

Denver

COLORADO

THE NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK

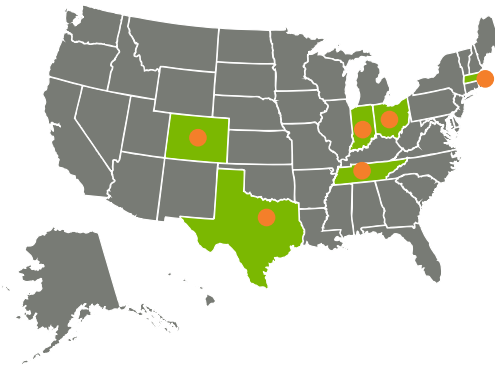
New Skills ready network, launched by JPMorgan Chase in 2020, bolsters the firm's efforts to support an inclusive economic recovery, as part of both their \$350 million, five-year New Skills at Work initiative to prepare people for the future of work and their \$30 billion commitment to advance racial equity. Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group are working with sites to improve student completion of high-quality career pathways in six US communities.

The six *New Skills ready network* sites are: Boston, Massachusetts; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Nashville, Tennessee. These sites are formulating new partnerships between local school systems, higher education, employers, and government entities to develop pathways and policy recommendations that give underserved students access to higher education and real-world work experiences that lead to high-wage, in-demand jobs.

These snapshots provide an overview of sites' accomplishments in the fourth year of the *New Skills ready network* initiative, including the development of priority objectives and action steps toward those objectives. Through the *New Skills ready network* initiative JPMorgan Chase is looking to advance the following priority areas to prepare students for good careers and economic mobility:

- Strengthening the alignment and rigor of career pathways;
- Designing, implementing and scaling real-world work experiences;
- Building seamless transitions to support postsecondary success; and
- Closing equity gaps.

Denver, Colorado, is one of the six sites participating in the *New Skills ready network*. This five-year initiative, launched by JPMorgan Chase in 2020, aims to improve learner completion of high-quality career pathways.



NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK SITES:

- Boston, Massachusetts
- Columbus, Ohio
- Dallas, Texas
- Denver, Colorado
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Nashville, Tennessee

In the inaugural year of the *New Skills ready network* in Denver, Colorado, the team focused on building a robust data infrastructure. They implemented a shared data framework to measure the impact of career pathways and meticulously mapped out career pathways with built-in accelerators. This groundwork enabled seamless data exchange between secondary and postsecondary institutions, paving the way for a comprehensive approach. They also documented their strategic plan, ensuring seamless integration of dual/concurrent enrollment, Career Technical Education (CTE), work-based learning (WBL), industry certifications and aligned advising.

The second year saw the team refine their foundation. The data framework was further expanded, with protocols established for data collection, sharing and analysis. Additionally, they launched a pilot program for the Individual and Career Academic Plan in partnership with secondary and postsecondary institutions. These achievements laid a solid groundwork for year three, during which the initiative further amplified WBL, leveraged data across all sectors and empowered learner transitions.

The third year witnessed a significant leap forward in data utilization across secondary and postsecondary partners. The team successfully integrated high-quality WBL experiences into career pathways, enriching learners' understanding and application of skills. The team also focused on enhancing the learner transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions, creating a smoother

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LEADERSHIP TEAM PARTNERS

- The Attainment Network (*site lead*)
- Colorado Community College System
- Colorado Department of Education
- Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Colorado Workforce Development Council
- Community College of Denver
- Denver Public Schools
- Emily Griffith Technical College
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Colorado Denver



VISION FOR SUCCESS

The Denver, Colorado, team — working under the name *New Skills Ready Initiative* — established a vision to guide the team's work over the five-year initiative:

The Denver, Colorado, New Skills Ready Initiative team aims to dramatically increase the number and diversity of learners who complete selected high-quality career pathways that start in high school, continue into and through higher education, and lead to good jobs in Denver's labor market. This partnership will also deliver a national model for closing equity gaps and increasing postsecondary attainment, resulting in family-sustaining wage employment.

and more supportive journey. These advancements enabled the cross-sector team to track learner progress more effectively, improve real-world work experiences and ultimately empower learners to confidently navigate their chosen high-quality career pathways within the network.

