Rhode Island is one of the 10 states selected to participate in New Skills for Youth (NSFY), an initiative enhancing state efforts to increase the number of kids across the country who are prepared for success in both college and career. NSFY is a $75 million, five-year initiative developed by JPMorgan Chase in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group.

In Phase One of the initiative, the Rhode Island NSFY team focused on identifying elements of a successful career readiness system that aligns the interests of K-12 students and school systems, higher education, and local business and industry.

Phase Two of the NSFY initiative began in January 2017. This snapshot profiles Rhode Island’s progress in the first year of Phase Two, including:

- **Strengthening career readiness through PrepareRI:** Through strategic partnerships among the state government, private industry and educational institutions, the state launched this initiative to prepare Rhode Island youth with the skills they need to fill critical gaps in the state’s workforce.

- **Establishing cross-sector connections and building local capacity:** Strong leadership from the governor’s office has helped the state bring together stakeholders from both the private and public sectors to help build workforce skills and capacity.

- **Expanding work-based learning (WBL) opportunities:** The rollout of new WBL standards and programs are helping to guide the expansion of programs throughout the state.

**Foundations for Career Readiness in Rhode Island**

When Governor Gina Raimondo took office in 2015, Rhode Island had one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. The state was still reeling from the effects of the nationwide economic recession and the loss of the manufacturing jobs that had long supported the local labor force. In response, Governor Raimondo prioritized career readiness reforms to align local workforce skills with the needs of the state’s high-priority industries.

With the help of the Career Technical Education Board of Trustees — the state body in charge of oversight and quality control for Career Technical Education (CTE) programs — and the Governor’s Work Board (GWB), as well as the creation of a multi-faceted strategic plan in Phase One, Governor Raimondo and state-level agencies have shown a commitment to engaging a wide variety of stakeholders in the state’s career preparation system. An industry-focused strategy and a number of formal accountability mechanisms are driving Rhode Island’s success in implementing a sustainable workforce development plan.
Strengthening Career Readiness through PrepareRI

In 2016 Rhode Island launched PrepareRI, an umbrella initiative to unite multiple state and local programs for career pathways development and expansion. PrepareRI works for the benefit of both students and businesses, aligning many key statewide programs, such as CTE programs; Computer Science for Rhode Island; Real Jobs Rhode Island, a statewide training initiative that provides local industries with funding to close workforce skills gaps; and the state’s federal accountability mechanisms. PrepareRI emphasizes a cross-sectoral approach that incorporates WBL, career pathways, data and employer engagement to restructure the state’s entire talent pipeline.

While career readiness initiatives are traditionally geared toward high school students, PrepareRI targets students as early as elementary school and all the way through working adults with its long-term approach. Initiative partners include the governor’s office, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, GWB, Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, and Rhode Island Commerce Corporation.

A PrepareRI Summit was held in October 2017 to publicly announce its strategic plan and its four main goals to be achieved by 2020:

- **All students will have access to career exploration opportunities** beginning in elementary and middle school, including individual learning plans based on students’ unique strengths and interests.

- **All high school students will graduate with college credit or an industry credential.** This goal will be achieved through the implementation of a greater variety of high school course choices, including options for dual enrollment in high school and college courses, Advanced Placement (AP) opportunities and WBL. The Advanced Course Network provides students the opportunity to take high-value dual enrollment, AP and career education courses not offered in their high school through other schools and districts, colleges, community-based organizations, and training programs approved by the Department of Labor and Training. In Rhode Island, a student’s high school does not determine his or her economic destiny.

- **All high school students will have access to WBL opportunities**, such as internships and industry projects, in career fields relevant to their interests. These experiences will allow students to develop and apply academic, technical and essential skills and contribute to the achievement of their postsecondary and employment goal(s).

- **All state investments in career pathway programs will be aligned** to the state’s identified high-demand career fields. The sectors Rhode Island has designated as “Advanced Industry” growth areas include biomedical innovation, information technology and maritime industries.

Establishing Connections among Multiple Stakeholders

Rhode Island has shown commitment to bringing stakeholders from multiple sectors into the state’s career preparation program. The state has prioritized industry participation, recognizing that buy-in from its major employers will be necessary for the development of a sustainable strategy.
The governor’s own involvement at the front and center of PrepareRI activities has been key in fostering the will for workforce development at the local level. By highlighting opportunities to mesh the needs of traditionally siloed sectors, like industry and public education, Rhode Island is working to forge deep community connections that will benefit local workforces.

To better understand the needs of the state’s industry — which in recent years has become even more high tech — Governor Raimondo commissioned a report by the Brookings Institution to identify key high-growth, high-demand sectors for Rhode Island. The report identified high-growth industries that offer the potential for high wages and high need for trained personnel, as well as the need to cultivate a well-trained local workforce able to fill those jobs. While the recommendations from the report helped accelerate Rhode Island’s planning around NSFY, they are part of a broader, statewide effort led by the governor to align workforce development and educational opportunities with high-wage, high-demand occupations.

