

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: South Carolina

The Profile of the South Carolina Graduate — which outlines educational achievement goals to prepare South Carolina high school students for success in college and career — is the cornerstone of the state’s theory of change for transforming its career readiness systems. During the New Skills for Youth Phase One grant period, the South Carolina project team used the Profile as a springboard to create a plan of action that brings together cross-sector partners to strengthen and expand high-quality career pathways.

Foundations for the Work

In South Carolina, growing momentum around high school career readiness culminated in the creation and subsequent adoption of the [Profile of the South Carolina Graduate](#). The Profile outlines the educational achievement goals, including the knowledge, skills and life and career characteristics, that students must gain to be successful in college and career. The State Board of Education adopted the Profile in 2015, and the state Legislature affirmed this commitment in 2016 by passing [Act 195](#), which formally declared the standards in the Profile as the benchmarks by which high school graduates are measured.

The Profile standards complement the state’s existing career readiness infrastructure, which was established in 2005 through the [Education and Economic Development Act](#) (EEDA). EEDA formally adopted 16 nationally recognized

Career Clusters[®] and launched the Personal Pathways to Success program, through which all high school students are required to declare a major that corresponds with one of the Career Clusters. Under this program, students are expected to take career-focused coursework aligned to their selected major. Accordingly, 80 percent of students in South Carolina have participated in at least one course associated with a Career Technical Education (CTE) program of study. Further, students can access a range of work-based learning experiences, from on-site career shadowing to internships or youth apprenticeships. In the 2014-15 school year, South Carolina students participated in more than 103,000 work-based learning activities.

Work During Phase One

South Carolina planned to leverage the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate framework as

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 South Carolina’s experience and progress in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.

the foundation for transforming career readiness systems in the state. South Carolina's theory of change states that increasing the number of South Carolina students meeting the standards articulated in the Profile will dramatically increase postsecondary readiness and the number of students who complete career pathways prepared to earn a living wage, become lifelong learners, and meet employer needs through the talent pipeline.

During Phase One, South Carolina conducted a data analysis and needs assessment of the existing career readiness systems that together highlighted a few priority focus areas. Despite widespread opportunities for students to participate in career pathways and work-based learning, the project team found discrepancies in who was participating in these experiences. According to the state's data analysis, only 41 percent of career pathways completers were non-white, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, or a combination of the three. This finding challenged the project team to explore strategies for not only improving the quality of South Carolina's career readiness system but also ensuring that all students could access and benefit from career-relevant learning opportunities.

Furthermore, the needs assessment highlighted the need to more intentionally align career pathways with the needs of the labor market and ensure career pathway continuity across secondary and postsecondary systems. South Carolina's priority industry sectors include diversified manufacturing, business and information technology, health care, transportation and logistics, and construction. While the state has high participation in the Health Sciences

Career Cluster (including 25 percent of all career pathway completers), less than 1 percent of completers were enrolled in Information Technology. As such, the project team planned to focus its efforts on more intentionally aligning career pathway participation with priority sectors.

The project team also identified a need to bridge secondary and postsecondary systems and ensure continuity across career pathways. One challenge in South Carolina is that the postsecondary system does not use common cut scores on college readiness assessments to determine how to place incoming students, making adequately preparing students for success after graduation difficult for high schools, regardless of what program or public postsecondary institution the student chooses to attend.

Legislative Wins

Building on the momentum around the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate, the state Legislature passed a comprehensive career readiness package in 2016. The bills included \$3 million to reimburse high schools for national industry credential examinations, with the goal of encouraging more students to pursue credentials of value at the secondary level. Credential examinations eligible for the reimbursement would need to be aligned with job availability in the state. As other states address the challenge of promoting and funding credential examinations, South Carolina's approach of reimbursing high schools for the costs of state-approved examinations demonstrates one strategy for incentivizing credential attainment. Additionally, the Legislature directed the state's Department of Employment and Workforce to integrate data across K-12, higher

education and workforce development to better determine student outcomes and enable participating agencies to target efforts toward program improvement.

South Carolina's Action Plan

South Carolina's theory of change requires all students to have access to quality career learning experiences to meet the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate standards and be prepared for postsecondary success. As such, the project team's action plan prioritizes efforts to expand access to all students, strengthen the alignment of existing career pathways, and create mechanisms to hold districts accountable and drive continuous improvement.

To strengthen the quality of career pathways, the state plans to convene a work group of secondary, postsecondary and business leaders. This group will establish articulation agreements in each career pathway to enable students to transfer credits earned in high school toward a postsecondary degree in the same program of study. Additionally, the implementation team will engage business and industry leaders to identify credentials of value in the state's top five priority sectors and work to align programs of study with workforce needs, scale up high-demand programs, and phase out those that are obsolete.

With the Profile as a guidepost, South Carolina also plans to revise the state accountability framework to encourage career readiness. The state is considering indicators such as industry

credential attainment, achievement on the WorkKeys[®] examination, work-based learning participation and CTE pathway completion. Although this work is still in development, the project team plans to use this proposed accountability framework to shine a light on career readiness across different student subgroups, enabling the state to focus on reaching students who are under-represented in high-quality, high-demand career pathways. The state plans to use the new longitudinal data system authorized by the Legislature to develop feedback loops and increase the number of students in each subgroup who graduate college and career ready.

Looking Ahead

South Carolina has experienced growing commitment and support for career readiness in past years, coalescing around the shared vision presented in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. Further, the state Legislature has demonstrated strong commitment by passing a comprehensive legislative package in 2016. In addition to funding industry credential examinations, formally adopting the Profile of the Graduate, and establishing a cross-agency longitudinal data system, the Legislature also created a Coordinating Council for Workforce Development that is tasked with sharing information and coordinating workforce education and training efforts across the state. This Council is designed to help ensure continuity across shifts in state leadership so that South Carolina's career readiness work can be sustained.