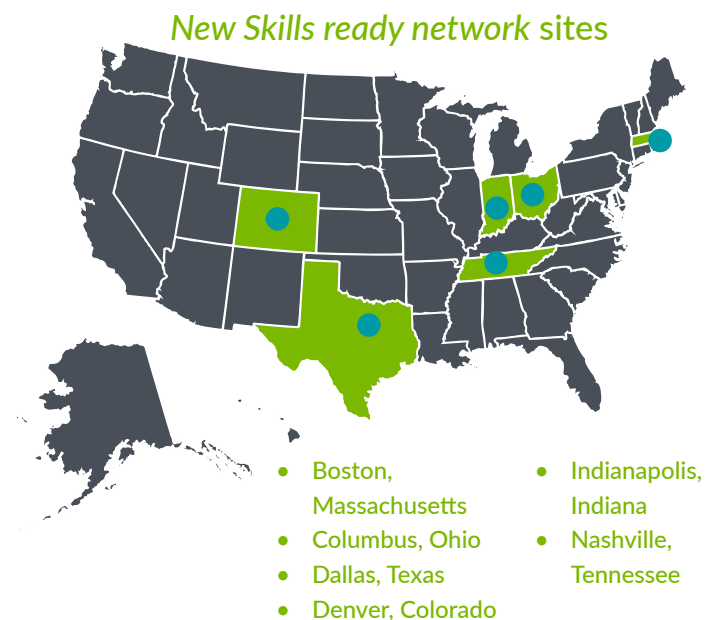# NEW SKILLS
READY NETWORK

YEAR ONE

Early Achievements & Innovations

To support and accelerate career pathways, JPMorgan Chase & Co. partnered with Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group to launch the *New Skills ready network* in 2020. This five-year initiative, part of JPMorgan Chase & Co.'s $350 million New Skills at Work initiative to prepare people for the future of work and their new $30 billion commitment to advance racial equity, aims 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.

The world of work is changing at a rapid pace, making early career preparation more critical than ever. Unfortunately, just 51.9 percent of young adults in the United States have completed education or training beyond high school despite the fact that more than 65 percent of jobs — in particular, good jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage — now require more than a high school diploma. In addition, there is still too often a disconnect between K-12, higher education and the world of work, resulting in barriers and limiting access and opportunities for learners to engage in seamless and industry-driven career pathways.

High-quality career pathways provide learners with the necessary academic, professional and technical skills to excel in their future careers. When designed well, these career pathways equip each learner with the experiences and skills they need for lifelong success, enabling learners to gain social capital through real-world work experiences, get a head start on college by earning postsecondary credits while

New Skills ready network sites

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

in high school, and earn credentials that are highly valued in the labor market.

While every learner can benefit from career pathways, given the recent economic upheaval from COVID-19 (coronavirus), it is more imperative than ever that systems and institutions ensure that historically marginalized learners have access to and the means to be successful in career pathways. Meeting this goal is particularly important for learners of color, learners from low-income communities, English language learners, and other learners who are under-represented and have been denied access and opportunity by racist or discriminatory policies and practices.

In 2019, JPMorgan Chase & Co. requested applications from a select group of U.S. community-state partnerships that shared a commitment to expanding high-quality career pathways for learners at scale. Applications were reviewed and evaluated according to the criteria outlined below:

- Strength of cross-sector collaboration between local partners;

- Strength of collaboration between state and local partners;

- The demonstration of strong and specific commitment from local and state leaders;

- Potential for impact;

- High ambition and potential to intervene, disrupt and change systems with new or existing partnerships, policies and resources;

- Capacity for reporting on identified key performance indicators;

- Commitment to equity;

- Expectation of quality in creating and transforming career pathways through alignment with the labor market and postsecondary needs;

- Clear path to sustainability beyond the grant period; and

- Value-add of philanthropic investment.

A key feature of the *New Skills ready network* is the makeup of the leadership teams. Each site's team brings together a cross-sector group of partners representing local school systems, two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions, intermediary organizations, industry, and state and workforce development agencies. These unique state-and-local, cross-sector leadership teams were developed to align systems; incubate innovative solutions; and ultimately, scale equitable career pathways for all learners.

As part of accomplishing systems-level change, each site took on a collaborative approach to understanding the site's collective starting points in the work. This effort included undertaking an intensive diagnostic assessment of the site's current career preparation system to identify strengths, gaps and the work ahead.

