

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's work in New Skills for Youth (NSFY) Phase One was led by a cross-agency team that included state-level participation from education, workforce and economic development leaders. While the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) tracks approved programs provided through the commonwealth's Career Technical Education (CTE) system, less was known about the myriad informal career pathways offered by schools and districts. Through the NSFY work, the state hoped to identify and better coordinate career pathways offered in Pennsylvania to ensure that all students have access to high-quality career pathways. Key components of this effort included increasing partner engagement, developing a strategic plan based on a statewide survey, and designing a communications strategy to advance current and future career readiness initiatives at the state level.

Foundations for the Work

Over the past two years, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf has advocated for investments that ensure high-quality, personalized learning for all students throughout the early childhood to postsecondary education continuum. The governor has also championed improved collaboration between education and workforce systems. Over the past few years, more high school students have also enrolled in CTE courses approved by PDE.

Pennsylvania includes [Career Education and Work Standards](#) in its state academic standards. The Career Education and Work Standards set out benchmarks in grades three, five, eight and 11 in the following categories: career awareness and preparation, career acquisition, career retention and advancement, and entrepreneurship. State regulation provides that districts must develop and implement a plan for comprehensive K-12 career exploration and counseling plans across all grade levels.

While PDE had a good understanding of the career pathways within CTE, the picture of the many career pathways programs developed

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

and implemented at the district level was less clear. PDE had little data on how many of these programs existed, much less the quality of the programs and student outcomes. Anecdotally, PDE was aware that many of these programs were high quality and had strong partnerships with local employers, but more information was needed to determine what gaps existed and how to scale these high-quality programs statewide.

Work During Phase One

During Phase One, the Pennsylvania NSFY cross-sector team conducted an analysis of available CTE student outcome data and surveyed more than 500 individuals in education, workforce development and business. The team also began planning a formal inventory of all the locally driven career preparation and career pathways efforts.

The subsequent strategic plan was based on survey findings and focused on expanding state-level strategies to promote career readiness in the following ways: work to update Pennsylvania's student and school

accountability systems to incorporate measures of career readiness; create a cross-sector leadership entity to maintain focus on career readiness; and develop and implement a statewide strategy to communicate the importance of career readiness for Pennsylvania students.

Engaging Partners

Pennsylvania identified strong state and regional partners ready to engage in career readiness efforts. These partners include the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Department of Labor and Industry, Department of Community and Economic Development and Department of Agriculture; Team Pennsylvania Foundation; the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education; the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges; the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry; the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board; the Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators; the Pennsylvania School Boards Association; and the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units. At the regional level, school districts are organized under 29 Intermediate Units (IUs),

Pennsylvania's Career Readiness Strategic Plan

- Establish a statewide Council on Career Readiness through legislative action, demonstrating our commitment to continuing this work beyond any grant cycle or political administration;
- Brand the Statewide Career Readiness Initiative and implement a comprehensive outreach and engagement strategy for stakeholders at multiple levels statewide;
- Reform our school accountability system to emphasize school progress in getting students ready for both college and career;
- Collect appropriate data to determine the extent to which all students, especially those who are traditionally under-served, are prepared for postsecondary success;
- Support districts in the development and implementation of comprehensive K-12 career exploration, counseling and career services plans, with particular attention to historically under-served subgroups; and
- Expand career pathways programs to reach students beyond the CTE system, building on the best practices already in place within and outside of CTE.

regional education service agencies that design and provide training and implementation strategies for school districts. Additionally, many IUs work with regional employer partners to inform career pathway development and improvement. During Phase One, the Pennsylvania team worked to leverage these existing partnerships and establish more formal roles for cross-sector stakeholders; looking ahead, the team has committed to continuing collaborative efforts.

Pennsylvania's team worked with partners in the General Assembly to take initial steps to establish a statewide Council on Career Readiness through introduction of Senate Bill 1403 in 2016. If established in statute, the Council would serve as a vehicle for implementing the statewide career readiness strategic plan, which was developed during the NSFY Phase One work. As proposed, the industry-led Council would include more than 50 percent of its members from business and industry, with representation from K-12 and higher education, workforce development and other key partners.

Brand and Communications Strategy

To ensure that all stakeholders at the state and regional levels speak with a common language and reference points, the team worked with an independent marketing firm to develop a brand for career readiness activities in Pennsylvania. The brand, called Compass, will bring all of the state and local career readiness activities under a single umbrella and was informed by focus group conversations with state-level stakeholders, local leaders, teachers and students. Compass will help ensure that

the same messaging reaches multiple stakeholders:

- **Students:** Students have help exploring their skills, interests and potential while gaining real knowledge about their future opportunities.
- **Parents:** Parents can feel confident that their children are participating in appropriate career exploration and counseling activities to prepare for postsecondary success.
- **Employers:** Employers — and the communities they support — can feel confident that high school students graduate with the skills and knowledge to take on the careers of tomorrow.



If established, the Council on Career Readiness would coordinate communications and launch a website.

Looking Ahead

The NSFY cross-sector team will continue to coordinate state-level career readiness activities until the Council on Career Readiness is established. These key activities include

surveying schools and districts, updating the accountability system with new tools and establishing the Council. The team remains committed to creating the Council on Career

Readiness to ensure that an industry-led, permanent leadership entity is dedicated to this work.

