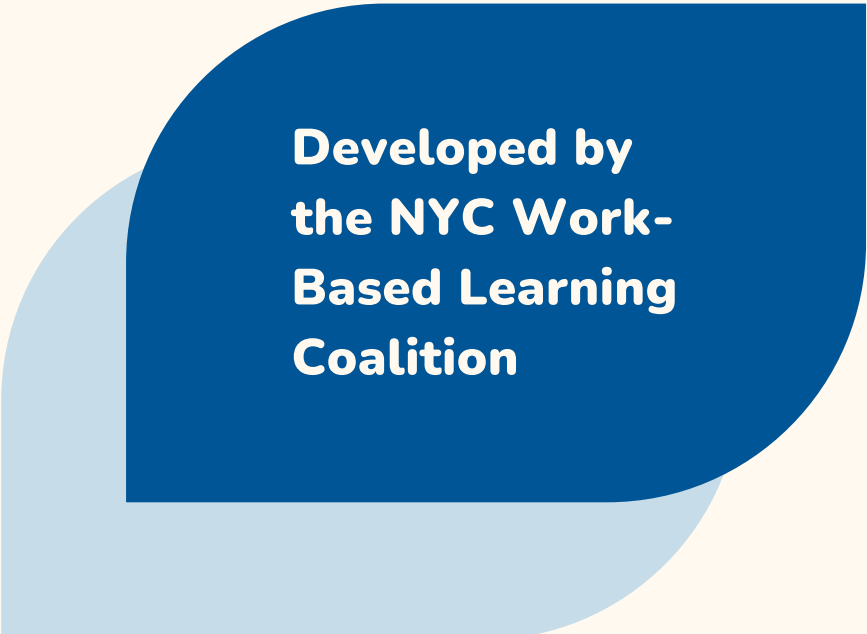


Proposal to Improve Postsecondary Success of New York City High School Students

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**Developed by
the NYC Work-
Based Learning
Coalition**

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Executive Summary

The New York City Work-Based Learning Coalition aims to increase equity, quality, and access to work-based learning (WBL) opportunities that prepare all young New Yorkers for career success and economic security in a rapidly changing labor market. We believe that all young people should graduate high school with a better understanding of the full spectrum of opportunities available to them. All students should have equitable access to these opportunities, and schools must have the support to provide them. The recommendations in this proposal present how the NYC Department of Education can make this vision a reality

Our coalition is calling for three specific sets of investments and policies for how the DOE, with other partners, should connect and expand the range of WBL initiatives into a system-wide effort to better braid education and employment in high schools:

Recommendation #1:

Expand opportunities for students to engage in paid, meaningful work, as an intentional part of their school experience

Recommendation #2:

Increase support for policies that promote career success, including ways for students to receive credit for skills acquired through work

Recommendation #3:

Emphasize and support career readiness within the DOE as a critical driver to improve K-12 outcomes for all students, rather than an alternative pathway

This proposal sets a broad framework for policy, but this coalition looks forward to the chance to work with the NYCDOE, students, and families to further refine and implement these ideas in ways that meet the needs of schools and communities.

Our Proposed Approach to Improve Postsecondary Outcomes

Despite increases in graduation rates, New York City students still struggle to turn those gains into success after high school, where college completion and employment outcomes still present the same disparities we have seen for years.¹ Bringing career awareness and learning from work into academic pathways better positions students to contribute to and benefit from an economy that is thriving, and inclusive. Work-based learning, a core component of career literacy, is the process of learning about work and learning through work experiences. Structured Work-Based Learning experiences can occur in school or out of school and can include exploratory activities such as guest speakers to hands-on work experiences such as internships. WBL allows students to build a bridge between their interests and classroom learning to their professional postsecondary lives.

Career readiness is not an alternative pathway for certain students. Research shows career readiness leads to improved outcomes for ALL students, in addition to giving specific boosts for students of color, and should not be thought of as separate from rigorous postsecondary preparation.² Higher-income families already have the resources to complement their children's education with enrichment experiences including work, either unpaid or paid. This results in massive disparities for students from different backgrounds in terms of their ability to know themselves and make informed postsecondary choices.

