

What
Works

New Skills Ready Network:
Transforming Youth
Career Pathways

Executive Summary

Across the U.S., young people often struggle to transition from school to meaningful careers due to a lack of coordinated guidance, work-based learning, and aligned coursework. The evolving labor market and growing demand for skilled talent underscore the need for youth career pathways, including training, work experiences, and support systems.

The New Skills Ready Network (NSRN) was launched by JPMorganChase to expand work-based learning, career advising, college credits in high school, post-secondary credentials, employer engagement, and supportive state policy that would develop demand-driven career pathways in six major cities.

In this What Works report, we explore the lessons learned from NSRN that can be scaled across communities to expand youth economic mobility.

The key insights gleaned from communities nationally that are featured in this report include:

1. Invest in Local Leadership

Successful career pathways require dedicated local leadership who can navigate complex stakeholder relationships and build workforce infrastructure that lasts.

2. Involve Employers as Strategic Partners

Meaningful business engagement requires clear roles, accountability, and investments in building effective partnerships that support local talent development strategies.

3. Create Seamless and Accessible Student Pathways

High-quality programs emphasize seamless and accessible transitions from high school to postsecondary opportunities, allowing students to earn dual credits, reduce costs, and align learning with both their interests and employer needs.

4. Scale Through Peer Learning

A national community of practice can accelerate innovation by facilitating learning exchanges that contribute to replicating promising approaches.

5. Institutionalize Change Through Policy

Local experiences must shape state and federal policies to create lasting, scalable change beyond individual districts or cities.





Introduction

When young people have exposure to career, technical, or postsecondary education, they are more likely to graduate, enroll in a two-year college, secure employment, and earn higher wages.¹ Despite the importance of this education, many students navigate fragmented systems that do not help them develop the skills or experiences needed to enter the workforce. In 2025, nearly one in ten high school graduates felt unprepared for any career pathway² and, while 70 percent of U.S. jobs require some postsecondary education, only half of the students earn a credential beyond high school within six years.³ The deficiencies in the systems that facilitate youth transitions to postsecondary opportunities also hinder local economic growth by not adequately supporting the talent pipelines required by employers.

Recognizing this challenge as an opportunity, we leveraged our decade of experience in youth employment programs to launch something unprecedented. Fixing youth career pathways wasn't just about helping young people—it was about building the skilled workforce that could power America's economic future. As a global employer with over 300,000 employees across a wide range of occupations, JPMorganChase is committed to expanding skills development and career mobility. The firm invested \$53 million in youth workforce preparation between 2014 and 2019, increasing access to job training, summer employment, and other programs. This focus led to the creation of New Skills for Youth Initiative (NSFY) in collaboration with the [Council of Chief State School Officers \(CCSSO\)](#), [Education Strategy Group \(ESG\)](#), and [Advance CTE](#), which helped expand state-level career readiness strategies.

NSFY demonstrated the potential of state-level investments to transform career education and led to the development of the **New Skills Ready Network (NSRN)** in 2020. We invested \$7 million each in six cities—**Boston, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Indianapolis, and Nashville**—over five years to develop demand-driven career pathways—programs that provide students with access to higher education and real-world work experiences leading to high-wage, in-demand jobs. Through a collaborative model facilitated by national partners Advance CTE and the Education Strategy Group, NSRN prioritized technical assistance, coaching, and sharing insights across cities to replicate promising solutions. JPMorganChase also brought business insights and local leadership to contribute to regional talent development strategies.

By 2024, NSRN demonstrated significant impact: student participation in high-quality career pathways increased in the six cities adding roughly 39,000 students to programs aligned with employer needs; the number of students earning high-value, industry-recognized credentials increased by almost 3,900; and new policies were enacted at institutional, local, and state levels to further support career education.⁴ The most significant achievement was less quantifiable: the creation of what local leaders describe as a “unified ecosystem” for career pathways, where previously fragmented organizations now work in coordinated partnership.⁵

NSRN provides a blueprint for transforming education and workforce systems to expand high-quality pathways that prepare young people to enter the workforce. This report explores the following insights to support communities nationwide in developing more effective and responsive systems:

1. Invest in Local Leadership

Successful career pathways require dedicated local leaders who can navigate complex stakeholder relationships and build workforce infrastructure that lasts.

2. Involve Employers as Strategic Partners

Meaningful business engagement requires clear roles, accountability, and investments in building effective partnerships that support local talent development strategies.

3. Create Seamless and Accessible Student Pathways

High-quality programs emphasize seamless and accessible transitions from high school to postsecondary opportunities, allowing students to earn dual credits, reduce costs, and align learning with both their interests and employer needs.

4. Scale Through Peer Learning

A national community of practice can accelerate innovation by facilitating learning exchanges that contribute to replicating promising approaches.

