



**NEW SKILLS FOR YOUTH  
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

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**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

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JUNE 2020

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The *New Skills for Youth* (NSFY) initiative shows how productive partnerships among state and local governments, the business community, and educators at all levels can drive the expansion of innovative programs for increasing students' preparation for high-skill, high demand careers. Although the states' approaches to pathway development differed, all designed and deployed strategies that led to increased state capacity and programmatic innovations, and contributed to increased rates of pathway completion among secondary students.

Drawing on national and state expertise, NSFY promoted pathways that span secondary and postsecondary systems, blend rigorous core academic and career-technical instruction, offer focused career guidance and advisement systems, include high-quality work-based learning experiences, and culminate in postsecondary or industry credentials of value. Following a 6-month planning period, 10 states—Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Wisconsin—each received \$1.95 million, 3-year grants (January 2017-December 2019) from JPMorgan Chase & Co. to implement statewide career pathways systems and ensure access for all students. The states also received technical assistance, including cross-state meetings, coaching, and communications support from a team of experts from the Council of Chief State School Officers, Advance CTE, and Education Strategy Group.

RTI International served as the third-party evaluator to assess NSFY's effect on the development and growth of career pathways in the 10 states. Building on three annual evaluation reports, the final web-based report examines the strategies and innovations states used to expand pathways and quantitative data on student outcomes. This executive summary provides highlights from the [web-based final report](#).



## CONTEXT

NSFY built on existing state career and technical education (CTE) and career readiness initiatives and was further bolstered by federal legislation. Passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in 2015 lent new support to career readiness efforts, and aspects of the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century* (*Perkins V*) Act of 2018 paralleled NSFY objectives. NSFY implementation coincided with a long period of national economic expansion and low unemployment (below 4 percent). As a result, public and employer interest and investment in workforce development and education grew, particularly in high-skill fields such as healthcare and advanced manufacturing.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, growing income inequality spurred legislation and initiatives supporting education programs that aimed to provide all youth with the skills needed for high-skill, high-demand jobs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Smith, E., Tsin, D., & Rogers, E. (2019). Who Will Succeed in Tomorrow's Job Market? Urban Alliance. [https://theurbanalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UA\\_WP2019\\_Who\\_Will\\_Succeed\\_in\\_Tomorrows\\_Job\\_Market.pdf](https://theurbanalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UA_WP2019_Who_Will_Succeed_in_Tomorrows_Job_Market.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Carnevale, A., Fasules, M., Quinn, M., & Peltier Campbell, K. (2019). Born to win, schooled to lose. Georgetown Center on Education the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/schooled2lose/>

## FINDINGS

By design, NSFY included states with career pathway systems at different stages of development, with some focused on designing and implementing new models, while others refined and expanded existing programs. Regardless of their starting point, all NSFY states began by strengthening cross-agency partnerships and pathways-related policies and legislation; they focused more on local implementation and sustainability planning in NSFY's final year.

### Increased State Capacity

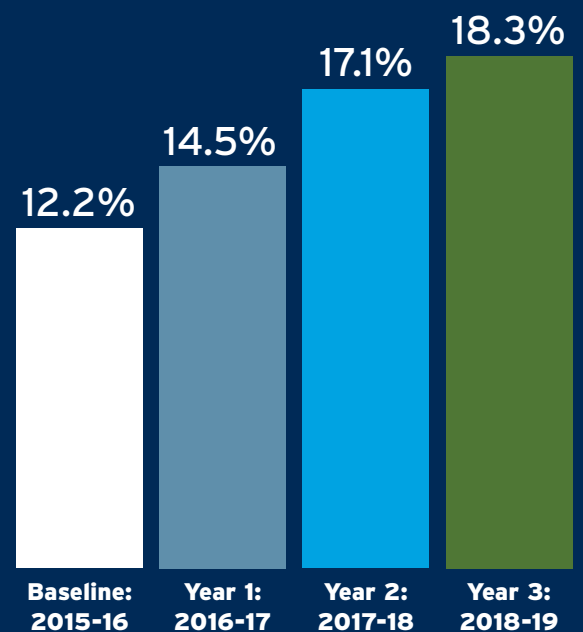
NSFY states strengthened connections between pathways-related initiatives and stakeholders around a cohesive vision and plan for career pathways, sustaining pathway development through staff turnover and political changes, including four new governors in 2018. Education staff from states participating in NSFY's 6-month planning phase, but not selected for implementation grants, described less centralized coordination, and they struggled to align stakeholder activities and avoid duplication across state agencies and initiatives.