To help grantees prepare for the intensive assessment, the national project partners, Education Strategy Group and Advance CTE, developed a suite of needs assessment tools that sites could use to conduct the work. In the first three months of this initiative, sites engaged in a robust process to analyze current policies and practices; did an analysis of their data to identify equity gaps around access, enrollment and outcomes; and analyzed their capacity for collecting, reporting and using data across and within institutions and state agencies. The findings from the needs assessments set the foundation for each site's year one action plans and identified best practices associated with the four priority areas.

NEW SKILLS
READY NETWORK

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

Key Priorities

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

Partners

K/12	SECONDARY K-12 DISTRICT	**CTE STATE**	STATE CTE DIRECTOR OR LIAISON
2 YEAR	POSTSECONDARY 2-YEAR	**EDU STATE**	STATE K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION AGENCIES
4 YEAR	POSTSECONDARY 4-YEAR	**WORK STATE**	STATE WORKFORCE AGENCY
T	POSTSECONDARY TECHNICAL COLLEGE	**LOCAL**	LOCAL FOUNDATION PHILANTHROPY
LOCAL	LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY CHAMBER, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	**LOCAL**	LOCAL CITY GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

New Skills ready network Priority Areas

1. **Strengthening the alignment and rigor of career pathways:** *New Skills ready network* sites will use policy and funding levers to improve the quality and rigor of career pathways — including scaling down or phasing out those that do not lead to credentials with labor market value — and to make those career pathways widely available to and accessed by all learners in secondary settings, especially in under-served populations.

2. **Designing, implementing and scaling real-world work experiences:** Sites will embed meaningful work-based learning opportunities within career pathways through sustained collaboration between employers and educators while also removing barriers to participation and success for learners. Improving access to good jobs by connecting learners to real-world work experiences will help fuel economic growth and set learners on the right path to long-term success in employment.

3. **Building seamless transitions to support postsecondary success:** Sites will build career pathways that enable learners to move up the career ladder by obtaining degrees and credentials of value. In practice, this work includes establishing partnerships and agreements among high schools, postsecondary institutions, employers and intermediary organizations to build aligned career pathways spanning grades 9-16 that increase learner attainment of degrees and credentials aligned with high-wage, high-skill, in-demand careers.

4. **Closing equity gaps:** Through the equity analysis sites will be able to understand where gaps in access, enrollment, persistence and completion occur in available career pathways by population group. Using that foundational knowledge, sites will work to remove barriers to meaningful career opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations and support effective transitions from school to work by aligning equitable policy and practice to scale proven career pathways programs that ensure equity and access.

Despite the differences in political and geographic contexts, sites experienced similar challenges as well as early successes in their year one approaches to the four priority areas. As a result, several common themes and approaches emerged during the *New Skills ready network* year one grant period.

PRIORITY AREA 1
Strengthening the Alignment and Rigor of Career Pathways

In year one, sites focused on identifying or affirming the core elements of a high-quality career pathway and began critical analyses and discussions around how to ensure that such career pathways are accessible to all learners, especially those historically under-served. Sites drew from their equity data analyses to identify the barriers that existed in sunsetting and building out equitable career pathways for all learners. National and cross-site landscape scans of best practices in refining criteria provided sites the opportunity to learn from the work of others and widen the reach of their programs to account for access and equity. The baseline of their work started further ahead because of the best practices they took from others who had started the work before them.

Boston, Massachusetts

After examining the labor market information (LMI) data the Boston, Massachusetts, leadership team chose to proceed with information technology, environmental and life science, health care and social assistance, manufacturing and business/finance as focus areas for their new high-quality career pathways. The team began the process by defining these career pathways and creating selection criteria to identify pilot schools to serve as the first cohort to advance these career pathways. The criteria were framed around the priority of integrating cultural wealth and equity into every aspect of the work. All open enrollment schools are eligible to participate in the pilot, but they have to ensure that they are exposing learners to the aforementioned industry sectors and supporting learners in taking courses in those areas. Schools also have to ensure that career pathways prioritize transferrable skills development within the curriculum.

Columbus, Ohio

The Columbus, Ohio, leadership team elected to start work in the information technology and health care program areas. Within these program areas, individual site partners have started to evaluate individual career pathways against defined criteria to determine alignment across learner levels, connecting secondary to postsecondary. Columbus City Schools has begun collecting data and organizing information around the two particular program focus areas, and The Ohio State University (OSU) has narrowed down the majors and career pathways that are aligned with the two identified program areas, noting any gaps where career pathways should exist.