5. Institutionalize Change Through Policy

Local experiences must shape state and federal policies to create lasting, scalable change beyond individual districts or cities.

In an economy increasingly dependent on skilled talent, ensuring young people don't fall through the gaps isn't just good corporate citizenship—it's the foundation of sustainable economic growth that works for everyone. While progress has been made, innovating career education continues to be a focus for regions across the U.S. In 2025, career education is a priority in states across the U.S.⁵ The solutions developed and tested through NSRN are ripe for additional investment and tailoring to other markets.

NSRN Approach

The New Skills Ready Network represents a reimagining of how education, workforce development, and economic opportunity connect. Rather than accepting fragmented systems as inevitable, we supported a national network focused on creating unified ecosystems where K-12 schools, colleges, businesses, and community organizations work toward shared local workforce goals. NSRN's collaborative model, executed alongside Advance CTE and the Education Strategy Group (ESG), with an external evaluation partner, RTI, aimed to expand work-based learning, career advising, college credits in high school, post-secondary credentials, employer engagement, and supportive state policy.⁶

The following are key elements of NSRN's approach:

- **National Community, Local Solutions**
Each participating city received \$7 million to develop locally-tailored strategies while participating in a national learning community that accelerated innovation across the entire network.
- **Pinpoint Systems Gaps**
Comprehensive city assessments conducted when NSRN was launched revealed the need for transformation and specific challenges to prioritize: only 1 in 13 high school students enrolled in career pathways, with completion rates of just 39 percent at high school and 19 percent at postsecondary levels.⁷
- **Student-Centered Design**
NSRN was organized around four core pillars that address every stage of the student journey: seamless transitions from high school to postsecondary education, postsecondary pathways aligned with employer needs, work-based learning experiences, and ensuring underserved student participation.
- **Priorities Aligned with Outcomes**
NSRN recognized that student enrollment alone wasn't enough—success required comprehensive support systems, data-driven decision-making, and coordination between previously siloed education and workforce systems. This shifted focus from access to completion and attainment outcomes.
- **Effective Employer Partnerships**
Employers served as collaborative partners from the outset, helping design curricula, provide work-based learning experiences, and shape regional talent strategies.



- **Sustainability**

The five-year grant period supported planning and coalition building. NSRN cities were also encouraged to integrate new career pathways strategies into existing programs and leverage public funding to ensure sustainability beyond the grant period.

By 2025, NSRN leaders reported progress in creating a unified ecosystem for career pathways, where previously fragmented organizations now work in coordinated partnership.⁸

STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES INFORMED BY NSRN SITES*

The work of NSRN cities informed policies at the state and local level, creating a pathway from local innovation to systemic reform. Below are some of the policies highlighted in this paper.

Indiana

- **Indiana Career Advising Legislation (H.B. 1002 (2023)):** Informed by Indianapolis' NSRN work, requires annual career fairs and career-focused conversations.
- **Indiana Graduation Pathways Policy:** Informed by Indianapolis' pathway mapping and alignment work.

Massachusetts

- **Massachusetts High Quality College and Career Pathways (HQCCP) Initiative:** Provides nearly \$48 million in sustained state funding for career pathway programs in FY25.

Colorado

- **May 2025 Executive Order:** Supported by Denver's efforts and momentum building, reimagines the state's postsecondary talent development system by directing agencies to integrate education, workforce training, and employer needs.

- **Colorado Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS):** Informed by Denver's NSRN work to connect educational and professional experiences for workforce planning.

Tennessee

- **Dual-Enrollment Expansion Legislation:** Informed by Nashville's pilot with Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCAT), requires TCAT to partner with local education agencies by 2023–2024.
- **TCAT Dual Enrollment Mandate:** Since 2024, TCAT must reserve full-time enrollment slots for dual enrollment students.

Local Initiatives

- **Nashville Transportation Referendum (Fall 2024):** Voter-approved referendum establishes dedicated funding source for transportation improvements over 15 years, informed by NSRN transportation barrier report.