In 2023-24, the Denver, Colorado, *New Skills ready network* team focused on:

- 1 Building and refining stackable credential pathways across high-demand industries;
- 2 Integrating WBL experiences into stackable credential pathways; and
- 3 Improving communication about career pathways, credentials and opportunities to learners and families.

PRIORITY 1

Building and refining stackable credential pathways across high-demand industries

Year four of the initiative in Denver, Colorado, focused on building and refining stackable credential pathways aligned with the state's high-demand industries. This effort aimed to equip learners with the qualifications to enter and progress seamlessly in promising careers. The Denver, Colorado, team actively fostered partnerships with key industry representatives, recognizing the importance of aligning with industry needs. Through ongoing communication, they identified the most sought-after skills and credentials within Denver's specific labor market. This work ensured that the developed pathways directly addressed the evolving needs of local employers.

Leveraging industry insights, the team designed stackable credential pathways combining industry-recognized certificates, short-term training programs and potentially associate degrees. This structured approach allowed learners to progressively build their skillsets and qualifications, gradually increasing their marketability. A thorough review of existing curricula within programs ensured that learners gained knowledge and practical skills that were directly applicable to their chosen career paths.

Collaboration with industry leaders yielded significant results. By working together, the team identified high-demand fields and developed high-quality career pathways that directly addressed the skills gap in Denver's workforce. This resulted in a 46% increase in the number of high school and postsecondary learners participating in these industry-aligned pathways, all leading to family-living wages. Notably, career exposure activities saw a 62% increase in high school learner participation, sparking a strong interest in these fields. Additionally, a 5-fold increase in high school learners earning valuable industry-recognized credentials through reimbursable state-funded programs demonstrates the program's effectiveness in equipping young people with the skills they need to succeed.



Community College of Denver (CCD) revised its Behavioral Health Associate of Applied Science (AAS) core curriculum, established two emphasis areas and developed eight new behavioral health courses aligned with industry and employer needs. These revised micro-credentials can stack into the AAS degree and are ready for implementation as credit or non-credit certificates. Denver Public Schools (DPS) and CCD were closely involved in this work. The Auraria Tri-Institutional Taskforce cross-walked all CCD courses transferring to the University of Colorado Denver and Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver). They also agreed upon and updated Transferology as the communication platform for learners to see how courses will transfer easily. MSU Denver entered into an agreement with Emily Griffith Technical College to transfer 45 credits for any completed registered apprenticeship program into MSU Denver bachelor's degree programs.

While expanding access across all DPS schools presented logistical hurdles, the Denver, Colorado, team actively pursued grant funding and local industry partnerships to bridge the financial gap and facilitate broader program implementation. Efforts are also underway to establish co-funding opportunities and potential internship placements for learners.

The team's commitment to collaboration extends beyond industry. Their participation in the [1215 Secondary, Postsecondary and Work-based Learning Integration Task Force](#) helped elevate the voices of learners, families and communities within the education-to-workforce system. Additionally, the Colorado Department of Higher Education Stackability Workgroups [finalized a report](#) on five industry areas that were critical in building high-quality career pathways.

Building on this groundwork, year five will focus on strategically scaling the stackable credential pathways to encompass a broader range of high-demand industries and on enrolling more learners. Key priorities will be securing long-term funding, implementing a robust data collection system to track learner outcomes and maintaining continuous improvement efforts. By addressing these areas, the Denver, Colorado, team is well positioned to ensure the continued development and successful implementation of impactful stackable credential pathways, empowering learners to thrive in Denver's ever-evolving job market.



PRIORITY 2

Integrating WBL experiences into stackable credential pathways

Recognizing the vital role practical skills and real-world experience play in securing rewarding careers, the Denver, Colorado, team prioritized fostering a robust WBL ecosystem throughout year four. This focus involved integrating industry-specific WBL opportunities seamlessly into established stackable credential pathways.

