

Strengthening Youth Career Pathways for an Affordable New York City

Executive Summary

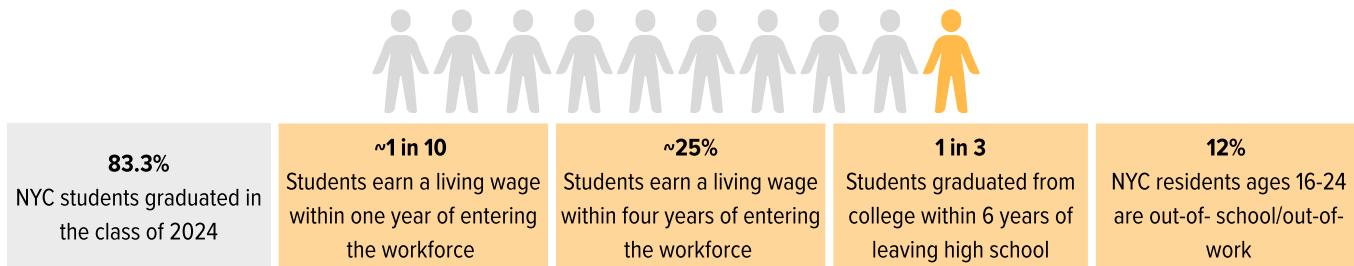
We believe that all young people should graduate high school with a set of foundational career literacy skills and experiences that set them up for success in postsecondary education, skills training, and the labor market. Serving 912,064 students across 1,596 public schools and 274 charter schools, New York City has both the scale and the responsibility to ensure every student is prepared for economic mobility. This work strengthens pathways to opportunity and promotes resiliency for our students in the midst of New York City's affordability crisis.

For young people, especially the 73.5% of students who are economically disadvantaged and those from historically underserved communities, career-connected learning is how we change the odds so they can find economic security as adults.

What is Career-Connected Learning and Work-Based Learning?

Career-Connected Learning (CCL) integrates classroom learning with real-world experiences to help young people prepare for college, careers, and long-term economic security. It offers exposure to diverse careers, access to clear pathways, and opportunities to earn credentials and college credit through collaboration among schools, employers, intermediaries, and postsecondary partners. Work-based learning (WBL), a core component of CCL, is the process of learning about work and learning through work experiences.

A strong system of career-connected learning is necessary to close the opportunity gap, not only by providing earning opportunities for youth but by building social capital that will serve them throughout their career journey. The recommendations in this proposal outline how a new Mayoral Administration can build on current progress to make this vision a reality.



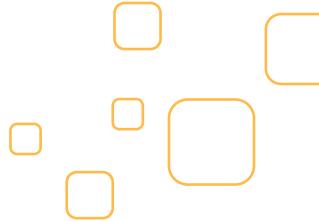
Our coalition is calling for three specific areas of focus that can guide investments and policies in the next administration to expand and align existing Career-Connected Learning initiatives into a system-wide effort to better braid education and employment from Pre-Kindergarten to High School:

Build on the momentum of Career-Connected Learning. Provide high-quality pathway-aligned WBL experiences in- and out-of school for all NYC High School Students in alignment with state changes in graduation expectations and requirements.

Strengthen coordination among city agencies to better align existing Career-Connected Learning initiatives.

Incentivize tri-sector collaboration among NYC agencies, nonprofit providers, and employers to prepare all NYC young people for meaningful post-secondary career skills as a cornerstone of building a more affordable and inclusive city.

The Coalition looks forward to working with the next mayoral administration, young people, families, and educators to further refine this broad framework for policy.



Introduction

We are not starting from scratch; we are building on the significant momentum in career-connected learning. New York City has made dramatic strides over the last decade towards ensuring high-quality WBL experiences are available to high school students. This progress includes more than doubling enrollment in the annual Department of Youth and Community (DYCD)'s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), to 100,000 young New Yorkers each year; creation of highly promising new career readiness initiatives within NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) such as FutureReadyNYC (FRNYC) that have built on the historic success of the City's career and technical education (CTE) programs and enrolled additional tens of thousands of high school students; and City University of New York (CUNY)'s Inclusive Economy initiative, which has emphasized paid work experience and career advisement with an eye toward improving graduates' labor market outcomes.