*This list represents a selection of policies and is not comprehensive of all the legislative impacts informed by NSRN cities' initiatives. **Their inclusion does not represent endorsements by JPMorganChase.**

NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK SNAPSHOT

Impact Highlights⁹

↑ **39,174**

increase in students participating in high-quality career pathways

↑ **3,899**

increase in students earning high value, industry recognized credentials

↑ **274**

increase in high-quality career pathways offered

+ **New policies**

enacted at institutional, local and state levels

Each of the six U.S. sites tailored their strategies to meet the unique needs of their market context

DENVER, CO

The Attainment Network

Build on our initial investment to strengthen an existing **strong youth apprenticeship system** by **building seamless connections between high school and higher education.**

INDIANAPOLIS, IN

EmployIndy

Leverage momentum around the conversion of Indianapolis Public Schools to career academies to lead a collaborative effort to **build seamless transitions between high school and higher education.**

BOSTON, MA

EdVestors

Leverage the great work of the state of Massachusetts as part of New Skills for Youth to **support expansion of high-quality health pathways in Boston Public Schools.**

COLUMBUS, OH

Columbus City Schools, Columbus State Community College, Ohio Excels, OSU

Leverage the district's strategic plan to **expand high quality career pathways for CCS students.**

DALLAS, TX

Dallas Commit

Strengthen our initial investment in the Dallas Promise scholarship program by **aligning it with in-demand careers** and **expanding real world work experiences for students.**

NASHVILLE, TN

Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce

Build on Nashville's existing strong career academy programs by **forging seamless connections between high school and higher education.**

Insights

OLUMUYIWA'S CAREER PATHWAY



Olumuyiwa Akinbobola's vision to expand his grandmother's business, an African market in Indianapolis, was fueled by the skills that he acquired through his high school's career pathway program. "I wanted to learn more about marketing to reach people so that the business can grow," says the recent Pike High School graduate.² Through his participation in [EmployIndy's Modern Youth Apprenticeship Program \(MAP\)](#), Olumuyiwa gained real-world experience that he plans to build on at Indiana University Indianapolis (IUI), where he will study marketing and supply chain management. He has also been able to expand his work at his grandmother's shop by managing its operations and website. His journey from high school student to young professional illustrates the potential of high-quality career pathways to set young people on a path to career success.

Olumuyiwa's experience is part of a larger youth career pathways story taking place across the United States. In Massachusetts, where half the high school students now participate in career pathways programs, state leaders see this as essential work.³ "Modernizing high school is an economic imperative for the state," explains Bob LePage, Massachusetts Assistant Secretary for Education, who has championed this work throughout most of his career.⁴ Massachusetts' progress, which started with 60 schools offering career pathways programs 10 years ago to more than 200 today, is an example of how strategic pathways investments and systemic change can create opportunities for young people and regional labor markets.

The following are insights from NSRN that can be leveraged to transform career education systems:

INSIGHT 1. Invest in local leadership

Successful career pathways require dedicated coordinators who can navigate complex stakeholder relationships and build workforce infrastructure that lasts.

NSRN provided support for local leaders to integrate career pathways through enhanced collaboration between workforce, education, and community organizations, government agencies, and employers. Intermediaries, including workforce and education nonprofits, provided staffing and infrastructure to manage these networks, facilitate communication, and fill resource gaps. Site leads at partner districts and institutions played an important role in developing and scaling practices. These partnerships resulted in integrated skill-based curricula, educator professional development, and collaboration between employers and community organizations.¹⁰ Continuous learning and improvement were achieved by sharing data, best practices, and refining strategies across the network.

The following approaches contributed to NSRN's success:

Prioritize staffing

NSRN collaboratives identified essential roles like pathway coordinators to manage student-employer-education connections in career pathway programs, employer liaisons, and data specialists that enhance youth services and manage relationships. Philanthropic partners funded these positions to demonstrate their value, with the goal of securing public funding for sustainability.¹¹



Spotlight: NSRN Boston partners made strategic hires to increase staff capacity across the district and within specific school sites. By investing in resources such as a districtwide pathways manager, data analyst, and school-based pathways coordinators to support implementation, Boston partners were able to provide expanded services, central to building a robust career pathways ecosystem.¹²

Dedicated staffing can also improve student experiences. Olumuyiwa's MAP coordinator Christina Anthony served as a bridge between his high school's education and workplace experience at Ivy Tech. "The three of us worked together, completely intertwined to make it easier on the students," he shared when explaining how his school, the apprenticeship program and his workplace supervisor collaborated to help him succeed.¹³

Develop infrastructure

Intermediaries and other organizations that lead career pathways strategies need infrastructure, such as data systems, communication mechanisms, and professional development to execute their plans.¹⁴ Developing data sharing was challenging due to issues like siloed information systems and lack of coordinated oversight. Some sites created data sharing agreements between partners, while others pushed for major digital changes.¹⁵




Spotlight: Dallas developed a system to share data between Dallas ISD and Dallas College, aligning course offerings and improving advising support for students moving from high school to college. For example, early alerts identify students who are off track based on predictive indicators. This data infrastructure linked educational attainment with workforce outcomes and helped paint a clear picture of student trajectories over time. The shared data made disparities more visible, such as who was and was not enrolling in college after graduation or completing a FAFSA.