Implementation of the PrepareRI goals is being helped by the state’s NSFY ambassadors — six local practitioners who help drive parts of the PrepareRI agenda in partnership with the state. The ambassadors include teachers, administrators and school counselors, who are helping to fill local workforce gaps by driving the development of high-quality career pathways and individual learning plans that can set students on track to enter identified growth industries. The ambassadors ground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RHODE ISLAND GROWTH AREAS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced Industry Growth Areas</strong></td>
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| **Biomedical Innovation** | • 31,548 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: biopharmaceuticals, medical devices, digital health |
| **IT/software, cyber-Physical Systems, and Data Analytics** | • 12,538 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: data sciences, cyber-physical systems |
| **Shipbuilding and Maritime** | • 19,107 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: submarine & boat building, ocean sciences, marine/coastal tourism |
| **Advanced Business Services** | • 34,780 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: back office operations |
| **Design, Materials, Food, and Custom Manufacturing** | • 11,045 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: product design, food processing |
| **Opportunity Industry Growth Areas** |
| **Arts, Education, Hospitality, and Tourism** | • 42,801 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: marine/coastal tourism, colleges & universities |
| **Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics** | • 21,322 jobs in 2013  
  • Priority areas: grocery wholesale, warehousing & storage |
Rhode Island’s state leaders in the work that needed to be done in schools to achieve the state’s bold goals for college and career readiness.

The ambassadors also assist with the state’s goal of expanding local education buy-in and community engagement in career pathway development. With a keen awareness of local needs, the ambassadors are able to engage with educators and business leaders to build district capacity to implement career readiness reforms. The first cohort of NSFY ambassadors began one-year terms in July 2017.

**Validating Standards for CTE Programs and WBL**

To ensure that new career readiness pathways are created with local business needs in mind, Rhode Island recently engaged industry leaders to create new business-endorsed standards for all CTE programs. These criteria lay out specific requirements for the completion of 57 career pathways in 13 high-priority sectors.

These new standards lay out the skills or knowledge students must acquire to be prepared for entry-level work in their fields, curricula that can be followed to acquire this knowledge (including offerings from the state CTE schools), and expected certifications to be earned while completing the career pathway. The new Process Technician Career Pathway, for example, prepares students to enter an environmental and life sciences program at the postsecondary level and to be “job ready” as a process technician — a job that earns an average of $24 per hour in the state. The career pathway was created in partnership with higher education partners and leaders from several of the largest biomedical and pharmaceutical employers in response to their expressed needs. It combines academic requirements — such as life sciences, chemistry and math — with safety training, industry-recognized credentials and work-based experiences that result in the earning of mandatory certificates and credentials.

Under the criteria laid out by PrepareRI, Rhode Island has also begun to develop and update industry-relevant approaches for expanding and standardizing WBL to ensure that high-quality initiatives are available in every high school by 2020. Recognizing that secondary students’ job preparedness was not at the level it could be, the GWB convened educators and employers in 2017 to develop new state WBL standards that incorporate a number of possible delivery mechanisms. These mechanisms are defined as:

- **Internship:** A position for a student or trainee to work in an organization, sometimes with pay, to gain work experience, satisfy requirements for a credential and/or gain course credit.
- **Apprenticeship:** Highly formal job training experience that involves studying with a master of the trade on the job.
- **Service learning:** A program or project that combines community service with an outside organization with a structured opportunity for reflection about that service, emphasizing the connections between service experiences and academic learning.
- **School-based enterprise:** A program through which students produce and sell goods or services in the school to learn about business skills and entrepreneurship.
- **Industry project:** Individual, group or class-wide projects in which students address a real-world, industry-focused question with the guidance of industry professionals.
The state will begin rolling out the new WBL standards while focusing on how to address existing challenges related to transportation and employer recruitment. The expansion of WBL through targeted investments will provide more options for high school students to earn credits toward graduation while gaining experience with practicing industry professionals and making career connections at the local level.

**Looking Ahead**

As Phase Two enters its second year, Rhode Island remains dedicated to an industry-focused approach to building local workforce capacity, and workforce development will continue to feature strongly Governor Raimondo’s agenda as she prepares to run for re-election in November 2018. Having gained a clearer picture of how to align workforce skills with industry needs in Year One, the state will continue expanding options for academic training, WBL and high-quality career pathways that will fill the gaps in the local economy under the PrepareRI banner.

Additionally, Rhode Island, along with five other states, was selected to join the National Governors Association’s policy academy on scaling WBL. This partnership will help accelerate Rhode Island’s efforts to design, invest in and expand high-quality WBL experiences across the state.

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1. [http://www.prepare-ri.org](http://www.prepare-ri.org)
2. [http://www.governor.ri.gov/initiatives/realjobs/](http://www.governor.ri.gov/initiatives/realjobs/)
3. [https://www.prepare-ri.org/s/PrepareRI-Action-Plan.pdf](https://www.prepare-ri.org/s/PrepareRI-Action-Plan.pdf)
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