

## New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Mississippi

Mississippi entered the New Skills for Youth (NSFY) initiative with several statewide student outcomes challenges and a leadership team — including the governor and State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) — committed to addressing them. By leveraging and combining existing state and federal initiatives and focusing on improving the rigor of career pathways, the state NSFY team set the foundation for statewide career preparation reform.

### Foundations for the Work

Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant launched the [Mississippi Works](#) initiative in 2012 with a charge for workforce and education stakeholders to work together and implement a plan that would help the state meet its current and future workforce needs. This initiative began amidst some persistent challenges for the state. The college completion rate for the 2013-14 school year was only 34 percent for both two- and four-year institutions. Additionally, the state has the second lowest workforce participation rate in the country at 55 percent.

Mississippi has for a while had strong in-classroom Career Technical Education (CTE) curricula, with nearly two-thirds of secondary students who complete CTE going on to enroll in postsecondary institutions with one year of graduation. Options outside of the classroom, such as work-based learning opportunities, continue to be an area for growth in the state.

The state's accountability system currently features a minimum number of career readiness indicators, including a CTE graduation endorsement option that requires students to complete a CTE program of study and earn either postsecondary CTE credit or a state-approved, industry-recognized certification.

Through Mississippi Works, as well as the NSFY initiative, the state has been focused on improving its career preparation system for all students to increase postsecondary participation and completion as well as workforce participation.

### Work during Phase One

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and the Research and Curriculum Unit at Mississippi State University partnered to conduct an assessment of the state's current career preparation systems and develop a strategic plan. The assessment revealed that

*Phase One of JPMorgan Chase & Co.'s New Skills for Youth grant began in May 2016 and went through October 2016. With bold visions for improving career readiness in K-12 education, each Phase One state spent the grant period performing a diagnostic assessment of their career preparation system and preparing for implementation of a new action plan. This snapshot describes Mississippi's experience in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.*

many of the mechanisms for engagement of employer partners are already in place. Employers are required to participate in the development and revision of CTE curricula at the state level, and similar forms of participation are officially encouraged at the local level through program advisory committees. Additionally, CTE curricula are required to be revised statewide every three years in a process that involves teams of instructors and industry representatives led by the Research and Curriculum Unit. The state's LifeTracks data system provides comprehensive education and workforce data, and the SWIB provides access to labor market information.

The assessment also revealed ways for the state to build on these strengths and improve its career preparation system. While mechanisms for employer engagement exist and are used for specific purposes, more can be done to focus engagement with high-priority sectors. The assessment recommended that existing CTE curricula be expanded through the use of more competency- and work-based learning models, as well as more affordable and accessible dual enrollment options. The state also must improve CTE recruitment efforts.

Based on this assessment, the Mississippi NSFY cross-sector team developed a strategic plan with six goals:

- Establish the SWIB Career Readiness Committee (CRC) as the state-level, cross-sector leadership for employer-driven career pathways, credentials of value and accountability;
- Increase the number of students who complete CTE programs and are prepared

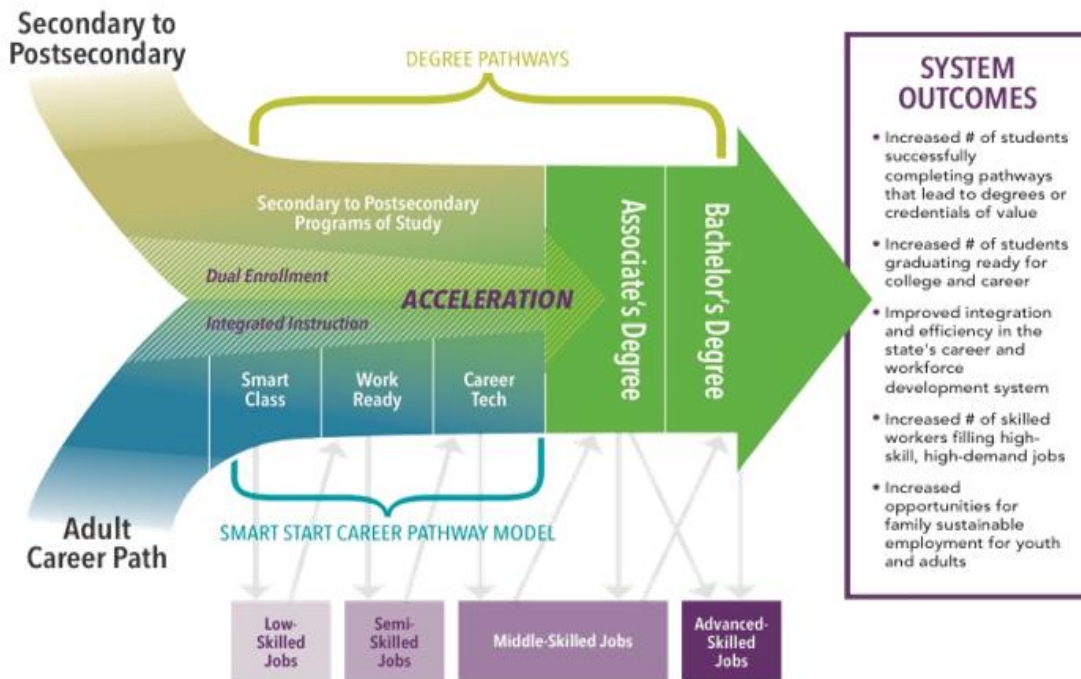
for the workforce or postsecondary education without remediation;