Spotlight: Denver built a shared data system to measure the impact of career pathways and track learners' progress into careers, which allows them identify access gaps and develop targeted outreach strategies. Insights from this experience have informed the plan for the [Colorado Statewide Longitudinal Data System](#) (SLDS), which connects data from people's educational and professional experiences to increase understanding on how to prepare students to meet the state's workforce needs.¹⁶

Build community

Effective collaboration demands trust, flexibility, shared vision and goals, clear roles, buy-in, accountability, and results. Establishing a shared purpose and community requires time and a willingness to adapt plans as progress is evaluated and new needs arise.

 **Spotlight:** Recognizing the importance of early relationship building, the [Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce](#) hired a third-party facilitator for partnership meetings, enabling them to engage as collaborators rather than primary decision-makers, fostering trust and community.¹⁷

 **Spotlight:** Collaboratives in Boston, Denver, and Nashville restructured leadership teams to include organizations responsible for implementation, creating a balanced bottom-up and top-down approach. These organizations played a crucial role in developing realistic implementation plans.

Faced with high turnover in education organizations stemming from persistent structural challenges (e.g., compensation, working conditions),¹⁸ Boston, Columbus, Indianapolis, and Nashville crafted onboarding plans to swiftly integrate new members, ensuring meaningful contributions without delays.¹⁹

“The development of an effective pathway ecosystem is everyone’s responsibility. Yet, no single entity owns it. Much of the work happens in the spaces between institutions. Intermediaries are needed to weave efforts together and advance pathway development by driving a shared agenda, adding capacity, and serving as stewards of institutional knowledge and stability—especially during times of transitions.”

-Edvestors

INTERMEDIARY IMPACT SNAPSHOT

EDVESTORS (BOSTON)

[EdVestors](#) in Boston collaborates with city, school district, and employer leaders to support students in shaping their future. As an intermediary, their approach is to build buy-in and trust across partners, identify and address partners’ capacity needs, hold partners accountable for implementing action plans, and provide the structure and capacity to operationalize the collective agenda.²⁰

- Since the 2019–2020 school year, they have achieved a **64%** increase in pathways, leading to more high school programs that blend academic coursework with work-based learning.
- Additionally, **46%** of Boston public high school graduates in 2024 participated in internships, a **21%** rise from the class of 2020.²¹

INSIGHT 2. Involve employers as strategic partners

Meaningful business engagement requires clear roles and structured networks, not just occasional guest speakers or job fair participation.

Employers play a vital role in providing insight into growing sectors and occupations, in-demand skills, and other workplace trends that help align education and training programs with market needs. Local talent development strategies are created with employers and often include work-based learning (WBL) opportunities for young people. **WBL helps students explore career opportunities, build workplace skills, develop a career identity, and chart a path to postsecondary opportunities.**²² Students who participate in quality WBL are more likely to get and stay in college level jobs.²³ However, opportunities are often hard to find for students in secondary education due to employer concerns around safety and liability, and barriers such as transportation to work sites and scheduling conflicts between schools and employers.²⁴ Intermediaries can help to address these concerns by convening stakeholders, aligning plans, and identifying resources to address barriers by offering students wrap-around supports.²⁵

Strategies for strengthening employer engagement and creating meaningful WBL experiences include:

Include employer tables as collaborative members from inception

Successful regional talent partnerships establish or engage employer networks where businesses serve as members with clear roles and shared goals. Position employer organizations as formal partners rather than external participants.



Spotlight: In Indianapolis, [EmployIndy](#), functioning as a workforce development board, is strategically positioned at the intersections of postsecondary education, secondary education, and the business community, enabling it to facilitate employer-education partnerships. Improved relationships and enhanced collaboration between industry and education sectors have significantly contributed to identifying gaps in work-based learning and developing a new statewide framework for career navigation. This effort has led to a nearly 600 percent increase in the number of Indianapolis Public Schools students participating in aligned work-based learning opportunities.²⁶

Establish dedicated staffing and coordination systems

Proper staffing and organizational structures are crucial for managing employer engagement and work-based learning, providing clear contact points to streamline partnerships.



Spotlight: In the Columbus collaborative, [One Columbus](#) serves as the central point of contact for organizations and employers. As the economic development organization leading the Columbus Region, One Columbus helps businesses navigate workforce partners. They created the Emerging Talent Manager role to coordinate employer partnerships districtwide and regionally, a position that is now permanently funded.²⁷

Create comprehensive toolkits

Address common barriers by providing resources that outline employer roles, student matching processes, quality experience definitions and expectations between districts and employer partners of different sizes and capacity.



Spotlight: In Indianapolis, NSRN lead EmployIndy collaborated with small- and medium-sized businesses, while [Ascend Indiana](#) engaged larger businesses, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of employer engagement strategies.²⁸ The Indianapolis project team developed a Talent Bound toolkit, which includes a menu of employer engagement options that guides businesses in engaging students through work-based learning.²⁹ This tool meets businesses where they are and enables team members to align employer capacity with pathway needs through a consultative sales approach.

