



NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK
EVALUATION: STRATEGY BRIEF

Improving Equity and the Learner Experience

December 2025

By design and focus, the *New Skills Ready Network* (NSrn) initiative placed an emphasis on developing equitable pathway opportunities. The NSrn sites are home to some of the largest urban school districts in the United States, serving students from a variety of economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Early in the NSrn initiative, the sites participated in a needs assessment that included reviews of quantitative data that revealed low rates of secondary and postsecondary pathway completion that varied by student subgroup. The assessment indicated a need for expanded career readiness supports, particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The sites used this information to develop strategies for increasing equity among schools and programs. They also instituted strategies to collect students' voices and perspectives to inform pathway design, advising strategies, and improvements to supports for postsecondary education transition.



Site Examples

The following are examples of how sites increased team members' and partners' awareness of and capacity to address equity issues:

Adopted equity frameworks and trainings. The sites explored different resources to address equity gaps and adopt equity practices at the district level. For example, the Boston team, which included a representative from Bunker Hill Community College's Center for Equity and Cultural Wealth, participated in the Center's Cultural Wealth and Equity Summit. This training helped the team build a shared understanding of equity based on the Cultural Wealth model, an asset-based framework that recognizes the collective skills,

About the NSrn Evaluation

From 2020 to 2025, JPMorgan Chase supported the *New Skills Ready Network* initiative, led by the Education Strategy Group and Advance CTE. RTI International conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of NSrn to examine changes in career pathways system policies, practices, and student experiences in the six participating U.S. metro areas. The six sites were: Boston, MA; Columbus, OH; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Indianapolis, IN; and Nashville, TN.

About the NSrn Briefs

This brief is one of five that highlight findings and examples of the following key strategies for systems change that were identified by the evaluation:

- Deepening collaboration
- Designing pathways using a systems perspective
- Strengthening pathway navigation and transitions
- Improving equity and the learner experience
- Amplifying and influencing state policy

These strategy briefs, along with a brief on data and reporting, are housed on the [NSrn evaluation website](#).

experiences, and values of diverse student populations.¹ The center also guided the inclusion of the model into Boston Public School's college and career exploration initiative, and the training of work-based learning placement supervisors at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Identified and removed barriers to pathways participation. Barriers to pathways participation identified by sites included a lack of transportation, information gaps, and the need for students to work to meet their own and their families' basic needs. For example, after the Nashville team learned that transportation was a barrier to participation in work-based learning and higher education, the team funded a study of public transportation in the region. The resulting report provided district- and region-wide insights into barriers that students face in accessing pathway opportunities, and influenced the Nashville voters' approval of increased transit system supports in 2024.

Included student voice in pathways design. In accordance with equity frameworks, sites collected student input and perspectives to help shape pathway programs through surveys, focus groups, and student ambassadors. They also developed strategies to sustain these practices over time. The Denver team, for example, provided grants to individual institutions and organizations to gather student perspectives on several topics, including barriers to college applications, awareness of career and technical education (CTE) opportunities, and student internship experiences. The team also instituted an annual virtual Learner Voice Symposium which showcased methods of engaging learners in pathway program development and shared the results of learning engagement activities from around the state.

¹ Yosso, T.J. (2005). *Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth*. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.



Other Equity Strategies

The examples above describe key strategies used across all sites to address equity and access to career pathway programs for historically disadvantaged populations. Other strategies were also observed in some sites, including the following:

- **Districtwide access to pathways through policy and process changes.** Sites worked to reduce equity gaps caused by certain processes and requirements governing students' access to pathway programs. For example, Columbus City Schools replaced CTE eligibility criteria with an admissions lottery.
- **Addressing the diverse needs of pathway students.** As sites broadened access to pathways, they recognized the need to provide tailored supports for students. For example, Boston's Bunker Hill Community College offered dedicated postsecondary success coaches and courses for English language learners to help them enroll and persist in pathways.
- **Communication tools to diversify pathways recruitment.** Sites hosted events, developed videos, and redesigned websites to make it easier for students and their families to understand the career pathway options available to them, and to broaden access to pathways among diverse student populations. For example, the Denver team conducted research on effective communication strategies for Latino communities and Columbus State Community College developed promotional videos featuring pathways students from diverse backgrounds to help more students see themselves in the career fields.

To learn more about the NSrn evaluation findings, see the other briefs and evaluation reports at <http://nsrn-evaluation.org>.