- Modify the current school accountability system to include meaningful career readiness indicators and develop a career readiness report card;
- Ensure that all students exit high school with a career plan that connects them to a pathway and postsecondary credentials of value that lead to a family-sustaining job;
- Maximize all available state, federal, local and private funds to support career readiness; and
- Create seamless and automatic transferability and transcription across public K-12 schools and two- and four-year postsecondary institutions.

### *Leveraging Existing Structures*

A key part of Mississippi's strategic plan for career preparation involves leveraging and building upon existing state structures in CTE and workforce. The state developed a combined plan under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This plan involved input from multiple state agencies and was overseen by the SWIB and approved by the state Department of Labor. It focuses on the role MDE, the Mississippi Community College Board and the state Institutions of Higher Learning will play as strategic partners in the Mississippi Works Smart Start Career Pathway Model. Figure 1 illustrates how the WIOA plan's Smart Start Career Pathway Model and MDE's secondary to postsecondary pathways combine to form an integrated state model for ensuring that students and adults have defined pathways to success.

Rather than re-create elements of this plan for separate NSFY or Mississippi Works initiatives,



the state decided to deliberately meld the multiple initiatives together under the control of the SWIB CRC. The SWIB CRC will be the state-level, cross-sector leadership team to drive all efforts around career preparation system improvement and employer engagement. During Phase One, this alignment of the state's new NSFY work with the existing WIOA infrastructure began, and a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by the SWIB agreeing to this role.

### *Expanding into New Policy Areas*

The state's strategic plan demonstrates a commitment to improving the rigor of all career pathways, including aligning programs with industry demand and offering more work-based learning experiences. During Phase One, the state NSFY team acted on this commitment by creating and implementing policies requiring that all CTE programs in automotive technology, construction trades, welding and manufacturing meet industry certification approval. These policies were based on recommendations from employer partners in

those industries, and these particular industries were chosen in part because they have more widely recognized and accepted external certification processes.

The Research and Curriculum Unit also developed curricula for a new computer science career pathway during Phase One. The Unit then provided professional development to instructors for implementation of the new and revised curricula.

In August 2016, the SWIB launched an Apprenticeship Committee with the objective of expanding registered apprenticeship programs in the state and increasing the diversity of populations engaged in registered apprenticeship programs. This committee will work with employer partners and districts to increase the opportunities for work-based learning for all Mississippi students.

### **Looking Ahead**

MDE plans to establish a statewide policy for dual enrollment programs that addresses funding concerns and improves access and

engagement, as well as the quality of instruction. It also plans to expand the use of online and hybrid CTE models. Both of these efforts will help increase the level of access and number of options secondary students have.

As the state focuses on improving access to high-quality career preparation systems, it will also work to increase CTE recruitment and enrollment by improving the perception of

CTE through a coordinated communications plan.

Finally, the state NSFY team plans to focus on improving the collection and use of data to drive effective decision-making. This effort will include increasing the amount of data collected on work-based learning opportunities, as well as the amount of career readiness data in the state accountability system.