Additionally, insights from EmployIndy's Modern Apprenticeship pilot informed Ascend Indiana's work in spearheading the creation of a statewide Model Program toolkit in partnership with the Office of Career and Technical Education. The toolkit addresses quality standards in youth apprenticeship, guides implementation across sectors, and can support expanding employer work-based learning partnerships.³⁰







INSIGHT 3. Create seamless and accessible student pathways


High-quality programs emphasize seamless and accessible transitions from high school to postsecondary education, allowing students to earn dual credits, reduce costs, and align learning with both their interests and employer needs.


NSRN demonstrates that high-quality career pathways require more than individual program improvements—these networks asked for changes in how institutions collaborate, how students move through systems, and how policies support economic mobility. Creating seamless and accessible pathways means both removing the friction that can complicate student transitions from high school to postsecondary education and careers, and addressing the structural barriers that can prevent students from participating in the first place.

For example, through MAP, Olumuyiwa earned dual credits that will transfer to Indiana University – Indianapolis.³¹ “All of my supply chain classes are dual credit,” he explains. “I won’t have to retake some intro marketing classes, and I can start on a later track because of my credit hours. I can save money.” This seamless student experience from high school to college coursework demonstrates how practitioners and policymakers work together to build integrated systems.

Approaches that contributed to NSRN’s success include:

-  **Dual enrollment:** In Tennessee, the work done in Nashville as part of NSRN informed the adoption of legislation to expand dual enrollment opportunities by providing the financial support to pilot Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCAT) dual enrollment in IT programs.³² By the 2023-24 academic year, each TCAT partnered with education agencies within their counties to offer early college and career experiences. Starting in 2024, TCAT offered full-time enrollment slots for dual enrollment students.
-  **Higher education partnerships:** Denver established Memorandums of Understanding with higher education institutions including Community College of Aurora, Community College of Denver, CSU Global, and Metropolitan State University (MSU), allowing students to earn transferable college credit. The Community College of Denver redesigned its Behavioral Health curriculum to align with industry needs, while MSU Denver created agreements allowing students to transfer 45 credits from registered apprenticeship programs directly into bachelor’s degree programs.³³

 **Seamless integration:** Denver NSRN efforts have played a pivotal role in driving workforce momentum across Colorado, supporting the state's vision to blur the lines between K12, postsecondary, and the workforce. This has culminated in the state's May 2025 executive order to reimagine the postsecondary talent development system. The order encourages state agencies to collaborate and align education, workforce training, and employer needs. The executive order instructs agency leaders to create plans for seamless integration, aiming to boost credential attainment, minimize bureaucratic obstacles, and enhance system navigation, which aligns with the groundwork laid by NSRN.³⁴

 **Addressing student barriers to enhance participation:** Participation barriers like transportation, awareness, financial issues, and support structures affect students. The NSRN framework offers academic advising and coaching, with each site developing strategies to address access and participation barriers.³⁵ The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce collaborative commissioned a report on transportation barriers that influenced the Nashville Mayor's decision to hold a referendum in fall 2024, which was approved by voters, to establish a dedicated funding source to improve transportation in the city over a 15-year period.³⁶ The Point of Departure report, while one of several on the topic, was the only one to catalyze action around barriers to youth and adult learners.³⁷

Olumuyiwa's experience is an example of the importance of support systems to ensure program participation. His Modern Apprenticeship Program (MAP) provided ridesharing cards and bus passes, removing transportation barriers that could have prevented his participation.³⁸ Additionally, the program's flexibility around academic obligations means students could balance work and school. Olumuyiwa shared that "[MAP] has been very understanding when it comes to schoolwork," highlighting how a program's support system can support success."

BOSTON'S INVESTMENT IN CAREER PATHWAYS



Massachusetts shows how state-level vision translates into local action. Bob LePage explains that the state's approach was designed to build infrastructure that connects the different education levels, then provide coordinated support across districts. "We recognized that there isn't one size that fits every student," he notes, describing how Massachusetts created flexibility within a coordinated approach that aligns high school pathways with postsecondary opportunities.

The state set standards and criteria but allowed schools to customize their approach. This integration between state policy and local implementation has been key to Massachusetts' "hockey stick" growth pattern with career pathway enrollments, where initial steady progress accelerated once connected systems were in place.³⁹

INSIGHT 4. Scale through peer learning

A national community of practice accelerates innovation, with successful strategies spreading rapidly across the network.

