



Nashville, Tennessee

Nashville, Tennessee, is one of the six sites selected to participate in the *New Skills ready network*. This five-year initiative, launched by JPMorgan Chase & Co. in 2020, aims to improve student completion of high-quality career pathways.

In the first year of the initiative, the Nashville, Tennessee, *New Skills ready network* team evaluated current career pathways to ensure alignment to high-wage, high-demand careers; worked to create a data-sharing agreement between secondary and postsecondary partners; and developed shared definitions around equity. The Nashville, Tennessee, team also created a career pathways assessment tool to determine where strengths are within career pathways as well as ensure alignment with the state's certified career pathways process. State agencies,

working alongside local Nashville partners, have focused on expanding certified career pathways statewide through the Tennessee Pathways initiative. In 2019-20 the number of certified career pathways doubled, bringing the total to 281 certified career pathways in 136 high schools and 69 districts.

In 2020-21, the Nashville, Tennessee, *New Skills ready network* team focused on two major priorities:



Establishing a shared understanding around systemic barriers to racial equity; and



Developing a data-sharing agreement between secondary and postsecondary institutions to ensure seamless learner transitions and postsecondary success.

THE NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK



NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK SITES:

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

New Skills ready network, launched by JPMorgan Chase & Co. 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 new \$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 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 first year of the *New Skills*

ready network initiative, including the development of priority objectives and action steps toward those objectives. While the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic presented challenges to launching the work, the sites demonstrated strong early progress toward developing high-quality career pathways through collaborative stakeholder engagement.

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.

Partners engaged on the leadership team

- Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce (site lead)
- Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Nashville State Community College
- The Office of Mayor John Cooper
- Scarlett Family Foundation
- Tennessee Board of Regents
- Tennessee College Access and Success Network
- Tennessee Department of Education
- Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Nashville, Tennessee's Vision for Success

The Nashville, Tennessee, *New Skills ready network* team established a vision statement to guide the team's work over the five-year initiative and their efforts to develop and expand access to high-quality career pathways for all learners:

With cross-sector leadership from secondary, postsecondary, philanthropy, and the public and private sectors, this project will design, build, and transform career pathways across Nashville to meet high-quality bars with the goal of recruiting historically underrepresented and underserved students and supporting them through secondary and postsecondary completion into high growth, high wage careers in the local economy. The overarching goals for the Nashville team include addressing systemic inequities, barriers to Early Post-Secondary Opportunities and Work-Based Learning, as well as challenges to postsecondary access, persistence, and success.

Setting the Context

Prior to launching the *New Skills ready network* initiative, both the city of Nashville and the state of Tennessee had been prioritizing college and career readiness through numerous initiatives. The Tennessee Pathways initiative is the state's strategy to expand high-quality regional career pathways — and aligned work-based learning experiences — through alignment among secondary, postsecondary and employers. The [Tennessee Pathways Certification](#), launched in 2019, builds upon the Tennessee Pathways model by setting clear expectations for alignment, advisement and partnerships that define strong education-to-career pathways. The Certification also elevates and celebrates innovative and exemplary career pathways across the state. Tennessee also has strong data capacity, including a statewide longitudinal data system that allows the state to collect, retain and maintain data from multiple agencies in a centralized warehouse, as well as a portal that collects data that is specific to work-based learning.



Anchoring the state's focus on college and career readiness is Drive to 55, which aims to equip 55 percent of Tennesseans with a college degree or certificate by the year 2025. The state has developed an array of initiatives to support this goal, including Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Pathways and Tennessee Reconnect. At the K-12 level, all learners are required to complete a college- and career-ready course of study to graduate from high school.

In Nashville, like the state of Tennessee, college and career priorities are highly important to the community. The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce has worked with the Brookings Institution to refine its assessment of what constitutes a living wage and, through that process, identified the region's opportunity jobs that provide a living wage. In addition, the Chamber's Talent Solution Councils have leveraged Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) strategies to analyze labor market data to determine the highest priority sectors for the city. TPM is a data-driven approach that helps employers successfully project demand, identify in-demand competencies, and map trusted sources of talent for their job needs. The Chamber has used the Talent Solution Councils and the TPM process to study workforce trends to more closely link employers' needs with colleges and universities that provide that skill development.

Beginning in 2006 Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) received a smaller learning communities grant to begin the process of transforming the district into a wall-to-wall academy model. Nashville transformed the 12 zoned high schools into the Academies of Nashville. Every learner self-selects into an Academy pathway in ninth grade, with Career Technical Education coursework beginning in 10th grade. More than 350 business partners provide learners in every school with experiential learning opportunities such as field trips, job shadows and internships. Today, the graduation rate of MNPS stands at 82 percent, and Nashville has welcomed more than 5,000 visitors from across the country to study the Academies model.

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Approach to Systems Transformation

The Nashville partners subscribe to a community-connected learning model, which has led to successful collaboration in the *New Skills ready network* grant and previous initiatives. The community-connected learning approach bridges the world of work and school and allows the community to take ownership of projects instead of the districts and colleges that house them. This approach ensures that all members of the community feel connected to the work and feel as if their voices are heard in the continuous improvement process. Within this context, collaborating on, scaling and sustaining the *New Skills ready network* is not just the work of the site lead organization but of the city of Nashville.

Strong collaboration among all local partners, as well as among local and state partners, has been key to the early successes of this initiative. Led by the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, the cross-sector team has a shared vision for success and shared accountability for the work. This includes monitoring and follow-up on project objectives and deliverables as well as bi-monthly communication on progress within priority areas. Fortunately, these partners have worked together previously in relevant ways and entered this initiative prepared for deep collaboration. The *New Skills ready network* grant allowed the cross-sector team to further strengthen existing partnerships and establish a more thoughtful, sustained and connected partnership.

