

## New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Rhode Island

The Rhode Island New Skills for Youth team embodies a statewide effort to improve career readiness pathways. In Phase One, the Rhode Island team demonstrated committed leadership and focused on elements of a successful career readiness system, while acknowledging the need to create better alignment among K-12, higher education and the business community. Key stakeholders — including the Governor's Office, Department of Education, Department of Commerce, Department of Labor and Training, higher education, non-profits, business leaders and educators — worked collaboratively and, with input from engaged citizens, created a thorough plan with clear strategies and cross-sector ownership. These accomplishments position the state for long-term success.

### Foundations for the Work

Since the beginning of her term, Governor Gina Raimondo — in partnership with business, education, non-profit and political leaders — has prioritized career readiness reforms that lead to sustaining jobs for Rhode Islanders. For example, the state has implemented programs including Computer Science for Rhode Island (CS4RI) and P-TECH. CS4RI will bring computer science to all Rhode Island schools in 2017, while students enrolled in P-TECH programs take college-level courses in high school and graduate with both a high school diploma and an industry-approved associate degree.

In addition, in 2014 the Rhode Island General Assembly created the Career Technical Education Board of Trustees (CTEBOT) to provide oversight and quality control for state Career Technical Education (CTE) programs. Most CTBOT members are current and former industry representatives, though there are also members from secondary and postsecondary education. Prior to the formation of CTBOT, the state had a legislative Career Pathways Advisory Committee (CPAC), but the committee had not been very active for several years, leaving much of the oversight of career pathways to the Governor's Workforce Board (GWB). The state also offers work-based learning experiences through the GWB as an intermediary.

*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 Rhode Island's experience and progress in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.*

Though state leaders' prioritization of career readiness has brought considerable gains, more work remains to align career pathways and work-based learning experiences to high-skill, high-demand sectors. According to the data analysis carried out during Phase One, 42 percent of CTE enrollment is in programs that are not aligned with high-skill, high-demand sectors, and nearly 50 percent of work-based learning experiences are not aligned.

## Work During Phase One

The Rhode Island team contracted with an external reviewer to conduct a needs assessment of the state's career readiness system. The team also conducted an analysis of student outcome data related to participation in and completion of high-quality career pathways, as well as participation in dual enrollment and work-based learning. Several strengths were identified. For example, the state has components of 9-14 career-focused pathways in place, including active sector organizations and committed employers. Rhode Island also has dedicated state leadership and a vibrant non-profit sector.

The needs assessment also identified key areas for growth, including the need for greater cross-sector alignment and better alignment between employer needs and high-quality CTE and work-based learning programs. And while CTE programs are technically available to all students, they differ widely in quality, making access inequitable across the state.

### *Creating a Long-Term Plan*

The Rhode Island team developed its career readiness action plan with a theory of change centered on employer engagement, system alignment, and opportunity creation for all

Rhode Island youth. The plan anchored its goals and strategies on four main concepts:

- (1) System alignment;
- (2) Demand-driven programs and investments;
- (3) Student-centered and personalized learning opportunities; and
- (4) A commitment to performance management, accountability and continuous improvement.

The state's plan was developed with input from multiple sectors, including business, secondary and postsecondary education, the Department of Commerce and the Governor's Office. A Career Readiness Working Group composed of more than 75 public stakeholders, including employers, educators and non-profit leaders, met biweekly from June through September to identify and vet the specific strengths and gaps of the state's career preparation system.

The team also solicited input from four Rhode Island instructors who served as Career Readiness Fellows. Fellows spent the summer researching best practices in career readiness and submitted evidence-based proposals to help improve the state's career readiness system. The Fellows were from various education backgrounds and roles: a math teacher, a CTE teacher, a counselor and a postsecondary CTE faculty member. The state plans to continue the fellowship program to solicit input, ideas and feedback to improve career readiness.

Each strategy within Rhode Island's plan has been assigned an individual owner from one of several agencies, including CTEBOT; the GWB; the departments of Commerce, Labor and Training, and Education; and the Community

## Strategy Anchors:

- (1) System alignment to knit together what have often been disparate and divided silos;
- (2) Demand-driven programs and investments targeted toward Rhode Island's growing industry clusters;
- (3) Student-centered and personalized learning opportunities that help youth develop interests and talents, consider options for the future, and allow for on- and off-ramps should paths change over time; and
- (4) A commitment to performance management, accountability and continuous improvement to achieve these goals.

Colleges of Rhode Island. By deliberately assigning strategy work to individuals or small teams, the state will be able to track progress more quickly and with greater clarity. Additionally, there are clear milestones and a progress monitoring process with the state's Office of Performance Management.

Rhode Island's strategies range in scale and objective from the relatively simple task of reconvening the CPAC as part of the GWB and aligning it with the work of CTEBOT to the ambitious strategy of offering work-based learning and advanced coursework opportunities to every Rhode Island high school student by 2020. Additionally, the state plans to expand to the high school level the existing Real Jobs Rhode Island initiative, a demand-driven model of workforce development led by the state's Department of Labor and Training and the GWB.

### *Putting the Plan into Action*

While the team conducted student outcome data analysis and developed the state's long-term plan, it simultaneously worked to enact policy, build formal stakeholder involvement and initiate in-depth strategy work.

Changes accomplished during the Phase One grant period include:

- The reconstitution of CPAC into a sustainable structure to guide the work and encourage cross-sector participation;

- A data-sharing agreement between the GWB, Department of Education, Council on Postsecondary Education, Department of Revenue, and Department of Labor and Training to facilitate greater analysis of student and employer outcomes; and
- The unanimous adoption by the Council on Postsecondary Education of a reverse transfer policy that permits students to transfer applicable coursework completed at a baccalaureate-granting institution back to a community college to earn an associate degree or certificate.

The state team also began work on the Transport to Career Fund, which uses state and federal funds to subsidize the cost of transportation to high-value, high-demand programs for students. This fund will break down a simple but potentially prohibitive barrier for students who want to access high-quality CTE programs outside of their home high schools.

## Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Rhode Island team will focus on implementing not just the plan for reform but also the processes for performance management. By having regular check-ins on strategies and goals, Rhode Island will remain up to date on how to achieve its goals and make any necessary adjustments.