Recognizing the importance of peer learning to achieve its desired impact and replicate promising approaches, NSRN launched a national community of practice that emphasized sharing data and insights across cities.⁴⁰ National NSRN partners, ESG and Advance CTE, led this community by facilitating semi-annual convenings and providing monthly targeted coaching support that was tailored to address specific concerns.⁴¹

“The coaching support provided by the national partners was integral in our work. One of the most valuable aspects of the coaching was their ability to build connections across the multiple cities in their portfolio, which enabled customized cross-community sharing.”⁴²

-Edvestors

The following are examples of effective approaches used and lessons learned from this community:

Targeted leadership support

- NSRN leaders engaged in planning and learning through an affinity group that was developed for them. They created their agendas collaboratively to reflect shared priorities and enable collective problem-solving.⁴³ These conversations also led to new opportunities for collaboration and partnership across cities, such as issue-specific convenings.

Issue-specific convenings

- Seamless advising, which helps students make seamless transitions across the education system and into careers, emerged as a key focus, resulting in **Boston** hosting an annual Seamless Advising Summit. In place since 2023, this gathering brings together student support professionals across K-12 and postsecondary institutions, a model replicated by **Indianapolis** and **Nashville**.⁴⁴ These summits have led to practice change, with **Denver**, **Boston**, and **Dallas** all moving to introduce career information to students in the middle grades, increasing the likelihood they make informed career pathway choices in high school.⁴⁵

Evidence-based learning and decision-making

- Cities frequently shared data during learning discussions and collaborated to identify solutions to local challenges such as siloed information, lack of systems coordination among stakeholders, and limited use of data for decision-making.⁵⁶ One example of how these knowledge exchanges elevated issues and opportunities was how cities responded to the need for individualized student career support, which make it more likely for students to secure employment after they earn their college degree.⁴⁷



Spotlight: Indiana University-Indianapolis utilized proactive advising data to pinpoint first-year students most at risk.⁴⁸ In a randomized pilot program, these students were provided with advising and support, which led to a 240% return on investment in tuition dollars retained by the institution due to increased student retention.⁴⁹ This achievement prompted the expansion of the proactive advising model across the entire system.⁵⁰

This personalized approach makes a big difference for students like Olumuyiwa in Indianapolis. When his Principles of Business teacher, Mr. James Jackson, noticed his interest in marketing, he connected Olumuyiwa with EmployIndy's Modern Apprenticeship Program (MAP). "He was the one that introduced me to EmployIndy," he recalls.⁵¹

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED: LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Just as the network was building momentum, COVID-19 struck, threatening to derail the work-based learning experiences that were central to our model. NSRN cities demonstrated remarkable adaptability, rapidly pivoting to virtual environments while maintaining program quality and student engagement. They invested in technology infrastructure, created new virtual learning experiences, deepened employer partnerships to support remote student engagement, strengthened their focus on equity by addressing technology access gaps, and doubled down on building helping young people build meaningful relationships in digital spaces.⁵²

JPMorganChase supported this process by providing grant extensions, demonstrating the importance of responsive philanthropy, especially in multi-year initiatives, national strategies that benefit from local customization, and when significant disruptions occur.

While the pandemic initially threatened our ability to advance NSRN priorities, ultimately, it reinforced the urgency of our work. Young people needed even more support navigating an uncertain economic landscape, and the skills of adaptability and resilience became even more important.

The lessons from COVID-19's impact on pathways programming have equipped NSRN collaboratives to proactively address emerging challenges like artificial intelligence. By fostering shared learning and collaboration through an AI affinity group, NSRN sites are preparing learners for AI-integrated careers, ensuring they remain adaptable and future-ready in an evolving technological landscape.

INSIGHT 5. Institutionalize change through policy

Local experiences must shape state and federal policies to create lasting, scalable change beyond individual districts or cities.

State and local efforts build on each other to create greater impact than either could achieve alone. **Massachusetts** exemplifies the evolution of strategies from NSFY to NSRN, with **Boston** serving as both a beneficiary and driver of state policy. With support from NSFY, the state created Innovation Pathways (combining technical courses, internships, and industry credentials) and Early College programs (helping students to earn 12+ college credits at no cost), and developed infrastructure to support career pathways programming.⁵³ And while NSFY helped create the pathways framework, NSRN funding provided the resources for Boston Public Schools to test, refine, and demonstrate how these models worked in practice.

As the state's largest metro area, Boston's work is "very visible locally with elected officials and policymakers," according to Bob LePage. Following early success and support from NSFY and NSRN, the state of Massachusetts has increased its investment in expanding college and career options for students, leading to nearly \$48 million in sustained state funding for career pathway programs.⁵⁴

Leverage Local Experiences to Drive Work with State-Level Leadership

NSRN collaboratives worked with state leaders to adopt policy changes that expand efforts beyond single districts. This collaboration helped local experiences shape state policies and scaling efforts.