A commitment to equity demands that we extend the same opportunities for all students and families. And while we are mindful of a negative legacy of vocational education when limited to lower-income and disproportionately Black and Brown students, there is ample research for braided pathways as a way to support a wide range of next steps after high school, including college and careers. We are also aware of the fact that low-income students often have to work for income, perhaps now more than ever as we emerge from the pandemic, which can keep them from more intentional career exploration.³

We are not starting from scratch. There are many high-quality existing programs in this area.⁴ Our aim is to invest in expanding, coordinating, and supporting these efforts, so they are no longer exceptional -- that they become the norm for how we connect our students and employers for their mutual benefit. In addition to many strong existing programs that can be scaled and better coordinated into a cohesive approach, several frameworks and tools can accelerate quality implementation and scale, including the CareerReadyNYC framework of outcomes, developed by the Mayor's Office for Youth Employment; the Key Distinguishers, a set of WBL program criteria also developed based on the feedback of practitioners, provides a set of practices and core principles to guide development and assessment of programs; and the Portal, developed by New Visions for Public Schools, a management tool for schools that integrates data from ATS, STARS, along with WBL participation and outcomes.⁵

The rest of this document presents this platform in greater detail.

Recommendation #1:

Expand investment in work-based learning, credit for work, and support to schools to elevate career success in high schools.

Expanding braided pathways rests on transforming the school experience for students and educators through more work-based learning opportunities. If successful, this will result in an increasing number of New York City high school students who have opportunities to participate in some type of career exploration and hands-on WBL experience every school year and every summer that they are in high school; conclude high school having completed at least one paid work-based internship that exposes them to the world of work and careers, and graduate high school with a postsecondary plan that is informed by a deeper knowledge of one's own interests and the career options that align with them.

Whatever path students pursue after high school should lead them toward a family-sustaining career. Experiences that expose students to career environments, build in-demand career skills, and develop knowledge of career options are the surest way to set students up for success on this path. These experiences make learning relevant and engaging, giving students a sense of direction no matter where their path takes them next.

Yet, students in low-income households report attending schools that offer little of these programs, and they suffer for it after high school, posting low rates of college enrollment, employment, and earnings. These opportunities, which are currently more prevalent in career and technical education (CTE) high schools, as well as many higher-income high schools, should be available to all students.

If this is to change for students, it must change in schools. Too often, schools lack the necessary partnerships with employers and community organizations to make this happen. Too often, educators lack the confidence and knowledge to integrate careers into their classrooms. Too often, the hands-on, collaborative approach to teaching at the heart of WBL is seen as outside the scope of academic education.



With the right allocation of resources and support, this can change. In order to accomplish this, the City should:

- Increase funding and provide guidance so that all high school students participate in at least one **paid work-based experience/internship**
- Fund every high school to hire a **full-time WBL Coordinator** to design a career pathways team who will develop partnerships with employers, CBOs, and city agencies; collaborate in IEP transition planning for students with disabilities; and report and share data for schools and partners to track outcomes that relate to students' career exposure and interests, in addition to academics.
- **Provide professional development** and easier pathways for educators and community partners to develop WBL instructional skills and certification
- **Provide guidance on academic policy** for course accreditation and support teachers to facilitate professional learning communities in which they design accredited courses integrating real-world, work-based experiences.



Recommendation #2:

Increase support for existing and new graduation policies that promote career success

If our high schools are not preparing graduates to enter family-sustaining careers, then we have failed them. And yet, too many students leave high school without the skills, networks, and knowledge they need to attain such careers. With a few strategic modifications to graduation requirements, New York can make this connection more vibrant and real for our youth.