Year four witnessed a significant expansion in WBL offerings. The Denver, Colorado, team facilitated a more comprehensive range of opportunities, encompassing internships, apprenticeships and job shadowing, allowing learners to gain valuable hands-on experience within their chosen fields. A key achievement involved strategically integrating WBL experiences directly into the curriculum of stackable credential pathways. This initiative aligns with the creation of pathways that bridge non-degree credentials to college credit. Through partnerships and engagement, these pathways map a clear progression from certificates and industry certifications to associate and even bachelor's degrees in specific fields such as behavioral health. This meticulous approach creates a cohesive learning journey, enabling learners to apply their newly acquired theoretical knowledge in practical settings.

The stackable credential pathways result from authentic partnerships, intentional engagement and centering the learner experience, just as Senate Bill 22-192 envisioned. The legislation mandates that the Colorado Department of Higher Education build out 10 stackable credential pathways across five high-value industries in the state over two years; the department has completed six of the 10 to date. This enhanced integration significantly elevates the value proposition of stackable credentials for both learners and employers.

HIGH-PRIORITY INDUSTRY SECTORS



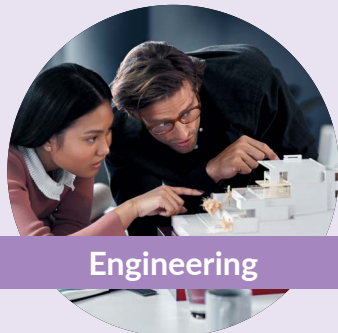
Behavioral Health



Business



Cybersecurity



Engineering



Health Care



Information Technology

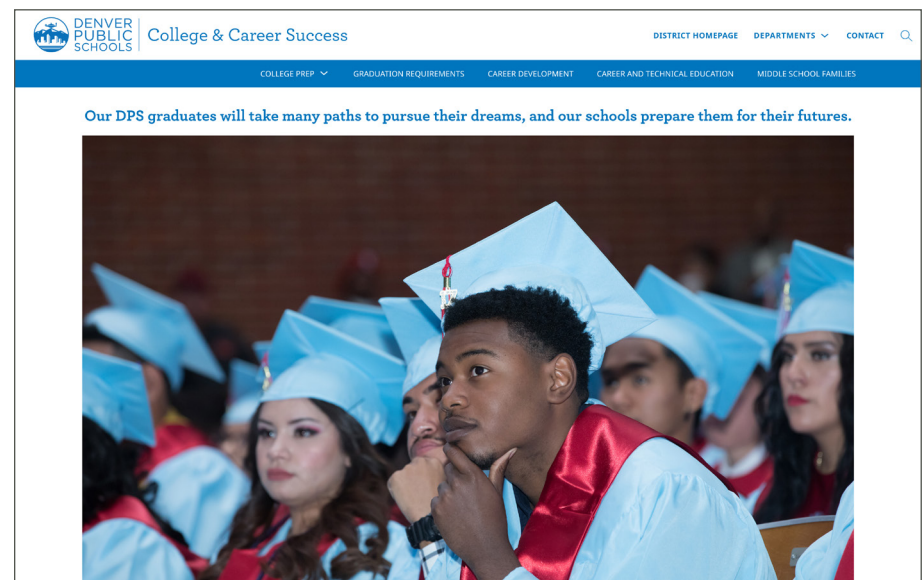


Furthermore, the Denver, Colorado, team focused on developing and refining high-quality WBL models to ensure meaningful experiences for all stakeholders. These successful partnerships were built upon several key elements:

- **Effective Mentoring:** Dedicated mentors from partner companies were crucial in guiding and supporting learners throughout their WBL placements.
- **Engaged Employers:** To actively engage employers, a multi-pronged approach was undertaken. This approach included offering financial incentives, implementing targeted marketing campaigns and establishing employer recognition programs. These initiatives fostered a firm commitment from industry partners and ensured that WBL experiences aligned with current industry needs.
- **Addressing Challenges:** The team acknowledged potential challenges, such as the quality of supervision provided and the level of learner preparedness. The Denver, Colorado, team implemented training programs for supervisors to address these concerns, equipping them with the necessary skills to guide learners effectively. Additionally, pre-placement workshops were developed to prepare learners with the skills needed to excel in their WBL placements.