All of this activity adds up to a strong foundation in place for the next administration to build upon. But we are far from the goal of ensuring every young New Yorker reaches adulthood truly ready for career success and economic security. Currently, only 1 in 10 students earn a living wage within one year of entering the workforce after high school or college. Connecting career awareness and real-world experience to academic pathways better equips young people to participate in and benefit from a thriving, inclusive economy.

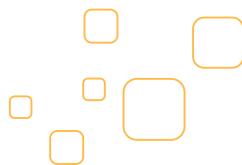
An exciting new development is a shift in state policy that promises to convert a longtime barrier into a powerful support. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has revised statewide high school graduation measures to ensure that a diploma signifies "educational excellence and equity for all young people" and has adopted a "Vision to Transform New York State's Graduation Requirements". By shifting away from Regents exams as a key graduation requirement, this critical statewide initiative opens space and frees resources for New York City to offer career-connected learning for all young people. By intentionally centering and authentically assessing work experience and career readiness alongside academic preparation, as called for by the Work-Based Learning (WBL) Coalition, the next Mayor can engage eager nonprofit and employer partners to formalize, scale, and connect existing high-quality WBL opportunities. Programs such as FRNYC and SYEP are already deeply embedded in 58% of high schools across New York City.

The recommendations outlined below present concrete steps that the next mayoral administration can take to reinforce institutional collaboration. These steps are derived from workforce data, challenges reported by young people, families, educators, and implementation partners. By addressing these systemic barriers, the City can better align services and amplify its collective impact.

Build on the momentum of Career-Connected Learning. Provide high-quality pathway-aligned WBL experiences in- and out- of school for all NYC High School Students in alignment with state changes in graduation expectations and requirements.

The launch and scale of FutureReadyNYC (FRNYC) and the expansion of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) to reach 100,000 youth represent a significant advancement in New York City's commitment to providing high-quality WBL opportunities. This progress has been recognized by key business coalitions such as the Partnership for New York City, whose president and CEO, Kathryn Wylde, observed that "the most important contribution has been to ensure that every student's education, from grade school through high school, includes awareness of their future career possibilities." She further noted that NYCPS has established sustainable employer partnerships that prepare young New Yorkers for the full spectrum of employment opportunities available both within the city and beyond.

A core example of such engagement is Career Discovery Week, co-sponsored by the Partnership for New York City. Since its inception in 2020, this initiative has enlisted more than 200 employers and provided over 11,000 public high school students with full-day immersion experiences at major employer worksites. These experiences serve as essential entry points for both employers



and students offering early exposure to workplace environments, building social capital, and laying the groundwork for long-term economic mobility.

While Career Discovery Week offers early career exposure, at the other end- apprenticeship is the gold standard of WBL. Through intentional public-private partnerships, NYCPS has scaled access to modern youth apprenticeships that connect education to high-demand, high wage career pathways. These apprenticeships offer students a robust postsecondary option, combining paid, WBL with continued training and college credit toward a thriving career. Building on this success, the City has also established historic youth civil service pathway titles, creating a modern pipeline into public sector careers for the next generation of New Yorkers.

To sustain and scale this progress, the City must ensure clear role definition and effective collaboration among NYCPS, DYCD, and CUNY. Coordination, not competition, among these agencies and investing in programs that support New Yorkers from kindergarten through adulthood, are essential to building a cohesive, citywide framework for career-connected learning that ensures all career pathways are equitably resourced, accessible, and strategically integrated.

While the City's investment in a diverse array of WBL programs is substantial, the Work-Based Learning Coalition recognizes that the breadth of programs (see Appendix) can create challenges for students, families, program providers, and employers seeking to navigate the system. In 2024, the Coalition released [Action Priorities for Systems Building, Coordination and Improvement](#), which remain highly relevant today. Advancing these priorities would move New York City closer to a unified and coherent career-connected learning system that ensures all young people are prepared for meaningful and sustainable participation in the workforce.

The recommendations outlined below present concrete steps for the city to deepen its investment in career-connected learning.

Sustain and Grow FutureReady NYC as a Citywide Model for Postsecondary Readiness

NYC Public Schools is reimagining the student experience by integrating traditional academics with career-connected learning, empowering all students to achieve long-term economic security. This vision integrates academic excellence with real-world skills and experiences, giving students a head start on college and career, and helping them build a strong plan toward a rewarding future.

