

Tennessee is one of the 10 states selected to participate in New Skills for Youth (NSFY), an initiative enhancing state efforts to increase the number of kids across the country who are prepared for success in both college and career. NSFY is a \$75 million, five-year initiative developed by JPMorgan Chase & Co. in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group.

In Phase One of the initiative, the Tennessee NSFY team worked within established career readiness initiatives such as Pathways TN and Drive to 55 to map assets and establish strategies for scaling high-quality career pathways statewide.¹ The NSFY team in Tennessee is working to put students on track to fill high-wage, high-demand positions with an overhaul of the state's career pathways system that includes better accountability mechanisms as well as a range of supports — including scholarships and grants — for students and school districts.

Phase Two of the NSFY initiative began in January 2017. This snapshot profiles Tennessee's progress in the first year of Phase Two, including:

- **Developing regional career pathways:** Working with the results of a statewide evaluation of academic and Career Technical Education (CTE) courses, the state is implementing new standards for technical courses in line with regional strategic plans.
- **Aligning Pathways TN with Drive to 55:** The state NSFY team is promoting a comprehensive approach to career readiness by ensuring that two of the state's major programs are working toward common goals.
- **Improving rigor and accountability:** Tennessee is aligning its offerings with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), removing courses that are not shown to be adequately challenging or aligned with economic needs and implementing new ways for schools to measure career readiness.

Foundations for Career Pathways in Tennessee

Tennessee's involvement in NSFY builds on longstanding political support for career readiness from state leadership, including current two-term governor Bill Haslam. Career readiness initiatives in Tennessee fall under the umbrella of Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 campaign, which was launched in 2013 to increase postsecondary credential attainment to 55 percent of Tennesseans by 2025.

Under the Drive to 55 banner, Governor Haslam mandated the creation of several initiatives that work toward the establishment of high-quality postsecondary career pathways and accountability mechanisms for Tennessee students. Drive to 55 also works in alignment with Pathways TN — a

statewide collaborative framework to align education choices with regional economic and labor force prospects.²

Pathways TN was launched in 2012 when Tennessee became one of the first states to join the Pathways to Prosperity Network, a multistate initiative to increase the number of youth who complete high school and attain postsecondary credentials with labor market value.³ Pathways TN aims to prepare Tennesseans for careers in high-demand fields such as manufacturing, health care and information technology through a comprehensive career readiness framework built around career pathways that culminate in credentials and offer the option to earn postsecondary credits in high school.

With Governor Haslam set to leave office in 2019, the state is working to document and institutionalize its career readiness initiatives to ensure sustainability through the impending administration change. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) will play a key role in continuing to implement and advocate for high-quality postsecondary career pathways. In October 2017 TDOE underwent a restructuring and now includes a new Student Readiness and Pathways unit, headed by the NSFY Tennessee state lead.

Focusing on Regional Career Pathways Development

In 2013, Tennessee undertook a multiphase review of its existing CTE programs with the goal of standardizing academic offerings and aligning programs with state economic needs. The effort resulted in the identification and discontinuation of nearly 100 courses that did not meet expectations for rigor or economic demand. TDOE then began setting new standards for programs of study that could be transitioned into high-quality career pathways in line with 16 state-approved Career Clusters[®] based on The National Career Clusters Framework.

Through NSFY, Tennessee aims to expand the reach of career pathways even further through a number of initiatives that incentivize regional career pathway development and engage stakeholders at multiple levels. Engaging leaders in regional industries is of particular importance to ensure that career pathways are properly preparing students to meet local business needs. Business representatives in each of the state's nine Pathways TN regions will act as intermediaries responsible for convening businesses and employers with educators and will communicate with the state NSFY team about local progress and implementation challenges. Other regional Pathways TN members include representatives from school districts, higher education, major local employers, community organizations and workforce development initiatives.

Regional teams are guided by TDOE's strategic planning process, informed by data on both the labor market and student outcomes. Eight of the nine state regions began working in 2017 to complete three-year regional strategic plans that take into account labor market information and postsecondary enrollment. The strategic plans will align K-12 career pathway programs with the top 10 industries in each region. With the help of NSFY funding, TDOE was able to hire a new full-time staff member charged with building and executing high-quality strategic plans that are comparable across regions.

TDOE launched a mini-grant program in 2017 to accelerate the development of new career pathways, drawing on funds from the NSFY grant. Schools, districts and regions were invited to apply for funding to expand career pathways or further develop existing ones. In the first cycle, TDOE awarded 16 NSFY mini-grants totaling almost \$190,000.⁴ The first round of mini-grant recipients focused on work-based learning (WBL), equitable access, rural and distressed counties, program quality and career

