

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: New Jersey

New Jersey's career readiness system has strong foundations in place, most notably through a system of engaging employers. That engagement is achieved with the state's Talent Networks; a comprehensive secondary data system; and a productive partnership of the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD), Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and Department of Education (DOE). During Phase One of New Skills for Youth (NSFY), the team prioritized bridging the gaps between state data systems to facilitate the state's ability to engage in practical and cross-sector data-based decisionmaking. This work included developing and measuring career readiness indicators, including tracking attainment of industry-recognized credentials and including them in the state's annual School Performance Report.

Foundations for the Work

To advance career readiness for its learners, New Jersey has implemented a number of critical programs and policy changes in the past few years, which are anchored in the goals of addressing achievement gaps between student subgroups and improving outcomes for all students. In 2014, the State Board of Education adopted [Career Ready Practices](#) for all K-12 students. These practices describe the transferable employability skills required for a career in any industry.

New Jersey delivers Career Technical Education (CTE) through its 21 county vocational school districts and in comprehensive high schools. Enrollment at the vocational schools is at maximum capacity, with most experiencing waiting lists. At the same time, enrollment in CTE programs in comprehensive high schools has decreased in the past few years. This decrease is partly the result of recent policy changes in program approvals that led to the elimination of more than 500 programs between 2012 and 2015 that did not meet the new higher standards. New Jersey is aggressively working to reverse this trend by building capacity in comprehensive high schools and expanding innovative partnerships at county vocational

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

schools. Through a five-year grant and \$4 million state investment that began in 2015, the state is working with eight diverse high schools to develop and scale quality CTE programs aligned to the state's key industries, which are listed on the next page. These schools are receiving intensive support and serve as learning laboratories for other schools. The Legislature has also appropriated \$7 million in funds over the past three years to county vocational schools to create partnerships to expand quality CTE programs and serve more students.

To better align industry and education systems, LWD established Talent Networks in 2012 in seven priority industries: advanced manufacturing; financial services; health care; life sciences; retail, hospitality and tourism; technology; and transportation, logistics and distribution. These networks consist of industry experts and are led by colleges, universities and business organizations. The Talent Networks partner with employers and workforce organizations to develop industry intelligence and work with the DOE, local districts and community colleges to support secondary and postsecondary CTE programs.

With this foundation, New Jersey entered Phase One of NSFY with a desire to more closely align multiple career readiness and workforce initiatives and to design new policies and programs to improve outcomes for all students.

Work During Phase One

The New Jersey DOE regularly works with The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University on its

career readiness initiatives. The two organizations partnered to conduct an assessment of the state's career readiness systems, as well as an analysis of student outcomes data. The assessment and brainstorming by the cross-sector team identified several key strengths to help the state enact new reforms:

- The State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) provides a formalized structure to improve the skills of New Jersey's workforce in alignment with labor market demands. With a mission to coordinate stakeholders in education, workforce development and industry, SETC is a statutory body that serves as the state workforce development board.
- The DOE's rigorous CTE program approval and re-approval process has led to more than 500 programs being phased out over the past four years. Meanwhile, the number of approved programs of study, which require a postsecondary articulation agreement, grew from 64 in 2011 to 363 in 2015.
- CTE individual student record data have been collected since 2011 in NJ Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART), a comprehensive statewide longitudinal data system that includes staff and student identification, data warehousing, data reporting and analytics. The NJ SMART system allows for deep analysis of CTE student performance by subgroup in all programs.

The assessment also identified areas for growth, including the need to build career readiness measures into the state accountability system. And while NJ SMART collects student data, that information is disconnected from and not regularly matched

with other workforce and labor market data. Finally, CTE teacher recruitment and high-quality professional development were identified as long-standing challenges and high priorities for the state.

Based on this assessment, New Jersey's NSFY cross-sector state team — which includes representatives from the DOE, SETC, LWD, postsecondary institutions, school district leadership, and the New Jersey Business and Industry Association — developed a strategic plan to drive career readiness work over the next three years.