Additionally, the Columbus, Ohio, leadership team has developed an Equitable Pathways workgroup to develop curricular and other academic components of selected career pathways, including technical components of work-based learning in these areas as well as adding criteria around "persistence" to ensure access and equity outcomes. Next steps in this work include bringing together faculty from Columbus City Schools, Columbus State University and OSU to discuss curricular alignment between institutions.

Dallas, Texas

Dallas, Texas, prioritized efforts to ensure it had the necessary data to align career pathways with labor market demand. Data became an early priority for the Dallas, Texas, team as they became aware of the misalignment among different LMI sources the institutions and partners were using. As a first step, the team convened all major institutions involved in the work to level set on the data sources each institution was using. The group reached consensus to move forward with one tool and data source for the shared LMI system, which all organizations involved in the work agreed to use moving forward. From there, the partners continued to engage around what their unified LMI system would need, such as identifying common questions regarding the factors of an entry-level job.

Designing, Implementing and Scaling Real-World Work Experiences

A core element of many sites' year one strategies is expanding access to real-world work experiences for learners. Across the country, education leaders have embraced work-based learning as a strategy to connect learners' classroom experiences to their future careers. However, work-based learning faced significant challenges, as well as changes in its delivery, in the midst of the pandemic. These changes have forced school leaders and employers to acknowledge pre-existing inequities that have kept marginalized learner populations from accessing high-quality work-based learning experiences. As such, a number of sites focused on overcoming inequities and strengthening partnerships with employers in the first year of this initiative.

Denver, Colorado

Denver, Colorado, recognized the importance of ensuring that all partners operate from a shared definition of work-based learning. The continuum of work-based learning as well as the definition had previously varied from institution to institution. The emphasis on one standard definition provided the Denver, Colorado, team the opportunity to shift the conversation to scaling credit for prior learning and prior learning assessments to ensure that high school learners can earn postsecondary credit for their work-based learning experiences.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Based on their early work in expanding high-quality career pathways, the Indianapolis, Indiana, leadership team received a grant to launch a new apprenticeship model for Indianapolis high school learners to prepare them for a future in high-demand industries. Modern Apprenticeship is a paid two- to three-year work-based learning experience with local employers, after which students will emerge with a high school diploma, college credits, relevant credentials and professional experience. This pilot apprenticeship program starts during an Indianapolis student's junior year of high school and enables the high school student to attain soft skills, technical skills and relevant work experience, while excelling in their high school and postsecondary coursework. This model is being established in Indianapolis, with plans to coordinate learnings and share best practices statewide.

Building Seamless Transitions to Support Postsecondary Success

Now more than ever, states and institutions are recognizing the need for robust data systems to monitor college and career readiness efforts, align career pathways across the P-20 continuum, ensure equitable access and success for each learner and continuously improve career pathways. However, in many of the sites — as is the case in many states and communities across the country — while data might be collected, too often it is not shared across systems, publicly reported, or used to drive policy decisions.

During year one, sites worked to focus on the most critical indicators of career pathway quality and success, determine how to best collect and share data, disaggregate and analyze the data to consider equity gaps, formalize data sharing across institutions, and develop or implement strategies to strengthen data agreements across institutions.

Columbus, Ohio

Columbus, Ohio, strengthened data-sharing agreements between key partners at the secondary and postsecondary levels to improve the flow of data across systems and support more informed policy decisions. The leadership team also looked outside of the postsecondary institutions to leverage existing research and data-sharing agreements from the Ohio Educational Research Center and the Central Ohio Compact. By working with several agencies in research and data sharing, the leadership team hopes to align data sources across Columbus. As the work progresses, the leadership team has prioritized the work of aligning and improving data infrastructure by creating a subcommittee dedicated to advancing the work in the next year of the grant cycle.

Nashville, Tennessee

In Nashville, Tennessee, much of the work around data sharing had been started prior to the *New Skills ready network* initiative. However, *New Skills* provided additional support to help lay the foundation for a strong data-sharing agreement between Nashville State Community College and Metro Nashville Public Schools. The lessons learned in Nashville came in the form of a double-layered memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU on an institutional level allowed learning to occur in larger-scale systems-level work around things such as disaggregating data, whereas the learner-level data MOU allowed a consent-based data-use agreement for supporting individual learners. By separating the work the conversations could move forward more quickly and provide more substantial data sharing not just among institutions but also with the families of the learners, enabling more equitable and transparent access for learners and families to their data.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Indianapolis, Indiana, focused its initial data efforts on program quality and data collection, allowing the team to move quickly in their identification of five focus programs of study for the *New Skills ready network* project. The project team has also identified key metrics to monitor the success of career pathways and partners that collect each data point. The site will be building a data dashboard to monitor progress and ensure alignment across partner institutions, as well as equitable access and outcomes for historically marginalized populations of learners.