Historically, to graduate high school in New York, students have had to pass five Regents exams in addition to completing 22 year-long course credits (or 44 semester credits). Since 2016, as part of an initiative to expand graduation options, NY State has allowed what are known as “4+1” pathways to a diploma. Through “4+1,” all students can graduate using a variety of options that can substitute for a 5th Regents exam, including the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS+1) pathway. The CDOS+1 Option 1 pathway requires students to participate in relevant coursework and WBL experiences, such as internships, career exploration, and postsecondary planning, to reflect on their interests and aspirations. Students also must demonstrate attainment of the CDOS standards, which include “universal foundational skills,” such as personal and interpersonal skills, technology, and information management.⁶

Many students and families are unaware of that CDOS is a +1 graduation pathway and schools do not receive support or guidance on how to implement it meaningfully. A simple first step for the NYCDOE is to support the use of existing options, such as the CDOS 4+1 graduation pathway, particularly as a program beginning in 9th grade, rather than as a fallback option for students unsuccessful at passing a 5th Regents exam.

This group believes that New York City should advocate with the state for more flexibility and the decoupling of Regents exams with graduation requirements, particularly when we can substitute other activities and assessments that promote success after high school with more real-world value to students, colleges, and employers.

Alongside those efforts, the NYCDOE can work locally to support its own schools to use existing tools to promote postsecondary success in ways beyond simply following the currently dominant five-Regents exam pathway. There are a range of WBL activities and assessments that can provide alternatives to the current ways we support and measure the postsecondary readiness of students. These may or may not be attached to specific graduation requirements for high school students.

These include:

- Performance-based assessments, utilizing the learnings of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, which have shown strong success in advancing deeper learning and postsecondary transition outcomes;
- Credentialing pathways assessments, as used in CTE and associates degrees;
 - The CDOS+1 Graduation Pathway - as discussed above
 - The NYS Seal of Civic Readiness - another 4+1 graduation pathway, this option can be both a programmatic tool for schools to use now, but also as a model for the type of practitioner-driven policy that can be used to develop new or modify existing alternatives to existing graduation requirements. The Seal was developed by educators and external partners to meet the growing concerns of communities about a lack of civic engagement and readiness.
- Ensuring that schools have a deeper understanding of academic policy and what it allows, particularly around awarding credit for offsite and work-based learning activities. This remains a black box to many educators, and schools are thus reluctant to engage in and program these activities, even when they are cognizant of the benefits they provide to students and communities.
- Professional development and support to equip schools to use the IEP process to design meaningful and individualized transition plans for students with disabilities.
- Opportunities-to-learn metrics that aim to quantify opportunities provided by curriculum, instruction, and programming. The NYCDOE should invest in funding to support schools to utilize these and related tools and resources to transform the school and student experience and lay the groundwork for a city economy where local talent is prepared to compete for the best careers. Existing, evidence-based WBL related tools include:
 - the CareerReadyNYC Framework - developed by the Mayor's Office of Youth Employment, it presents a set of skills and experiences in which youth should progressively engage, across four domains of career readiness (awareness, exploration, preparation, and training), and can be used to guide program design.

Currently, these are used sporadically, limited to the schools aware of them and with the willingness to pursue new opportunities. But in too many cases, career-related pathways are seen as a fallback if seniors are unable to meet traditional assessments, such as passing a fifth Regents exam. Instead, these should be used as intentional programs, beginning in 9th grade, to provide a robust set of experiences to prepare students for the full range of postsecondary options, particularly since the majority of New York City students work while they attend college.



Recommendation #2:

Coordinate focus on career readiness by the DOE as a critical driver to improve K-12 outcomes for all students, rather than an alternative pathway

Students, families, schools, and youth-serving providers can derive enormous benefit from stronger guidance and clear and accurate information regarding work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. If our system aspires to produce a generation that is prepared for the workforce and knows how to apply their skills and knowledge to strengthen civic society and the economy and lead choice-filled lives, expanding investments and clarifying policies regarding WBL/braided pathways are critical steps, as is creating a central focus on this work within the DOE. The DOE's Office of Postsecondary Readiness (OPSR) has the most expertise in this area, and we believe that their leadership can be strengthened with more resources and recognition of the importance of this work.

