_2018\\_Final\\_-\\_Double\\_Page\\_Spread-1524079581.pdf](http://www.thecoweninstitute.com.php56-17.dfw3-1.websitetestlink.com/uploads/SPENO_2018_Final_-_Double_Page_Spread-1524079581.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://catholicschoolguide.ednavigator.com>

<sup>14</sup> [https://urbanleaguela.org/yfn\\_toolkit/](https://urbanleaguela.org/yfn_toolkit/)

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the Family Engagement Toolkit, see [https://urbanleaguela.org/yfn\\_toolkit/](https://urbanleaguela.org/yfn_toolkit/).