By 2030, their goal is to ensure that:

- 100% of NYCPS students transition from eighth grade with foundational skills in financial literacy and computer science, having explored careers of interest and begun developing strong postsecondary plans;
- 100% of NYCPS graduates leave high school with foundational skills in career readiness, financial literacy, and computer science, along with a strong plan and access to early college credit or industry-recognized credentials; and
- 100,000 students are pursuing pathways designed in partnership with higher education and industry, ensuring alignment to New York's fastest-growing career fields.

A key vehicle to achieving these goals lies in FutureReadyNYC, an initiative NYCPS launched in 2022 that builds on the 120 year history of Career and Technical Education (CTE). FutureReadyNYC's comprehensive, evidence-based approach is grounded in five core components, ensuring that every participating student completes a robust sequence of experiences. By graduation, FRNYC students receive individualized pathway advising, career-connected instruction, early college and

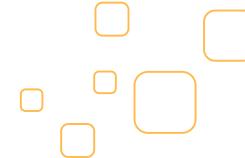
credential opportunities, work-based learning, and financial literacy education. The goal of FutureReadyNYC is to ensure 100% of students graduate with a postsecondary plan, and over 50% earn a living wage within one year of transitioning into their careers, with 90%+ doing so within five years.

Together, FutureReadyNYC and CTE support ~300 schools with funding, resources and training to ensure the ~65,000 students enrolled across both initiatives are on a path to success. Since 2022, students in these initiatives have

earned nearly \$30 million through paid internships and apprenticeships, gaining real-world experience, building social capital, and developing professional networks. Investments in this work ensure that career-connected learning begins early and evolves alongside students' interests and the city's economic landscape.

While FRNYC and CTE offer deep, industry-aligned learning, currently, only 14% of NYCPS students citywide participate in structured career exploration activities, highlighting the need for expanded access to career-connected learning citywide. The WBL Coalition calls for greater investment to make career exploration accessible to all middle and high school students, building toward universal career literacy.

Expanding access must also include more opportunities for students to earn college credits and industry credentials through CUNY partnerships. In 2023 alone, NYC students saved nearly \$70 million in future college costs through



early college credit attainment. Personalized advising is also critical to helping students develop individualized college and career plans as they navigate opportunities in high school and beyond. Currently, more than 350 high schools have access to digital advising tools to support this work.

For this vision to succeed, cross-sector collaboration must continue to bring together major employers, industry groups, philanthropy, higher education, labor, community partners, and government. This alignment is what makes FRNYC powerful: it connects education directly to labor market demand, scales opportunities through shared investment, and ensures that students from every background gain the skills and experiences needed to thrive. By expanding the power of this collaboration citywide, we can transform workforce preparation into a citywide economic strategy, not just an education reform.

Uplift SYEP as a Core Component of the City's Career-Connected Learning System

By expanding and establishing baseline funding for the SYEP to serve 100,000 youth annually, New York City has become a national leader in youth employment. Over the past 8 years, SYEP has evolved into a more comprehensive and equitable model of work readiness that reaches deeper into communities and provides broader career-connected learning opportunities. Beyond access to paid work, SYEP serves as a critical resource that connects young people from under-resourced communities to their first work experiences while putting nearly \$150 million directly into the pockets of young New Yorkers each summer. In 2025, over 200,000 students applied to the program, reflecting the program's growing demand and the need for Universal SYEP. SYEP's extension program, Work Learn Grow (WLG), continues to expand as well, now serving 7,000 young people each year earning college credits through partnerships with CUNY. This model highlights how paid work experiences can integrate with academic achievement and career preparation.

Together, SYEP and WLG form the foundation of the broader career-connected learning ecosystem that DYCD provides. Programs such as Learn & Earn, Train & Earn, and Advance &

Earn, offer internships, college credit, wraparound services, workforce training and pathways through college partnerships. As of 2024, the youth (aged 16 to 24) unemployment rate has increased to 13.2%, 3.6% higher than in 2019.

Train & Earn, Advance & Earn, and CRED provides critical services that directly address these unemployment challenges by equipping 4,000 out-of-school and out-of-work young people with industry-recognized credentials, employability skills, and direct connections to job opportunities in high-demand sectors. Uplifting DYCD's out-of-school and out-of-work programs, alongside SYEP, must be a focus of the next administration.