Many of the DOE's central offices support career readiness and work-based learning, including the Office of Postsecondary Readiness (OPSR), Office of Community Schools, ACCESS Schools, Multilingual Learners, Special Education and School Design, and the Office of Special Education's Transition and College Access Centers (TCACs). Significant expertise and innovation related to WBL are already underway--the next step is to build on, incentivize, and connect these efforts and offices to create greater consistency in which students and schools get access to opportunities.

Despite these challenges, many high school superintendents, partnership support organizations, and hundreds of individual principals have brought career readiness into the center of their work. A recent pilot funded by the Gates Foundation led by the Fund for Public Schools found that career readiness activities could serve as a powerful mechanism to re-engage young people in school following months of remote learning, further motivating activity to provide explicit career readiness opportunities to middle and high school students.

Additionally, programming from career and technical education (CTE) to summer employment is strongly correlated with a range of positive academic and life outcomes, although it is important to note that CTE programs serve relatively fewer numbers of many groups of students, including Multilingual Learners and students with disabilities--any initiative along these lines must ensure their full participation.⁷

Currently, however, with the exception of those running CTE programs, schools have few if any institutional incentives to prioritize WBL and other career readiness activities. Because these activities are not central to middle and high school priorities, school leaders who see value in providing WBL opportunities for young people must navigate a confusing system of policies and determine how to secure needed resources. Students in

schools with principals unwilling or unable to run this gauntlet often simply cannot access these opportunities. DOE can remedy this inequity and promote long-lasting outcomes in college persistence and economic mobility by strengthening central structures for WBL and career readiness, utilizing incentives first to engage schools and partners, followed by accountability measures once sufficient supports for implementation are in place.

Above all, DOE leadership, starting with the Chancellor, must embrace career readiness as a core mission of K-12 education, with work-based learning as a robustly supported strategy toward this goal. To this end, the DOE must codify and institutionalize this commitment by supporting a **high-level office dedicated to students' long-term career success**. This office, which could consist of an expansion of the current scope and resources of the DOE's Office of Postsecondary Readiness (OPSR), should consider students' transition into higher education not as an end unto itself--a point at which the DOE's role and responsibilities end--but rather as an input and a means toward rewarding work and economic security. The office should collaborate with the DOE programs described above in order to leverage system-wide expertise to define competencies necessary for career and college success. It should define school- and system-level accountability measures for career readiness outcomes that are publicly reported, and work with partners to develop the necessary resources to support career readiness for every student.

The portfolio of this office could include:

- Postsecondary planning and readiness
- Early college credits and joint degree programs, including vocational programs
- Career and technical education
- Community partnerships and wraparound services
- Collaborating with DOE's Offices of Multilingual Learners and Special Education
- Liaison to partnering City agencies (see below)

DOE shares a "career readiness ecosystem" with the City University of New York--the college destination for a substantial majority of DOE graduates--and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), which runs NYC's publicly funded workforce programs that overwhelmingly serve DOE students. With this in mind, DOE must develop and maintain strong partnerships with DYCD and CUNY to deploy, sustain, and refine a seamless, holistic, and progressive set of career readiness services. Collectively, these include foundational academics, postsecondary readiness, education and training, and a well-sequenced set of career exploration and WBL activities. DOE can also support schools to develop linkages with career-oriented programs offered by potential partners.

To truly operationalize a career readiness mission across the DOE and leverage its commitments in this larger ecosystem, DOE must address a number of pedagogical and operational priorities.