### Higher Rates of Pathway Completion

NSFY saw the implementation of new pathways and student recruitment strategies in nearly all states. Consistent with these strategies, secondary student completion of pathways aligned with high-skill, high-demand career fields grew from 12 to 18 percent from 2015-16 to 2018-19.

#### Completion of HSHD Career Pathways Across States

% of students who completed HSHD pathways\*



\*Excludes MA from Y3 only (no data), OK for baseline-Y3 (not cohort), WI for baseline-Y3 (grade 11 and 12 only, not cohort)

Data Source: *New Skills for Youth* state education data systems. See [data sources](#) for more information.

## Career Pathway Innovations and Quality



### Employer-Driven Pathways

NSFY states formalized and expanded employer partnerships and the use of labor market data to inform pathways development. States convened employers to offer input on pathway priorities, content, and credentials, and they created or improved processes for using traditional and real-time labor market data to prioritize pathways fields. States also dedicated staff time to building and maintaining employer connection.



### Career Pathway Quality and Rigor

States created new pathway models; revised program approval processes to ensure consistency and rigor in local pathways; and launched pilot programs to identify and address equity gaps. All states developed policies and directed funds and support to expand work-based learning opportunities, and most strengthened processes for identifying and promoting industry-recognized credentials.



### Career-Focused Accountability Systems

As part of ESSA implementation, NSFY states introduced data indicators related to CTE or pathways programs, such as dual credit and industry-recognized credentials, in their state or federal accountability systems or report cards. NSFY reporting requirements contributed to further changes and improvements in data collection on career pathways and career readiness indicators.



### Scaling Local Pathways

States offered new incentives and support to encourage pathway expansion at the local level, focusing on aspects of pathways, such as work-based learning and employer engagement, that districts and schools found most challenging to implement. States promoted the benefits of pathways through messaging and branding campaigns aimed at stakeholders, but noted that negative perceptions of pathways persist among parents and school staff.



### Funding and Sustaining Pathway Innovations

NSFY state teams highlighted new state and private funding sources, partnerships, staff positions, legislation, and statewide alignment as key parts of plans for sustaining their work after NSFY. More than half of the states dedicated new state funds for pathways and pathways-related programs or anticipated related budget increases after the conclusion of NSFY.



### Postsecondary and Workforce Connections

Early college credit attainment rates increased across NSFY states able to track this indicator over time, reflecting new incentives and funding for college readiness, including pathway models integrating aligned dual credit opportunities. State workforce system partnerships focused on aligning pathways with registered apprenticeships, but some also addressed work-based learning and programs serving at-risk students and those with disabilities.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

NSFY concluded as the latest federal legislation supporting CTE, *Perkins V*, took effect in July 2019. The interplay of state support for pathway development and local pathway implementation promoted by NSFY is echoed in the law's new requirement for states to collaborate with school districts to conduct local needs assessments including labor market and industry data to inform CTE program development and expansion. Other emerging opportunities for further CTE and pathways development and expansion include:

## Connections to Middle School and Postsecondary Education

NSFY states expanded career advising through new resources and training for counselors and other school staff. *Perkins V* permits the use of federal funds for career development as early as middle school, echoing early career planning activities introduced during NSFY. Secondary-postsecondary pathway connections tended to be institution- or region-specific rather than statewide, and several collaborations developed under NSFY might serve as models for other districts and institutions.

## Workforce Systems and Apprenticeship

NSFY states started programs funded by the *Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act* that supported pathways for students with disabilities or at-risk youth, and they built connections between pathways and apprenticeships. States planned to continue developing these programs in response to industry interest and federal funding for registered apprenticeships.

## Equity and Access to Pathways and Work-Based Learning

To improve student access to pathways, states piloted programs for students with disabilities and other underrepresented students. NSFY states plan to continue and expand these initiatives. They also acknowledged a need to expand work-based learning opportunities for students, such as those in rural regions, who lack transportation to employer workplaces, a considerable barrier to participation.

## Supporting District Employer Engagement

Schools and districts at the vanguard of pathway implementation leveraged established employer relationships to expand pathway activities during NSFY. To aid other districts, states provided a variety of support for employer outreach, including funds for intermediaries and technical assistance. Because employer connections take time to develop, states will need to track the effects of these strategies after NSFY.

## Data on Student Outcomes

NSFY state teams leveraged other initiatives and varied in their approaches to pathway development, making it challenging to tease out NSFY's effects on student postsecondary and employment outcomes. Most states were able to track pathways students into postsecondary education, for both in-state and out-of-state institutions, but data on employment outcomes either were not available or were limited. Data collection to track and inform career readiness programs will continue with *Perkins V*, which requires new data indicators for work-based learning and dual enrollment.