With current SYEP contracts expiring in March 2027, the next mayoral administration has a pivotal opportunity to establish Universal SYEP as DYCD's workforce "north star," ensuring every young person who wants a summer job can access one. Preparing and releasing the next RFP will be a critical moment to codify SYEP's role as a key driver of career readiness, ensuring it continues to evolve to meet the needs of young people. The process should begin immediately so that new contracts can be implemented by

Summer 2028. Building upon the infrastructure and momentum of the last four years, the next phase should expand SYEP and WLG while strengthening DYCD's internal capacity-building support and their network of community-based organizations (CBOs) that anchor this work.

By leveraging the city's \$240 million investment and engaging the business community, New York can prepare the next generation for living-wage careers, build equitable pathways to economic security, and strengthen its workforce.

Strengthen coordination among city agencies to better align existing Career-Connected Learning initiatives.

A central component of improving career-connected learning in New York City is strategic coordination between the key city agencies that serve the vast majority of young New Yorkers: Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development (NYC Talent), Department of Youth and Community Development, New York City Public Schools, and the City University of New York. The successful rollout and implementation of increasingly comprehensive career-connected learning opportunities at scale in New York City necessitates continued feedback and input from all stakeholders.

The recommendations outlined below present concrete steps that an incoming mayoral administration can take to develop a streamlined messaging approach about the WBL ecosystem to reduce confusion among young people, families, and educators.

- **Establish a cross-agency WBL Coordination Task Force** with a clear direction to align goals, timelines, and resources across NYC Talent, DYCD, NYCPS, and partners (e.g., employer networks, intermediaries). Grounded in the City's Career Navigation Roadmap, the Task Force would steward a WBL Innovation Fund and ensure public accountability through regular updates.
- **Develop a unified WBL framework and shared language** with clearly defined terms, stages (e.g., career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training), and program outcomes to ensure consistency across programs. This should include a central online platform or portal where young people can explore opportunities, understand pathways, and apply for programs.
- **Streamline and align contracting and data systems** across DYCD and NYCPS to reduce administrative burden for providers and improve service delivery. In tandem, align data collection and reporting systems to enable better tracking of youth engagement and outcomes across agencies.

Incentivize tri-sector collaboration among NYC agencies, nonprofit providers, and employers to prepare all NYC young people for meaningful post-secondary career skills as a cornerstone of building a more affordable and inclusive city.

The pending changes to New York State's graduation requirements, set to be fully implemented by 2029, will require that all high school graduates have meaningful career-connected learning experiences as part of their pathway to graduation. Currently, only an estimated 25% of NYC high school students participate in CCL opportunities by their senior year.

Developing this level of systemic scale and integration will require more than encouragement or high-level support from the Mayor's Office. It will require a comprehensive, well-resourced citywide strategy built on shared accountability, aligned incentives, and clear infrastructure to sustain collaboration among NYC agencies, nonprofit providers, and employers. To meet this moment, below are key strategies to operationalize this tri-sector approach:

- **WBL Coordination Task Force** (*discussed in recommendation #2*) would provide strategic oversight, monitor progress toward equity goals, and remove systemic barriers to collaboration (e.g., contracting, data sharing, or policy alignment).
- **Create employer participation tiers and recognition programs** that highlight companies actively contributing to a young person's career development. Tiers could be based on number of placements, quality of mentorship, or industry-aligned project-based learning contributions.



NYC Work-Based Learning Coalition

- **Build employer readiness through intermediaries** that can bridge the gap between schools and businesses by managing logistics, preparing young people, and supporting employers with early career exposure events, hosting young people as interns, and establishing structured apprenticeships.
- **Ensure equity in opportunity matching and support** using citywide data systems to prioritize underserved young people (e.g., multilingual learners, young people with disabilities, young people in temporary housing) for high-quality WBL placements. Provide wraparound supports such as travel stipends, mentorship, and flexible scheduling, to ensure that all young people can participate.

The Time is Now

New York City has an opportunity to empower our education system to better serve youth and young people and create the conditions for a more inclusive economy. If we move forward on the three sets of recommendations presented here, we can pave the way for a New York City where every young person 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 next mayoral administration, young people, families, and educators to further refine and implement these ideas in ways that meet the needs of schools and communities.

About the NYC Work-Based Learning Coalition

The New York City Work-Based Learning Coalition is composed of nonprofits, 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 labor market.