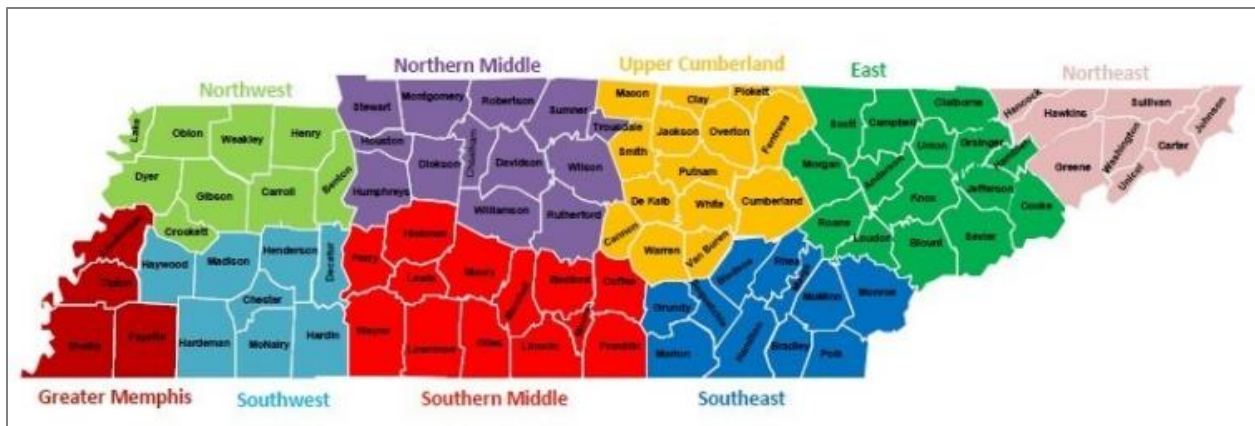


Figure 1: Tennessee's nine Pathways TN regions

advisement. TDOE is preparing to issue a second round of grants in the 2018-19 school year and hopes that mini-grant-funded programs will help seed and scale pilot initiatives across the state.

Aligning Pathways TN and Drive to 55

To promote a comprehensive approach to career readiness initiatives, NSFY is working to align Pathways TN with Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 Alliance. The Alliance works to raise awareness of local career options and ensure that student skills align with the needs of the workforce. Targeting the K-12 population will be key in accomplishing the Drive to 55 goals.

In 2017, Tennessee took a major step toward improving understanding of student postsecondary and career pathways with the release of its Drive to 55: Pathways to Postsecondary report.⁵ The report illustrated post-graduation behaviors for 2016 high school graduates. Specifically, 63 percent of 2016 high school graduates in the state enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the summer or fall following graduation: 35 percent in four-year universities, 25 percent in community colleges, and 3 percent in technical colleges. In addition to the statewide report, TDOE provided district-by-district data to local leaders to provide critical insights into students' post-graduation career pathway participation and guide local decisionmaking. These reports were aggregated regionally to inform the work of the regional Pathways TN teams.

TDOE also provided data on participation in early postsecondary opportunities (EPSO) such as dual enrollment that allow students to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school. Across the state, 40 percent of students in 2016 participated in EPSO offerings of some form. Tennessee also found that EPSO participation was associated with higher college-going rates: More than 80 percent of students who took an EPSO continued on to postsecondary education after high school graduation, compared to less than 50 percent of those who did not take an EPSO. Racial and economic factors also played a role in enrollment rates, with economically disadvantaged students; students with disabilities; and black, Hispanic and Native American students significantly less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than their peers.

Ensuring Rigor and Accountability

Tennessee is working to institute new accountability mechanisms that ensure that students throughout the state are pursuing rigorous courses that prepare them for the needs of the job market.

The 2017 state ESSA plan laid out a new ready graduate accountability indicator that measures the number of students who demonstrate readiness for postsecondary or careers by earning a benchmark score on the ACT, attaining an industry certification, earning postsecondary credits through International Baccalaureate or Advanced Placement classes, or earning a benchmark score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.⁶

The state is also working to put incentives in place to improve postsecondary and career readiness. Completion of dual enrollment courses will be valued in the new ESSA accountability system, and students can also receive funding to cover tuition for their first two dual enrollment courses at a community college or Tennessee College of Applied Technology through the state Dual Enrollment Grant. TDOE is also providing CTE-equipment-funding grants for high-skill, high-demand career pathways, focusing mainly on the top three priority industries in the state: advanced manufacturing, information technology and health care.

In line with earlier course evaluation efforts for career pathways development, TDOE has issued recommendations for the discontinuation of certain career pathways that have been found to be less rigorous or do not result in high-wage employment. The state NSFY team created tools to help in the evaluation of career pathways, focusing on mapping the scope and career quality of programs to predict employment outcomes.

TDOE plans to implement a new school counseling framework in the next academic year to help students make informed decisions that enable them to enroll and succeed in their career pathways of choice. The framework includes more rigorous standards for school counselors that encourage them to spend more time with students and less time on unrelated tasks such as test coordination and data entry. TDOE plans to employ regional coaches to help counselors implement the new standards.

Looking Ahead

As NSFY moves into the second year of Phase Two, Tennessee will focus on scaling up successful programs and communicating about programs and results. TDOE is working with the state Department of Labor to expand registered apprenticeships, both by engaging new employers and leveraging employers already offering apprenticeships. Plans for applying to a federal Apprenticeship Accelerator grant, which will help districts expand their pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, are also being developed.

Regional Pathways TN teams are expected to finalize their three-year action plans in 2018 and are scheduled to begin implementing strategies in the coming year. The regional teams will focus on expanding access to and adoption of career pathways, particularly among underserved students and students with disabilities. TDOE plans to release another round of NSFY mini-grants in 2018 to support the expansion and innovation of local career opportunities.

To improve messaging about career readiness initiatives, TDOE is working with a new staff member to solidify a strategic communications plan for the coming years. The new plan will focus on long-term branding messages, improving constituent engagement over social media, and increasing the visibility of career pathways work. This communications work includes the development of indicators related to career pathways and the release of the data related to those indicators to relevant stakeholders.

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- ¹ https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/files/resources/Tennessee_Phase_One_Snapshot_2017.pdf
 - ² <https://www.tn.gov/education/pathwaystn.html>
 - ³ <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network>
 - ⁴ https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/ccte/pathways/pathways_nsfy_minigrant_awardees.pdf
 - ⁵ https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/ccte/ccte_drive_to_55_report_state.pdf
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