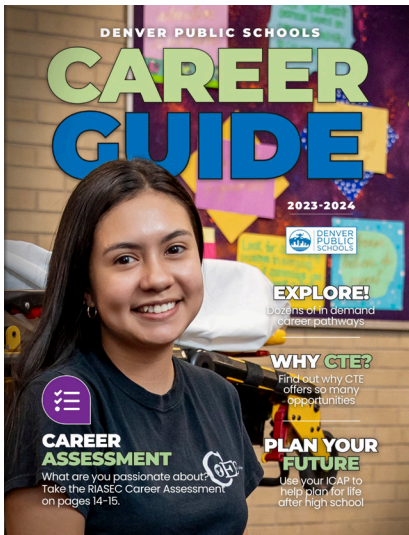
Looking ahead, the Denver, Colorado, team recognizes the critical role of employer partnerships in expanding WBL opportunities. Efforts will be directed toward cultivating and strengthening these partnerships by implementing robust engagement strategies. Securing sustainable funding for WBL programs also remains a key priority. The team is actively exploring potential partnerships with private entities and pursuing public grant opportunities to ensure the long-term viability of these crucial programs.

By continuously expanding access to WBL experiences, refining successful WBL models and fostering solid collaborations with industry partners, the Denver, Colorado, team is well positioned to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. This comprehensive approach empowers the Denver workforce with the necessary skills and experience to thrive in the ever-evolving job market.



PRIORITY 3

Improving communication about career pathways, credentials and opportunities to learners and families



Year four of the *New Skills ready network* initiative in Denver, Colorado, strongly emphasized improving communication and support systems for learners and their families. Recognizing the crucial role of information access and guidance in navigating career pathways, the Denver, Colorado, team prioritized equipping learners with the necessary knowledge and support to make informed decisions about their futures. A cornerstone of this focus area was ensuring clear and accessible communication. The team implemented a multi-faceted approach to achieve this goal.

A user-friendly website was developed specifically for DPS' [College and Career Success](#) website. The page features interactive [career exploration](#) tools, detailed information about [stackable credential pathways](#) and readily available resources in clear language. The team also leveraged targeted outreach campaigns. Strategic partnerships with community organizations and schools facilitated these campaigns. This work ensured that diverse learners and families were reached and equipped with the knowledge needed to explore career pathway options. Finally, community collaborations strengthened the cross-sector efforts. Information sessions and career fairs were organized through collaborations with community partners. This proactive approach significantly increased awareness and fostered engagement among under-represented populations.

Furthermore, the Denver, Colorado, team highlighted strengthening advising and transition support. Recognizing the importance of personalized guidance, the team invested in professional development for advisers. This effort equipped them with the latest tools and strategies to effectively guide learners throughout their chosen career pathways and to support a smooth transition to the workforce. Dedication to robust advising and transition support has positively affected individual learner journeys.

Looking ahead, the team acknowledges the need to address existing data gaps. To gain a comprehensive understanding of program effectiveness and learner outcomes, the team is actively working to improve data collection systems. This work involves gathering crucial information on learner progress and program impact. Collaborations with education institutions are underway to establish seamless data-sharing practices, enabling a holistic view of learner success in career pathways.

The cross-sector team has been instrumental in stewarding both institutional and statewide investments in improving systems that track aligned WBL opportunities, career exposure and certificate completion data in addition to the state's movement toward implementing a comprehensive longitudinal data system, all of which are setting the critical foundation for expanded and holistic career pathways data storytelling for Colorado in the future.

