**NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK
EVALUATION: STRATEGY BRIEF**

Amplifying and Influencing State Policy

December 2025

The *New Skills Ready Network* (NSrn) sites' work resulted in multiple policy and practices changes at the institution and local levels. These included changes to higher education admissions processes, advising practices, and data sharing. The sites' work also both reflected and influenced improvements in state pathways systems policies. Site teams described a reciprocal relationship between their local *NSrn* teams and state agencies, with most having state agency representation on their teams. This reciprocal relationship aligned local career pathways systems with statewide initiatives and requirements. It also provided a mechanism for NSrn sites to inform state policy initiatives or efforts to scale pathways in other parts of the state.

Site Examples

The following are examples of how sites aligned their local pathway systems with state policy:

Used state policies to spur innovation. The NSrn initiative provided sites with the opportunity to develop strategies for implementing state policy related to career pathways. For example, in response to Texas House Bills 3 and 8 that financially reward districts and community colleges for positive student outcomes, the Dallas team created the Pathways Manager Tool to bring together student data that was previously managed separately. This allowed the district and colleges to better track student progress in pathways, develop strategies to improve outcomes, and earn incentives under the new funding formulas.

About the NSrn Evaluation

From 2020 to 2025, JPMorganChase 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**.

Accelerated the adoption of state pathways policies. NSrn sites also demonstrated the potential of state policies for expanding students' access to pathways. In some cases, the state policies predated *NSrn* but had not been implemented by local districts. The Nashville team, for example, led the implementation of a state policy that was developed prior to NSrn to expand the availability of dual credit in Tennessee. Through a partnership with the technical college, several of the district's smaller high schools were able to offer pathway-related dual credit coursework. This partnership expanded the high schools' pathway options and provided a model for other districts in the state to follow.

Leveraged local pathways systems to inform state policy. NSrn sites used resources from the initiative to experiment and pilot pathway innovations, some of which were later formalized statewide. The Indianapolis team, for instance, developed and piloted a career advising framework to integrate career advising practices into existing advising systems. Led by a working group and informed by input from 250 stakeholders, the Indianapolis team created a framework that outlined career coaching and navigation milestones for students from elementary through secondary school to help shape their postsecondary planning and transitions. Ultimately, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education adopted a version of this framework to guide career advising practices statewide.

Replicated and scaled local pathway innovations. NSrn sites used policy levers to inform statewide career pathways system development by participating in state pathways advisory groups and sharing promising local practices. Members of the Denver team, for example, sat on the state's Secondary, Postsecondary and Work-Based Learning Integration Task Force (referred to as the 1215 Task Force, after H.B. 22-1215), which reviewed pathways across the state to ensure students had equitable access to quality programs. The task force also identified effective local strategies and models that could be implemented statewide. In this way, aspects of Denver's pathways system, such as stackable credentials, learner voice events, and aligned work-based learning experiences, informed pathways systems development in Aurora and the San Luis Valley and contributed to new state policies and initiatives.

Other Policy Strategies

The examples above describe key strategies used across all sites to leverage statewide pathways policies and initiatives to strengthen, scale, and sustain local pathways systems. Other strategies were also observed in some sites, including the following:

- **Alignment of pathways with statewide initiatives and requirements.** Sites leveraged statewide pathways initiatives and initiatives related to pathways components, such as advising and work-based learning, to inform local pathways changes and provide consistent pathways experiences for students across districts. For example, Indianapolis Public Schools aligned its programs to the state's Next Level Programs of Study and state graduation requirements.

- **Groundwork for future policy changes.** Policy changes, particularly at the state level but even at the local level, can take time to develop. Although NSrn teams initiated and implemented multiple changes in institutional and local policies (and practices), many of the state-level policies passed during NSrn were initiated before the initiative began. During NSrn, sites identified policy needs and conducted research studies, such as on students' transitions from secondary to postsecondary education, and performed needs assessments to review pathways offerings and gaps. These steps provided an important foundation for future policy changes at the local and state levels.

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