Closing Equity Gaps

While equity is a priority across the initiative, the unique challenges from COVID-19, the resulting economic downturn and the protests for racial justice made equity — including racial equity — an even clearer imperative in year one. Armed with the results from the equity analyses, which showed consistent and persistent gaps in access and outcomes for under-served populations, a number of sites started by level-setting their leadership teams around common nomenclature to lay the foundation for deep equity work.

Equity was seen as particularly hard work across all six sites, and although sites have started digging into data, the work is still in the early stages with progress fairly limited to date. However, the site leadership teams are committed to focusing on equity as a leading objective throughout the initiative and thread it within the work of each priority.

Nashville, Tennessee

In Nashville, Tennessee, the leadership team's early focus was on creating a shared understanding of equity and systemic barriers to racial equity. The team believes that to make significant progress on any objective, the career

pathways work needs to be firmly grounded in equity. The Nashville, Tennessee, team worked collaboratively to establish common definitions and language, which all partners have agreed to use in all of their current and future work on career pathways. The team ultimately decided to focus on defining several key terms, including *educational equity*, *race*, *institutional racism*, *implicit bias*, *systemic racism*, *white privilege* and *cultural representation*, that would be the most useful in the career pathways work.

Nashville, Tennessee's leadership team also offered racial equity training to staff at partner institutions and other key community organizations. In the first year of this initiative, more than 380 individuals including partners, school staff and other stakeholders participated in the training, building a shared foundational knowledge within the community on systemic racism. The leadership team recognized that to sustain the work on equity beyond this five-year grant, a foundation around breaking down systemic racism had to be developed through engagement and open discussions with community partners.

New Skills ready network
Year One Snapshot Index

All sites involved in the *New Skills ready network* began the early stages toward transforming career readiness through strategies aligned with the four priority areas. Individual snapshots are available in the Learning that Works Resource Center at careertech.org/resource-center.

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

EARLY LESSONS FROM YEAR ONE

In a year that was transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic, sites were challenged with numerous barriers to implementing high-quality career pathways. COVID-19 forced meetings into virtual spaces and students into out-of-school learning environments and raised questions about how equity could be at the forefront of all work moving forward. Despite the challenges and barriers facing the planning and early implementation work during year one, a few strategies emerged that are conducive to effective career pathways systems transformation:

Identify a clear, articulated vision with actionable next steps that build upon each other

A key element to success is having a common vision, which is used to focus, drive and prioritize work. All sites are driving toward more equitable career pathways for all learners across the career continuum and developed or adapted shared visions through their cross-sector leadership teams. These visions are at the heart of the sites' action plans and aim to drive collective action and alignment across systems and partners. The next crucial steps for all sites include unpacking the vision into an actionable project plan.

Secure shared commitment to owning priorities

While each site had an identified site lead to manage the grant, the year one goals would not have been accomplished without a shared commitment by the leadership team members to owning the four priority areas based on the context of their institution. Sites were most successful when partnering organizations had defined roles and responsibilities in the work and leaders from all sectors were vocal about owning and committing to those shared goals. Leadership teams that were deeply engaged in continued communication through weekly or monthly calls were able to prioritize the work, make the most progress and lay the foundation for sustainability.

Create trusting and collaborative relationships to move the work forward

To achieve true systems transformation, collaboration must be present in all priority areas across the work. Some sites were fortunate to be building on years of partnerships that enabled them to accelerate this work, but even those teams saw great value in continuing to strengthen their relationships and engage new partners. Sites that brought in and leveraged individuals within partner organizations — beyond the leadership team members — made even greater progress as each organization was more invested and had more capacity to move the work forward. It should be noted that sites were challenged with achieving trust and collaborative relationships during a pandemic, which forced all meetings into virtual environments.

Be data driven

Data is a foundational element of this initiative and often serves as the thread that connects each priority for sites. From day one, all six sites began the critical work of mapping their data capacity and reviewing equity gaps to identify where they most needed to lean in. Looking ahead, all sites have ongoing work to strengthen data collection and sharing, as well as to develop mechanisms to gather input and feedback from learners, families, community partners and the business community to inform their career pathways design, implementation and improvement. Sites are also focused on leveraging labor market data in an efficient and effective way to ensure that all career pathways lead to good careers with family-sustaining wages and that all partners are using LMI consistently and collaboratively. Simply put, the priorities of the *New Skills ready network* cannot be accomplished without a strong commitment to building and using quality and actionable data.