The Denver, Colorado, team remains dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of communication, advising and transition support beyond the initial grant period. They actively explore potential funding sources and partnerships to ensure continued service delivery. This may involve collaborations with potential partners and philanthropic organizations. By fostering transparency through clear communication, providing personalized guidance through effective advising and building a sustainable support infrastructure, the Denver, Colorado, team is well positioned to empower its learners for long-term success in their chosen career paths.



LOOKING AHEAD

Capitalizing on the significant progress achieved in year four, the Denver, Colorado, project team has identified three key priorities to further empower learners in year five:

1. Bolstering Advising and CTE Instructor Capacity: Building strong, collaborative advising practices across partners in Denver, Colorado, is essential to provide learners with holistic support throughout their chosen pathways. The team will leverage shared messaging to ensure seamless transitions between K-12 and postsecondary advising. This work includes identifying opportunities for collaborative learner support and utilizing partners' shared spaces to engage learners more effectively. The team will also build on state recommendations for centralized and efficient information sharing on pathways opportunities and career-connected learning.

Additionally, the team recognizes the importance of recruiting and retaining qualified instructors in priority career pathways. State and local partners across the team will develop resources that support the onboarding of CTE instructors and enhance teacher recruitment efforts. These resources will prioritize increasing the number of teachers of color and fostering stronger connections with employers in high-demand fields.

2. Strengthening WBL Integration: Expanding access to WBL experiences, such as internships and apprenticeships, for learners within stackable credential pathways remains a key priority. The team will continuously work to improve the quality of WBL models. This focus will emphasize effective mentoring for learners and strong employer engagement to ensure valuable experiences for all stakeholders. The team acknowledges the challenges of employer engagement and funding limitations for WBL programs. Innovative strategies will be explored to address these hurdles. This work might involve establishing public-private partnerships, exploring financial incentives for employers and implementing targeted outreach campaigns.

3. Enriching Learner Support and Data Insights: Comprehensive communication strategies will aim to reach learners and families effectively. Providing clear and accessible information about career pathways and opportunities will ensure informed decisionmaking throughout learners' educational journeys. Enhanced and expanded advising services will continue to guide learners throughout their chosen pathways. This focus on robust advising also encompasses supporting a smooth transition from education to the workforce. Investments in data collection systems and programmatic evaluation will enable the team, and the broader Colorado community, to better understand the direct impact of high-quality career pathways on the employment and earnings of learners and their families and to evaluate the community's investment in programs. The valuable insights gained will inform continuous program improvement and guide data-driven decisionmaking within the initiative.

The Denver, Colorado, *New Skills ready network* team demonstrates its commitment to ongoing innovation and improvement by focusing on these critical areas. Their dedication to deepening stackable credential pathways, strengthening WBL integration and enriching learner support and data insights positions them to effectively empower learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in high-demand careers.



JENNIFER CHAVEZ

EDUCATION: Took health care concurrent enrollment courses at Northfield High School; graduate of Emily Griffith Technical College Certified Nurse's Aide Program; current nursing learner at Community College of Denver

Jennifer is working as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) while attending the Community College of Denver to complete her prerequisites so she can transfer to the University of Colorado Denver's Nursing program. Her ultimate goal is to become a nurse anesthetist.

What were your educational and/or career goals before participating in the program or initiative?

- Had previously wanted to be a forensic scientist.
- Realized through an internship at Denver Public Schools that she preferred more hands-on opportunities and wanted more social interaction.

How did the experience shift your thinking about your education and/or career goals?

- MedConnect showed the reality of what being a CNA would be like. She had an opportunity to talk to chief executive officers and current nurses from hospitals who provided a lot of transparency and

support on what could be done with this certification and the benefits of working in a hospital.

What did you find to be most beneficial from participating in the program or initiative?

- Pushed her ahead. She has a lot of adult co-workers asking how she has the level of professionalism and experience at her age. This provided a feeling of power and confidence to do well and feel prepared.
- Provided many connections in the professional environment.
- Connected her to further opportunities.