PRIORITY 1
**Establishing
a Shared
Understanding
Around
Systemic
Barriers to
Racial Equity**

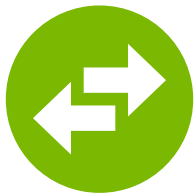


Early on, the entire Nashville, Tennessee, team agreed that they must work collaboratively to tackle the challenge of closing equity gaps within career pathways. All stakeholders agreed that there was unresolved systemic racism and unconscious bias across all institutions. To change the culture, the team needed to gain a shared understanding of the full extent of the systemic racism that affects learners and their families from health to justice and employment to education. To set a baseline for this work, the Nashville, Tennessee, leadership team; representatives from partnering secondary and postsecondary institutions; industry leaders; and other community stakeholders took part in a Racial Equity Institute training about systemic racism. The training was a level-setting opportunity for 300-plus individuals to gain foundational knowledge on systemic racism and for the systems and institutions to develop a shared understanding and framework. These trainings will continue for a smaller subset of practitioners in the fall to continue building capacity within their systems and institutions around racial equity.

In addition to providing trainings, the leadership team engaged in work to identify shared definitions around equity. The goal was to ensure that any equity work was focused at the systems level, rather than at the programmatic level, and that everyone was operating from the same viewpoint on what racial equity and racism meant in the context of a career pathways system. The team ultimately decided to focus on defining several key terms that would be the most useful in the career pathways work, including *educational equity*, *race*, *institutional racism*, *implicit bias*, *systemic racism*, *white privilege* and *cultural representation*. The definitions were derived from several national resources and surveys of numerous stakeholders both inside and outside of the leadership team. Those terms will be revisited throughout the initiative to ensure that the definitions continue to represent the correct nomenclature for the project.

Both the training and the shared definitions are the foundation for all other priority objectives within the *New Skills ready network* grant. Going forward the team plans on holding a pair of two-day training sessions with the leadership team and individuals who are working closely with learners in the target schools. These sessions will turn the training, common equity definitions and systemic racism understanding from knowledge into action to advance the Nashville, Tennessee, *New Skills ready network* equity goals.

PRIORITY 2
Developing a Data-Sharing Agreement Between Secondary and Postsecondary Institutions to Ensure Seamless Learner Transitions and Postsecondary Success



Alongside the equity work, the Nashville, Tennessee, team has been deeply focused on creating seamless transitions from secondary to postsecondary education. Currently, secondary and postsecondary institutions in Nashville do not have systems to share or collaborate using data and often operate with isolated, incomplete information. For learners, this lack of connection and intentional data sharing not only is inconvenient but also means that information is not used in timely and targeted ways that support persistence and success. Once the process of sharing data is ingrained into the system, local leaders and practitioners will be better positioned to make data-informed decisions to provide learner supports, improve the quality of programs, and close equity and opportunity gaps.

This priority work builds on an existing project underway to strengthen alignment across MNPS and Nashville State Community College (NSCC), called *Better Together*. The initiative, which pre-dates the work of the *New Skills ready network*, is a joint venture launched in early 2020 to help MNPS graduates prepare for, attend and complete college. The overarching goals for this initiative are to expand college access, boost college persistence and completion, and significantly improve learner outcomes for both systems. The ultimate goal for learners is a seamless transition, making sure every learner has the information, resources and networks they need to be successful as they transition to and through their postsecondary education. A key element of this initiative is the development of a data-sharing agreement between MNPS and NSCC.

From the beginning, the Nashville, Tennessee, team encountered challenges with the process around developing a memorandum of understanding for data sharing. MNPS and NSCC had to work collaboratively to address legal issues around the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and institutional challenges around developing new data-sharing agreements. In the end, the process became somewhat less complex once the data agreement was split into a two-tiered system, with one agreement focused on sharing institutional-level data and the other on getting learner-level data-sharing agreements signed by learners and guardians.

The success in the development of the two-tiered agreement is important for two reasons. For one, it codifies Nashville, Tennessee's commitment to data-driven decisionmaking across institutions and supports continuous improvement. It also helps both institutions build systems to support seamless transitions to and through postsecondary, as well as use data to identify and address inequities and challenges. For learners who consent to data sharing, the partners can create an insulated pipeline that supports individual learners based on their specific needs. These data-sharing agreements afford the Nashville, Tennessee, team an opportunity to measure their impact on learners' college-going and career pathways.

In addition to the work on the data-sharing agreements, the Nashville, Tennessee, team has participated in robust data analyses across partners. Sessions have focused on disaggregated data at the K-12 and community college levels and have pulled out the four high schools that they are working with to provide the team with context and overview of the impact of COVID-19 on career pathways metrics (postsecondary enrollment, early postsecondary opportunities, labor market alignment, and responses to a counseling and advising survey).

Looking Ahead

Even in the midst of a global pandemic, the Nashville, Tennessee, team showed their strength in partnerships and collaboration as they prioritized the work of the *New Skills ready network*. This can be seen in the team's commitment to complete a data-sharing agreement between two of their major partners and the collaborative work around creating shared definitions within their equity priority. They also completed a [foundational report](#) for collecting and presenting disaggregated data on learner persistence and success and mapped current advising systems with recommendations for a new advising framework.

As the first grant year ends, the Nashville, Tennessee, team is starting work on year two priorities, which include developing a tracking system for learner career pathway data at the secondary level, building a career pathway evaluation tool, and developing a toolkit for career and college advising based on national best practices.