

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Oklahoma

Oklahoma's career readiness work began prior to the New Skills for Youth (NSFY) grant through the state's Oklahoma Works initiative. During the first phase of NSFY, the Oklahoma team was able to build on this existing work to create new plans for expanding access statewide to high-quality career readiness systems. Much of Oklahoma's strategy involved intensive stakeholder engagement including representation from rural and Native American student populations.

Foundations for the Work

[Oklahoma Works](#) is a cross-sector career readiness and workforce development initiative that began in 2015. Oklahoma Works sets the foundation for planning Oklahoma's Phase One work to meet the career-ready objectives in Phase Two. The initiative has strong support from the governor and state superintendent and is anchored by a network of nine regional employer partnerships referred to as Key Economic Networks (KENs). Each KEN has an individual employer champion who coordinates local efforts.

According to data from the Oklahoma Works initiative, under the state's current education delivery system only half of Oklahoma students will be prepared for college and career upon graduating from high school. Data also show that as of 2015, only about half of the Oklahoma workforce had continued their education past high school.

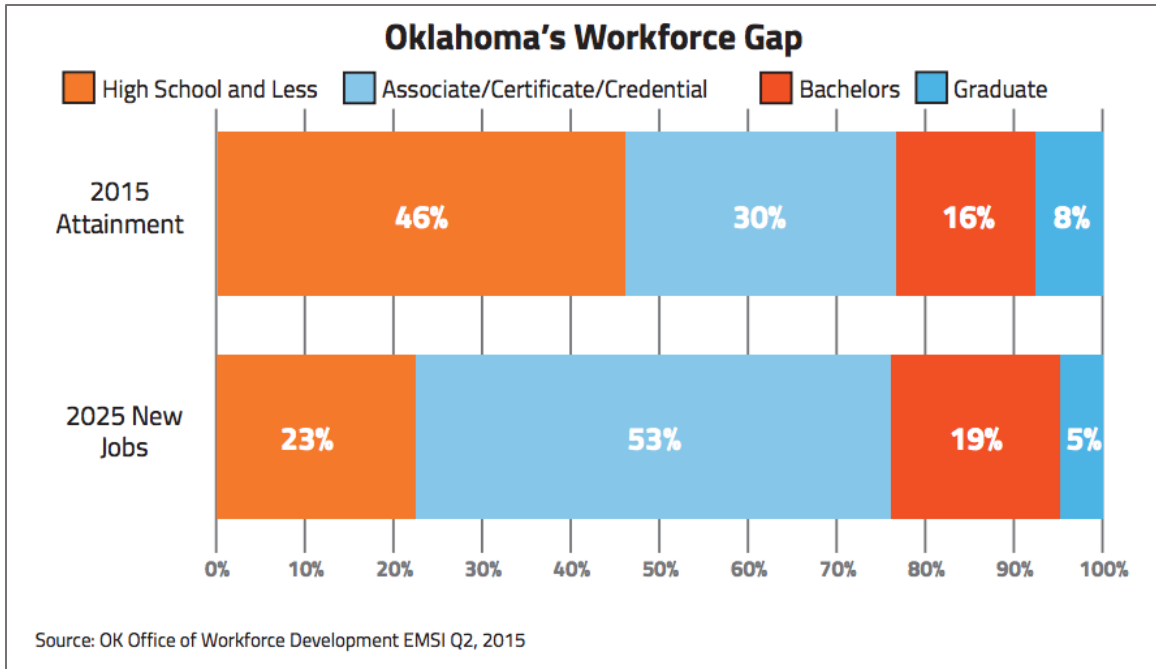
By 2025, 75 percent of Oklahoma's jobs will require postsecondary credentials. The need to increase credential attainment over the next decade is especially critical for Oklahoma's wealth-generating job sectors such as aerospace and defense, energy, information and financial services, and agriculture and bioscience.

Work During Phase One

An external assessment of Oklahoma's career readiness system found several strengths to build upon and challenges to address. For example, some of Oklahoma's school districts have strong systems with high-quality career pathways that engage employers effectively. Now, these systems must be scaled statewide.

Additionally, while both secondary and postsecondary agencies collect numerous data on career readiness indicators, those collection efforts are not coordinated. Currently,

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



Oklahoma does not have an official statewide definition of what being career ready means.

Using the needs assessment and data analysis, the Oklahoma team created a long-term plan to build upon its strengths and address its challenges. To make sure that all state career readiness efforts are coordinated, the team also aligned its plan with the Oklahoma Works strategic plan, which is structured around aligning systems, improving data collection and use, aligning funding streams and building and sustaining partnerships.

The plan includes a strategy for convening cross-sector groups to interpret and disseminate labor market information and then asking KEN champions to use the labor market information to drive modifications of career pathway offerings at the regional level.

Oklahoma also plans to redefine the senior year, which will include more active career advising, work-based learning experiences and

rigorous courses designed to aid the successful transition to postsecondary.

In Phase One, the state created a brand and prepared to launch a website that will focus on helping students, parents, teachers and employers learn about the career preparation and workforce opportunities available to them by offering tools, information and other resources.

Cross-Sector Commitment

From the beginning of Phase One, the Oklahoma team placed a high priority on cross-sector ownership of career readiness reforms. The team formed committees around the six main objectives of the NSFY initiative, which include:

- Demand-driven and employer-led processes;
- Rigor and quality in career pathways for all students;
- A career-focused accountability system;

- Scaled career pathways that culminate in credentials;
- Aligned state and federal funding streams; and
- Cross-institutional alignment.

Oklahoma hosted the Call to Action Summit in September 2016. The Summit brought together employers and state and district education leaders and representatives for under-served and under-represented student populations to discuss the career readiness state plan and roles of each stakeholder. More than 70 stakeholders signed commitment cards listing which strategies and projects they would like to be involved with. Afterward, the state team organized committed stakeholders by strategy and set clear expectations for their roles.

Multiple education agencies began discussions around sharing and measuring data. The Department of Public Instruction started work with the State Regents for Higher Education to include meaningful career readiness indicators in Oklahoma's accountability system, which will involve sharing their disparate career readiness data with each other and then agreeing on which indicators to use.

Rural and Native American Outreach

Oklahoma is also prioritizing the engagement of rural and Native American populations. The Oklahoma Works initiative had an existing strategy to expand broadband internet access to all students, which is key to ensure that the website achieves the reach and impact it aspires to accomplish.

The Oklahoma team focused on engaging under-represented student populations, including students who are members of the 39 local Native American tribes. The secondary and postsecondary education agencies each have a full-time staff member who liaises with the Native American community. During the Phase One work, the Oklahoma team included tribal representatives in the planning efforts and the Call to Action Summit.



The state team is able to reach students in every region of the state through the KEN champions, who work with their local schools to develop and reform career pathways. Employers involved with the KENs are connected with the work at the state level but are also empowered to use that information in the way that makes the most sense in their region.

Looking Ahead

As the Oklahoma team continues to implement its plan for career readiness reform, it will prioritize its communications efforts, including the development and launch of the

website. The site will offer career advising resources for counselors, connect students and teachers with work-based learning opportunities in their area, and provide tools for students and families to explore their career options. The team has used commitment cards and follow-ups to leverage

stakeholders' commitments made at the Call to Action Summit to continue career readiness reforms with true cross-sector engagement. Work groups and a College and Career Ready Advisory Council have been established and will begin meeting in early 2017.

