



## Dallas, Texas

Dallas, Texas, 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 Dallas, Texas, *New Skills ready network* team launched a virtual internship toolkit and employer recruitment campaign, completed their initial labor market information (LMI) analysis focusing on post-COVID-19 changes, started career pathway mapping,

completed a landscape of middle school and high school career exploration activities and programs, and started an equity analysis of learner participation in career pathways.

In 2020-21, the Dallas, Texas, *New Skills ready network* team focused on two major priorities:



Developing a community-aligned view of LMI; and



Creating a collaborative approach to work-based learning supported by a virtual internship toolkit.

## 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

- Commit Partnership (site lead)
- Dallas College
- Dallas County Promise
- Dallas Independent School District
- Dallas Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Dallas Thrives
- University of North Texas – Dallas

## Dallas, Texas' Vision for Success



Dallas' history has negatively shaped the economic lives of many Dallas citizens today. Dallas is a minority majority city (42 percent of Dallas residents are Latinx, and 25 percent are Black) where 22 percent of residents live in poverty. In 2019, the Urban Institute ranked the city of Dallas 272 out of 274 cities in terms of racial, economic and overall inclusion. The challenge of solving this intractable problem has attracted many different leaders and innovators to Dallas' education institutions over the years, with each person bringing their own approach and ideas.

Despite the negative history, Dallas has chosen to move forward with a vision for success that is anchored in a community-wide strategy called [Dallas Thrives](#), which aims to create pathways out of poverty for the youngest residents. The Dallas, Texas, team was launching their core Dallas Thrives strategy, called "The Big Moves," at the same time as the *New Skills ready network* framework. By braiding the Dallas Thrives strategy, momentum and community support with the *New Skills ready network* framework and partner expertise, they are looking to create a career pathway design and maintenance process that is financially sustainable after the grant ends and scalable across the community as pilot projects evolve into routine practices and programs. Through true systems change, the community can make measurable and sustainable progress toward its economic mobility goals for learners and young adults.

## Setting the Context

College and career readiness has been a major priority across Texas for many years, with career pathways growing in prominence over the past few years. In 2015, [Texas House Bill \(H.B.\) 2628](#) required that programs of study incorporate rigorous college and career readiness standards that address a myriad of objectives such as the inclusion of both academic and technical content, incorporation of multiple entry and exit points, and culmination of programming in the attainment of a postsecondary credential. These standards were created in partnership with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to align secondary learning requirements to the skills necessary for success in entry-level postsecondary courses. This work was further institutionalized and strengthened through the state's Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) plan.

In 2019, the [Texas Legislature](#) passed [H.B. 3](#), a school finance bill that expanded the [incentive funding](#) that districts can earn for preparing graduates for college, a career or the military. The purpose of the funding allocations and changes are to further the goal set under the state's plan for higher education for at least 60 percent of all adults ages 25 to 34 in Texas to achieve a postsecondary degree or workforce credential by 2030 — or [60x30TX](#). The College, Career, and Military Readiness funding provides support for districts to offer learners greater access to career opportunities.

The community has built two initiatives to further this work: the [Dallas County Promise](#) and [Dallas Thrives](#), both of which are housed within the [Commit Partnership](#). The initiatives are designed to work together to help more Dallas County learners enroll in and complete college or postsecondary training and begin successful, higher wage careers. Both the Dallas County Promise and Dallas Thrives are supported by a multi-sector collaboration of lead partners including universities, school districts, employers and community leaders.

Dallas Independent School District (ISD) is expanding opportunities for learners with 18 [Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools \(P-TECH\)](#) and a plan, which launched in 2020, to place four [Career Institutes](#) throughout various quadrants of the city. The P-TECH programs are designed to serve incoming ninth grade students who have the determination to attend college, are first-generation college students, and have been historically under-represented in higher education. The vision of the Dallas ISD Career Institutes is to provide high school students a choice to pursue a Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway; work with industry partners; train on state-of-the-art, industry-standard equipment; obtain four or more certifications; and obtain dual credit, when appropriate, prior to graduation.

At the postsecondary level, in 2020 a rebrand and organizational restructure occurred as Dallas County Community College District consolidated seven colleges into one: Dallas College. The district's consolidation goals included organizing around "schools of" that span multiple campuses, streamlining learner services to make them available to all learners regardless of campus location, and making organizational changes to academic leadership.