Indianapolis developed a comprehensive career advising framework that informed state-level legislation enacted in May 2023, including the addition of more specific career advising language. The bill requires annual career fairs and high school students to have career-focused conversations.⁵⁵

Additionally, **Indianapolis** mapped and aligned all pathways within Indianapolis Public Schools to the state's Next Level Programs of Study, which informed the state's formal graduation pathways policy.⁵⁶ NSRN partners in the state supported policies that expanded seamless transitions to education and careers, informing legislation that set up more flexible postsecondary pathways, refined career coaching grant programs, and required the State Board of Education to create a new diploma that considers career readiness.⁵⁷ Another example from Indianapolis is the creation of a statewide seamless admissions policy informed by the model from Indiana University **Indianapolis**.⁵⁸

*The success of career pathway transformation requires intentional collaboration across sectors. The trajectory from pilot to policy shows one path to sustainability. In Massachusetts, where LePage reports that the state legislature has recently filed bills to formally codify career pathways and **MyCAP** into Massachusetts state law to ensure universal access across schools, the evolution from philanthropic investment to state funding shows how catalytic funding can lead to permanent systems change.*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGH-QUALITY CAREER PATHWAYS

Building on the lessons learned and innovations tested by grantee communities over the past ten years, including NSRN, JPMorganChase's PolicyCenter is advancing the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Promoting state leadership and support for scaling high-quality integrated career pathways**
Fostering state policy environments that seed and support high-quality local career pathways, so that innovation and implementation are replicated and scaled at the state level
- 2. Creating seamless connections from high school to post-secondary to career**
Connections between high school, higher education, and good jobs should become seamless by developing educational pathways that offer students early post-secondary experiences and lead to credentials aligned with high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand careers.
- 3. Expanding access to work-based learning experiences**
Improving access to good jobs by connecting students to real work experiences in industries fueling future economic growth, such as technology and healthcare.
- 4. Ensuring access and opportunity for all**
Removing barriers to meaningful career opportunities and supporting effective transitions from school to work, by aligning policy and practice to scale proven career pathways programs.
- 5. Leveraging employer partnerships**
Engaging employers at the state and local level in the design, implementation, evaluation, and modification of integrated high-quality career pathways as part of the broader state or local economic development strategy.
- 6. Advancing data-driven decision-making**
Aligning and enhancing state and local data systems to connect career pathways to high-skill, high-wage, in-demand careers, measure student and worker outcomes, align resources to effective programs, and inform decisionmakers' actions.

What's next

Over the past five years, NSRN cities have transformed education systems to prepare students for careers. Leveraging the NSRN blueprint—public-private partnerships, employer networks, peer learning exchanges, data infrastructure, and policy change—can further expand economic mobility for young people. The following are key lessons and next steps to build on NSRN's success:



Invest Long-Term. To drive lasting change, invest in long-term projects that foster innovation and scalable models. While short-term grants offer initial support, true transformation demands building infrastructure, empowering local leaders, and establishing data systems for ongoing improvement. Dedicated coordinators, active stakeholder engagement, and strong policy advocacy create momentum that endures beyond individual funding cycles. These local leaders and community partnerships are key to sustained success. Communities need investors who are committed to long-term goals and adaptable to changing circumstances. Philanthropy plays a crucial role by providing the flexible funding necessary to connect and strengthen communities.



Foster Effective Employer Partnerships. Moving beyond traditional light-touch employer outreach models, successful career pathways require authentic, deep business partnerships. Employers should collaborate in designing curricula, offering structured work-based learning, and actively engaging in regional talent strategies. Based on our experience leading and participating in employer tables, these only work when there is room for business leadership in shaping local strategies. NSRN has facilitated new forums where education leaders, employers, and community organizations align their efforts toward shared economic goals that drive regional competitiveness and economic growth. This approach doesn't just benefit students—it creates the skilled workforce that drives regional competitiveness and economic growth.



Create Seamless Transitions. The longstanding boundaries between K-12, higher education, and workforce systems do not reflect how students transition into adulthood, as they develop career identities, build skills, gain work experience, and create professional networks throughout their education. Policies that promote high-quality career pathways and expand access to work-based learning experiences will help ensure every young person what they need to build meaningful careers. These learning experiences should be affordable, flexible, center student needs and experiences as they make transitions, and focus on long-term economic mobility. Enable dual enrollment, stackable credentials, and aligned curricula to reduce career preparation time and cost while building skills employers need.