Improving Data Connections

NJ SMART, managed through the DOE, collects and analyzes student-level data by grade, program and subgroup, among other categories. The Office of Research and Information at LWD collects information on which industries are hiring. Prior to Phase One, the state did not have a practical way to analyze how closely the programs measured by NJ SMART aligned to well-paying jobs in high-demand industries, as determined by LWD. As such, the state was limited in its ability to use labor market data to inform programmatic decisions.

During Phase One, the cross-sector team worked with the Heldrich Center to develop a methodology for matching programs of study, occupations and industries. Each linkage between a program of study, related occupations and related industries was given a score based on how closely it aligned in required skillsets and experiences. When choosing programs to grow and expand, the Heldrich Center set threshold scores. CTE

programs whose alignment to the industry score was lower than the set threshold were disqualified as candidate programs for expansion. A final list of targeted programs was developed within each of New Jersey's key industries based on:

- The course to industry alignment (i.e., the quality of the match);
- Projected demand for the matching jobs; and
- The entry-level hourly wage of the matching jobs.

During Phase One, the cross-sector team was able to establish proof of concept that the state will be able to use the soon-to-be launched State Longitudinal Data System to follow student data through secondary and postsecondary education and the workforce.

Measuring Credentials of Value

Recognizing that career readiness was not highly valued in the state's current accountability system — and that the state needed a process and protocol for identifying meaningful industry-recognized credentials — New Jersey developed a strategy to address both of those challenges at once. As a critical first step, the state's Credentials Review Board, whose membership includes senior staff from local career centers and workforce development boards as well as from SETC, the DOE and LWD, met in May 2016 for the first time to approve a list of industry-valued credentials. This meeting followed an extensive period of employer input and public comment regarding the credentials to be included. The Review Board will review and continue to update the list of industry-valued credentials quarterly.

Advanced Manufacturing			
credential	issuing agency	endorsements	type
Certified Automation Professional (CAP)	International Society of Automation (ISA)	A - C - I - J - M - N	Core
Certified Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Auditor	American Society for Quality (ASQ)	I - M	Core
Certified Internal Auditor	Institute of Internal Auditors	C	Core
Certified Production Technician (CPT)	Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC)	A - C - I - M	Core
Certified Quality Inspector	American Society for Quality (ASQ)	C - I - M	Advanced
Certified Welder	American Welding Society (AWS)	I - M	Core

Figure 1: Example credentials from the New Jersey credential list.

A credential in New Jersey is defined as a recognized degree, diploma, certificate or certification that is awarded for an occupation and has the following characteristics: It is valued and demanded by employers; it is portable — skills learned are transferable and provide broad opportunities; and it is stackable — skills learned may lead to opportunities for continuous or advanced training and education and to higher wages, career advancement and/or increased job security.

The credentials list also includes indications of whether credentials are related to initiatives like the National Career

Clusters® Framework or Military Occupational Specialties. As a result of this work, the DOE added the attainment of state-approved credentials earned by secondary students to the NJ SMART system.



Looking Ahead

The cross-sector team will soon launch its communications campaign around the career readiness strategic plan, titled *Many Paths, One Future*. New Jersey's state agencies representing education, labor and higher education all signed memorandums of agreement to use this brand and accompanying messaging. This campaign will help inform stakeholders about New Jersey's career readiness efforts. It will also begin to

break down some of the stigma currently facing CTE to help increase enrollment in career-focused programs.

Additionally, SETC established the Career Pathways Taskforce to develop and support a formalized, structured and dynamic process for using current and projected labor market data to identify and prioritize high-skill, high-

demand career pathways. The DOE will launch a new grant program that was developed during Phase One to assist in offering a quality, research-based, alternate-route educator preparation program for CTE teachers. This program aims to increase the supply of CTE

teachers in skilled, in-demand programs by increasing recruitment efforts and providing teaching candidates with the instruction and clinical experiences they need to enter the teaching profession.

