



# Denver, Colorado

Denver, Colorado, 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 Denver, Colorado, team – working under the name *New Skills Ready Initiative (NSRI)* – began developing strategies for data sharing among secondary and postsecondary systems, mapping their shared career pathways, and working on a model for co-advising. The state of Colorado, alongside Denver, also prioritized the need for improved career planning and further strengthening its workforce development

system. The state passed [House Bill 20-1396](#) to create an online platform to assist Colorado residents with career exploration and planning options through collaboration between the state Workforce Development Council, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Higher Education, and other state agencies and partners.

In 2020-21, the Denver, Colorado, *NSRI* team focused on two major priorities:



Building a shared data framework to better measure the impact of career pathways; and



Mapping career pathways to ease learner transitions.

## 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

- Denver Education Attainment Network (site lead)
- Colorado Community College System
- Colorado Department of Education
- Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Colorado Workforce Development Council
- Community College of Denver
- Denver Public Schools
- Emily Griffith Technical College
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Colorado Denver

## Denver, Colorado's Vision for Success

The Denver, Colorado, NSRI team established a vision 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:

*The Denver, Colorado, New Skills Ready Initiative team aims to dramatically increase the number and diversity of students who complete selected high-quality career pathways that start in high school, continue into and through higher education, and lead to good jobs in Denver's labor market. This partnership will also deliver a national model for closing equity gaps and increasing postsecondary attainment resulting in family-living wage employment.*

## Setting the Context

For the past several years, the state of Colorado and the Colorado Legislature have been working to drive alignment between education and workforce development, specifically in the priority area of college and career readiness. Colorado's [FY 2021 budget](#) includes \$27,778,242 (an increase of approximately \$540,000 from FY 2020) to the Department of Higher Education for distribution of state assistance for Career Technical Education (CTE).

Recently, the state launched its Innovations in CTE Grant, leveraging funding from the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V). In July 2020, the Colorado Community College System [announced](#) \$1,787,936 in grants to help Colorado high schools and colleges expand CTE. An expert panel of business and workforce representatives reviewed proposals and awarded 12 grants ranging from \$23,000 to \$250,000. Emily Griffith Technical College (EGTC), in partnership with the Denver Education Attainment Network (DEAN), Denver Public Schools (DPS), and Community College of Denver (CCD), received approximately \$200,000 to support a CTE Teaching Excellence Pilot as a part of this grant funding.

Currently, several state agency partners including the Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado Workforce Development Council, Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment and Colorado Community College System are collaborating to define a quality non-degree credential (NDC), develop a process for identifying and counting NDCs, and create a public repository to track quality NDCs. Quality NDCs include certificates, industry certifications, micro-credentials, occupational licenses and apprenticeship certificates. This work is important in developing an aligned and accessible career system.





## LEARNING WITH PURPOSE



On the local level, [DPS' CareerConnect](#) has been instrumental in exposing learners to thousands of career choices within nine career pathways. The career pathways aim to equip learners with the “traits of a young professional,” which are aligned to the [Colorado Essential Skills](#) (influenced by the in-demand skills identified in the Colorado Talent Pipeline report).

Higher education partners have mobilized to receive learners in career pathways and have created multiple on- and off-ramps to certificate and degree completion and upward mobility in high-demand industries. CCD has built stackable certificate-to-degree pathways, expanded concurrent enrollment with DPS with a career pathways focus, served as an apprenticeship training partner, and is working with DPS to pilot summer and online modalities that can expand college access to more learners regardless of geography. EGTC has likewise increased concurrent enrollment, has launched new certification programs, has robust apprenticeship programming, and is working with its college partners to seamlessly stack in-demand certificates into degree programs.

Metropolitan State University of Denver has been partnering with DPS in expanding concurrent enrollment; building peer mentoring programs such as the Peer Health Exchange; and providing learners with wrap-around academic, social and emotional supports. The University of Colorado Denver likewise provides wrap-around supports including college success classes, First Year seminars and learning communities, admissions agreements and apprenticeship training options.