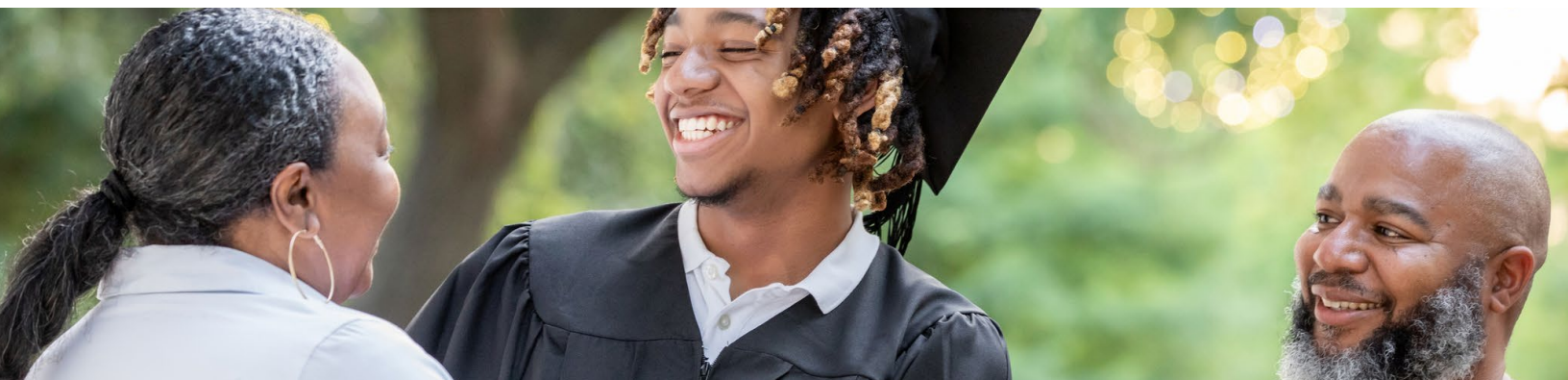
Plan for Disruptions. The lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic have provided valuable insights as career pathways programs look toward the future. NSRN cities have carried forward key lessons to proactively navigate emerging challenges—most notably, the rise and impact of artificial intelligence. In Year 5 of the initiative, NSRN cities engaged in an AI affinity group designed to foster shared learning and provide space for both critical and creative exploration of AI’s role in career pathways.⁵⁹ Participants examined labor market data related to AI and emphasized the importance of AI literacy for all learners, recognizing that an increasing number of occupations will incorporate AI technologies. Cities also began assessing strategies for preparing learners for careers directly connected to AI development and maintenance—debating whether success lies in creating dedicated pathways or embedding new AI-related skills and competencies into existing ones. This group underscored the value of connection and collaboration in a rapidly evolving landscape, enabling resource sharing and collective problem-solving to support responsive programming.⁶⁰

The most important measure of these initiatives is their impact on young people and communities. Stories like Olumuyiwa Akinbobola’s illustrate the transformative potential of investments in career pathways. As he prepares to grow his grandmother’s business and eventually launch his own, his journey exemplifies how these investments create not just individual success stories but also serve as seeds for community and regional economic growth.

The question facing business, education, workforce, and policy leaders is not whether this approach works—NSRN has demonstrated its effectiveness. The opportunity before us is how quickly we can scale these solutions to unlock potential in every community.

“When I finish the program, I just want to help my community. I want to help apprenticeship programs because they helped me so much.”⁶¹

-Olumuyiwa Akinbobola



OUR COMMITMENT TO EXPANDING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

At JPMorganChase, we recognize that a prosperous job market is the foundation of a strong economy. As an employer of over 300,000 workers globally, JPMorganChase is committed to expanding opportunities for skills development and career mobility. We are deeply engaged in expanding high-quality career pathways and supporting regional talent partnerships that contribute to economic growth in cities across the U.S. In the last five years, we have invested more than \$500 million in expanding career and wealth building opportunities nationally. Because of our business needs and dedication to expanding access to opportunities at the firm, we have also supported efforts to bring workers who are often overlooked back into the workforce through apprenticeships and other hiring strategies that support veterans, those re-entering the workforce after a career pause, and justice-impacted individuals.

The JPMorganChase PolicyCenter distills what we've learned through the firm's business resources and expertise, including Institute research and data, talent and philanthropic investments, into actionable, evidence-based policy recommendations. We support policy solutions, organizations and initiatives that help upskill and train the workforce of today for the jobs of the future. Through these intentional investments, we're working to power a stronger economy that works for everyone.

Disclaimer: The metrics in this paper are derived from a variety of public and private sources, including data that were self-reported by JPMorganChase grant recipients. JPMorganChase has not independently verified these data and makes no representation or warranty as to the quality, completeness, accuracy or fitness for a particular purpose. The metrics as reported are not directly tied to funds or other support provided by JPMorganChase but rather are a result of a variety of factors.

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What Works