These include:

- Creating, maintaining, and expanding employer and nonprofit partnerships necessary to offer New York City young people real access to job growth
- Increasing the capacity of schools to incorporate WBL into their programming
- Refining data systems that track academic progress to ensure processes that enable continuous improvement and accountability for career and college planning for all students, ideally through reflection of WBL implementation in school dashboards.
- Designing and delivering teacher training around labor market information, essential skills development and instruction, and how to deliver high-quality project-based and work-based learning activities to all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Charging the Office of Academic Policy to create guidance to support integration of work-based learning into core and elective coursework and standard curriculum for students as they matriculate. This must shift away from the current frame of compliance and misplaced concern over academic rigor, toward language that supports achievement and celebrates rigorous, experiential learning where high school students apply their skills and reflect on their interests and post-secondary paths.



The Time is Now

New York City has an opportunity to empower our education system to better serve students and create the conditions for a more inclusive economy. If we move forward on the three sets of policies presented here we can pave the way for a New York City where every student has a real chance to put themselves on a path toward a successful career, and create the conditions for a more powerful, competitive, 21st-century local economy. This proposal sets a broad framework for policy, but this coalition looks forward to the chance to work with the city administration, students, and families to further refine and implement these ideas in ways that meet the needs of schools and communities.

The New York City Work-Based Learning Coalition

is a coalition of organizations, practitioners, advocates, and thought leaders committed to increasing equity, quality and access to work-based learning opportunities for New York City's youth. We aim to better prepare all young New Yorkers for career success and economic security in a rapidly changing economy/labor market.

New York City Work Based Learning Coalition Members

Advocates for Children of New York • Beam Center • Big Picture Learning • Brooklyn Navy Yard • DreamYard • Education Video Center • Ellen Baxt • ExpandedED Schools • Futures and Options • Goddard Riverside • Henry Street Settlement • HERE to HERE • Internationals Network for Public Schools • JobsFirstNYC • John Duval • Michael Rothman • New Visions for Public Schools • obt (opportunities for better tomorrow) • PENCIL • Per Scholas • South Bronx Community Charter School • Teens Take Charge • The Bell • The Hispanic Federation • The Pinkerton Foundation • The Urban Assembly • United Neighborhood Houses • Virtual Enterprises International • Young Invincibles

Additional Endorsers of this Platform Include

Advocates for Children of New York • The New York Community Service Society of New York • The NYC Employment and Training Coalition • The Student Success Network • The Center for an Urban Future • Bank Street College of Education • Metro Center NYU College Prep Academy • United We Stand of New York • Citizens' Committee for Children of New York • Futures and Options • Internationals Network for Public Schools • CareerWise New York • JobsFirstNYC • NYC Outward Bound Schools • United Neighborhood Houses • NY Career Internship Network



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2. Work-based learning in California: Opportunities and models for expansion. Kenny, M. E. (2013). Washor, E. and Mojkowski, C. (2013) Leaving to Learn: How out-of-school learning increases student engagement and reduces dropout rates. Portsmouth, NH.
3. https://www.heretohere.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/One-Step-Closer_H2H-Winter-2020_Online.pdf
4. Existing program and initiatives from which to build include the Summer 2021 WBLPI; the Brooklyn STEAM Center; CareerReady SYEP; ExpandedED Options; CTE Industry Scholars; Career Clue; the Learning to Work program; various models at CUNY, including the Bronx Recovery Corps; CareerWise NY and similar apprenticeship programs; the Transfer to Careers program, supported by JobsFirst and New Visions for Public Schools; Work, Learn, & Grow; and the Career Development Occupational Studies credential.
5. The portal provides schools with the ability to monitor the completion of activities, where students gain in-depth experiences such as work-based learning, job training, and service learning. Identify students who are not planned for activities and ensure they get the experiences that will help them succeed in a Postsecondary plan. The Portal CDOS List Page has been built in alignment with New York State and City DOE CDOS requirements and allows schools to see an aggregate and individual student view.
6. NY State also allows for a CDOS Option 2 pathway, in which students do not need to participate in any specific set of activities, but instead need to pass an approved assessment exam. Despite both options being designed around work-based learning in theory, this group is less supportive of CDOS Option 2, given that students need not necessarily engage in any WBL activities to utilize it.
7. <https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/1151>