Finally, much of the collaborative work under *NSRI* builds off of DEAN's credential completion and equity strategy: [Denver Direct Pathways](#) (DDP). The strategy was designed to improve outcomes for all learners. In collaboration with many of the partners from the *NSRI* leadership team, the DDP strategy incorporates the following elements:

1. Alignment of academic and career pathways;
2. Development of a cross-institutional and cross-partner advising council;
3. Smoothing of transition points: high school to college, two-year to four-year transfer and certificate transfer;
4. Alignment of DPS programs to college pathways; and
5. Community, family and student awareness and engagement.

# Approach to Systems Transformation

The Denver, Colorado, *NSRI* leadership team has a strong history of collaboration, spanning both the local and state partners. Partner institutions have worked together on the development and administration of DEAN's DDP, DPS' CareerConnect, and the implementation of dual enrollment opportunities for learners. The state agencies within Colorado have a long history of collaborating with Denver partners, both as thought partners and through advocating for state-level policy changes to support and grow career pathways efforts.

*NSRI* has motivated both local Denver leadership and Colorado education and workforce agencies to collaboratively lay the groundwork to build coherent career pathways that span secondary and postsecondary and break down the silos that exist between local institutions and state agencies.

## PRIORITY 1 Building a Shared Data Framework to Better Measure the Impact of Career Pathways



The Denver, Colorado, *NSRI* team prioritized developing a shared framework for defining, collecting and analyzing data to help the team measure the success of the career pathways strategy going forward. The Pathways Data Framework aims to provide decisionmakers with the information they need to implement, improve and understand the impact of career pathways on high-value credential completion and workforce outcomes. By adopting this framework, the leadership team can better understand the impact of implementing a system-wide career pathways strategy, allowing the groundwork of systems transformation to be built. Moreover, the process of building a collaborative process and understanding the learner experience across partners (as opposed to with each individual partner) will allow partners to examine how the current system hinders equitable outcomes and how partners can work as a system to improve the experience of marginalized learners.

To begin the work, the leadership team identified the best way to measure the implementation and impact of career pathways by convening both data and program experts across multiple partners to agree upon data terminology, metrics and data sources. Equity is built into this data framework through the use of disaggregated data and a focus on closing equity gaps. The data framework will drive goal setting and strategy development, largely through this equity focus. Over spring and summer 2021, a subcommittee of the leadership team will work to establish protocols for data collection and analysis and to set a baseline. Once a baseline is established, the team will work with data and program experts to establish goals for the next steps in Denver's career pathways work.

## PRIORITY 2 Mapping Career Pathways to Ease Learner Transitions



A priority for the Denver, Colorado, team in its *NSRI* work was to begin the process of creating, mapping and documenting its career pathway development strategy. An early and necessary step has been to document the career pathways development process within and across partners, including the integration of dual/concurrent enrollment, CTE, work-based learning, industry certifications and aligned advising.

A key goal of this career pathways strategy is to further strengthen the alignment between and across DPS and postsecondary partners to support learner transitions and the transfer of credit across certificate, two-year and four-year degree programs. A major accomplishment in the first year of the *NSRI* grant was leveraging DDP program maps and the leadership team structure to begin the process of fully mapping career pathways. Starting with their focus sectors (health sciences, information technology, business and engineering) and using common program map templates, the Denver, Colorado, leadership team is mapping the courses and certificates across EGTC, CCD and DPS. One unique aspect of these program map templates, which were recently updated, is that they include opportunities to map certificate programs to both two- and four-year programs.

Critically, these efforts are building on strong policy environments at both the state and local levels – including guaranteed transfer for career pathways approved by the Colorado Department of Higher Education in two- and four-year institutions, common course numbering, and established statewide transfer articulation agreements. These fully articulated career pathway maps will be foundational to the work underway to expand the prior learning assessments (PLAs), with the goal of ensuring that all career pathways have PLAs embedded in them, including opportunities to receive credit for prior learning and work-based learning experiences.

## Looking Ahead

The progress of the Denver, Colorado, *NSRI* team on these two priorities will lay the foundation for the work to come in the next year of this initiative.

As the Denver, Colorado, team moves forward into their year two objectives, they will be focusing their efforts on implementing their shared career pathways mapping and co-advising strategies. The team will also continue to focus on engaging industry partners, developing common work-based learning strategies and a PLA framework among partner institutions, and using shared data to measure and inform the work.