Appendix: Career-Connected Learning Glossary

Initiative	Description
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	Career and Technical Education programs are made up of elective courses that teach students about different careers. New York City has over 130 CTE schools and over 260 CTE programs to choose from. Some CTE schools also host additional career-connected learning programs, like Career Readiness and Modern Youth Apprenticeship.
FutureReadyNYC and Modern Youth Apprenticeship	FutureReadyNYC (FRNYC) is a reimaged high school experience where students learn important job skills, get paid work experience, earn early college credit, and get certificates for jobs that pay well and are in demand. This helps them plan for a bright future with good careers. FRNYC focuses on five main areas to help students explore and prepare for exciting jobs. 1. Personalized Advising 2. Career-Connected Instruction 3. Early College Credits & Valuable Credentials 4. Work-Based Learning, including internships and apprenticeships 5. Financial Literacy
Computer Science Education	The New York State K12 Computer Science (CS) and Digital Fluency Learning Standards are currently in use in some schools and are expected to be implemented in all schools in the 2024-25 school year. These standards include Digital Citizenship, Digital Fluency, and Computer Science. The Computer Science Standards are being aligned to the CS4All Blueprint to help teachers integrate computational literacy, algorithmic thinking, and problem-solving skills in every classroom and at all grade levels.
Training Opportunities Program	A paid work-based learning program for NYC public high school students with disabilities.
Learn to Work (LTW)	Supplementing transfer schools and Young Adult Borough Centers, the LTW program provides intensive student support services, including case management, attendance outreach, internships, and post-secondary planning to over-aged, under-credited young people who have struggled in the traditional public school model.
Student Success Centers (SSCs)	Student Success Centers (SSCs) are centralized postsecondary offices on a school campus, providing early college awareness, college access counseling, financial aid advisement, and career exploration. A key component of each SSC are the Youth Leaders, current high school students trained to serve as peer counselors and educators around college access.
Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and Work Learning Grow (WLG)	The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) connects 100,000 NYC youth between the ages of 14 and 24 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience each summer. Through SYEP, participants can explore different interests and career pathways, develop productive workplace habits, and engage in learning experiences that strengthen their social, civic, and leadership skills. The following are the different types of SYEP: CareerReady SYEP, Community-Based SYEP, Ladders for Leaders, Special Initiatives (Emerging Leaders, sector-focused, and NYCHA), Cure Violence Program, and Youth with Disabilities. Work, Learn & Grow offers 7,000 NYC youth between the ages of 16 and 20 a paid 22-week-long opportunity to strengthen their work-readiness skills, explore postsecondary education and careers, and potentially earn college credit.
Learn and Earn Train and Earn Advance and Earn	Learn & Earn is a career exploration and academic support program for 1,200 high school juniors and seniors. The program provides participants with academic support, college application assistance, work readiness training, service learning and leadership activities, as well as a paid six-week summer internship. Train & Earn is a comprehensive career pathways program that supports 1,400 young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school and not working in finding long-term, sustainable employment through career exploration, paid internships, case management, job credentialing and placements, and mental health support. Advance & Earn is an innovative career pathway initiative that meets 1,400 young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school and not working where they are to provide comprehensive and continuous programming. Program pathways include pre-High School Equivalency, High School Equivalency, and Advanced Training.
Community Resources for Employment and Development Program (CRED)	CRED will offer work readiness training, occupational training, and internships for in-demand, emerging sectors for up to 24 weeks, as well as job placement within a three-month follow-up period for 1,000 participants ages 18 to 40. CRED offers holistic support to participants, providing access to mental health counseling, housing, academic support, and health care access.
Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program	The Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program (AGVEP) is a year-round employment program for people between the ages of 14 and 24 who are at risk of perpetuating or being victimized by gun violence.
Work Progress Program	The Work Progress Program (WPP) assists nonprofit organizations to provide beneficial internship opportunities for low income young adults in all five boroughs of New York City. Nonprofit organizations are designated as WPP Service Providers and conduct internship programs for participants ages 16-24. Since 2015, the Work Progress Program has supported 45 internship programs managed by nonprofit organization, engaged over 1,900 youth and young adults with internships in NYC, and contributed Approx. 277,500 hours of employment to NYC.
Employer-led Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Organization Internship Programs (e.g., Science Research Mentorship Program at the American Museum of Natural History) • Organization and Business-led Internships (e.g., Robotics Challenge at NYC First and Internship Program at Google) • Traditional Job (e.g., McDonald's, Chipotle)