## Approach to Systems Transformation

The Dallas region has a strong track record of cross-sector collaboration, and the *New Skills ready network* investment has helped to expand the collective work of these partners. The Commit Partnership, Dallas College and Dallas ISD work closely together with a variety of other regional education partners on the Dallas County Promise and Dallas Thrives. And the leaders of all four organizations serve together on the Promise Advisory Council and the Dallas Thrives Board, creating a forum for continued collaboration.

The Dallas, Texas, *New Skills ready network* will continue to enable Dallas ISD, Dallas College, University of North Texas – Dallas, the Commit Partnership and TEA to collaboratively and equitably address a host of issues ranging from work-based learning to LMI for the approximately 7,000 learners that graduate from Dallas ISD each year.

### PRIORITY 1 Developing a Community- Aligned View of LMI



As the Dallas, Texas, team began the work of addressing the four priority areas of the grant, an initial action was to develop a community-aligned view of LMI. With the aligned data system, Dallas will be able to work collectively on the priority of strengthening the alignment and rigor of career pathways across the partner agencies and institutions in a more streamlined fashion.

Data became an early priority for the Dallas, Texas, team as they became aware of the misalignment among different LMI sources that each of the institutions and partners were using across the region and even within Dallas ISD. As a first step, the team convened all major institutions involved in the work to level set on the data sources each institution was using. The group reached consensus to move forward with one tool and data source for the shared LMI system, which all organizations involved agreed to use moving forward. From there, the partners continued to engage around what their unified LMI system would need, such as identifying common questions regarding the factors of an entry-level job.

The team is now working with area employers to validate the labor market data to ensure that the list of top high-wage, high-demand industries and jobs is aligned with the actual need within the community. From there, the larger focus will be on ensuring that all career pathways at secondary and postsecondary institutions, including new Career Institutes being launched by Dallas ISD, are aligned with those high-wage, high-demand jobs.

**PRIORITY 2**  
**Creating a Collaborative Approach to Work-Based Learning Supported by a Virtual Internship Toolkit**



As COVID-19 hit the city of Dallas and the education system, priorities shifted to allow for a new and innovative approach to engage learners in virtual work-based learning. In years past, much of the work around work-based learning had been siloed in select areas of Dallas ISD that offered one-off experiences. For example, P-TECH schools managed their own work-based learning opportunities, while CTE programs in comprehensive high schools relied on their own relationships to offer aligned work-based learning. The new necessity for a collaborative approach to work-based learning in a global pandemic brought individuals to the table that had been engaged in the work for numerous years but not in a systematic and coordinated way. The school system leaders and educators provided their input and best practices alongside employers engaged in similar work to create a continuum of exposure to experience for learners. The use of a cross-sector team provided a singular system for bringing together the best practices from each career pathways model and delivery system and provided tools for local school leaders to be able to replicate those best practices in a seamless way.

The cross-sector collaboration efforts fed into Dallas ISD's investment in building a virtual internship toolkit. The toolkit offers a how-to for teachers and learners around the key components of a successful virtual internship program. The toolkit covers a variety of key topics such as creating appropriate work assignments, providing feedback to learners, building and sustaining a mentoring relationship with learners, and connecting classroom teaching with workplace experiences. This work will allow Dallas ISD to grow its virtual work-based learning offerings, something that may not have been possible without the backing of the *New Skills ready network* grant.

While the priority was not initially written into their grant proposal, the Dallas, Texas, team saw an opportunity during a global pandemic to offer real-world work experiences virtually by leveraging best practices and guidance from the region's educators and employers. As the world moves forward to more in-person experiences, the lessons learned around virtual work-based learning will provide more equitable opportunities across the board for Dallas ISD learners.

**Looking Ahead**

Within the year one objectives the Dallas, Texas, team has incorporated a community lens to their work by developing an aligned view of LMI across business, workforce development and K-12 and postsecondary institutions. During the shift to remote instruction, the Dallas, Texas, *New Skills ready network* team focused on enhancing their learners' experiences by developing a collaborative approach to working across programs in developing virtual work-based learning experiences.

As the Dallas, Texas, team moves forward into the year two objectives, the team will focus on leveraging LMI to make data-driven decisions. This means ensuring that the data is being used to enhance, develop or sunset career pathways at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The team will also work to ensure that the LMI system remains aligned across the community through the ongoing engagement of non-profits, workforce development partners and employers. Finally, a critical goal for the year ahead is to build a robust form of career exploration that starts in the middle grades to provide access to real-world experiences for younger learners. Work is already underway to conduct a landscape analysis of the current offerings across Dallas ISD to inform a plan going forward.