

# The CDOS Pathway:

# Leveraging the CDOS to Enhance and **Expand Work-Based Learning Opportunities** for New York High School Students

**HERE TO HERE Policy Brief** | Fall 2019

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Learn more: about our efforts to support work-based learning and career pathways in high schools

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# **About HERE to HERE:**



**HERE to HERE** is a Bronx-based nonprofit that unites employers, educators, and community-based organizations to connect young people to family-sustaining careers and create a thriving, inclusive economy. HERE to HERE was developed through feedback from the community and DreamYard, Big Picture Learning, and the Dimon Foundation's shared commitment to enhance opportunities for young people.



#### **Big Picture Learning**

For over 20 years, Big Picture Learning has worked to put students at the center of their own learning. Today, hundreds of BPL network schools in the United States and around the world work together and in their communities to reimagine and reshape education.



#### **DreamYard**

DreamYard programs develop artistic voice, nurture young people's desire to make change, and cultivate the skills necessary to reach positive goals. By offering sustained and meaningful supports, Bronx youth develop the tools to become creative and engaged citizens, life-long learners, and the leaders and innovators of the 21st century.



## **Abstract**

**Work-based learning activities greatly** improve high school retention and graduation rates, and postsecondary preparedness.

The Career Development Occupational Studies commencement credential, or CDOS, utilizes many of the same resources, staffing, and infrastructure as other work-based learning programs. Given recent changes to CDOS policy that expands eligibility of the credential to all high school students, the CDOS represents a powerful avenue for educators, policymakers, and organizations interested in expanding work-based learning opportunities for students in New York City High Schools. [1]

This HERE to HERE Policy Brief discusses how the CDOS can be a tool for expanding and enhancing work-based learning opportunities in New York City High Schools and offers steps for educators and policy-makers to develop and implement strong programs. In the following pages, this brief answers several questions:

- What is the CDOS?
- How is the CDOS currently used in schools?
- How can the CDOS support career pathways and work-based learning for students?
- What are possible directions for the CDOS moving forward?

<sup>[1] &</sup>quot;Work is College Prep: How Work-Based Learning Prepares Students for Success". HERE to HERE. Fall, 2018.

#### :: INTRODUCTION

## What is the CDOS?

The CDOS, or the Career Development and Occupational Studies commencement credential, is a skills certificate that recognizes student readiness for entry-level employment.

The CDOS was introduced in 2013 by the New York State Board of Regents to bolster career readiness instruction for high school students, particularly students with an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. In recent years, recognition of the CDOS as a useful metric for establishing college and career readiness has led the New York State Board of Regents to expand the student population eligible to earn the credential. In 2016, eligibility expansion granted all students the opportunity to earn the credential, either as a substitute for one Regents exam or to endorse a complete Regents diploma.

The recent expansion of CDOS eligibility to all students offers a new opportunity for educators to build programs that enhance and expand work-based learning. Work-based learning (WBL), is an educational strategy that emphasizes the importance of real-life work experiences as an integral part of the curriculum and provides students with the opportunities and tools to build skills that increase employability. WBL programs can take place in the school or the workplace, and often occur in collaboration with the community. Common WBL activities include job shadowing, volunteering, career-focused research projects, school-based enterprises, and community-based work programs.

WBL activities add relevance to student studies by bridging classroom learning with real-work situations. Structured, professional opportunities offer students work experience and an understanding of the postsecondary options available to them, including college, technical training, and entry-level skilled employment. For employers, WBL allows businesses to engage educators and communicate employment needs. Employers who host students as interns and apprentices are able to develop meaningful relationships with students that frequently lead to continued employment. They are also able to play a leading role in producing, rather than consuming, talent.

WBL should be a part of every graduation pathway, as the benefits to students, employers, educators, and communities are substantial:

"Given the wide-reaching and symbiotic benefits of WBL, schools should consider how WBL programs can serve their students and how the CDOS might supply the leverage to build out WBL programs."



#### **Benefits for Students**

- Develops deep connection between education and work
- Fosters career exploration and awareness of postsecondary options
- Deepens student engagement and motivation
- Increases technical skills and work expectations through student application in authentic tasks
- Establishes professional contacts for future employment and mentoring

#### Benefits for Employers

- Encourages employer involvement in development of career-focused curriculum
- Creates meaningful relationships between employers and students
- Provides employers with skilled and motivated employees to build business
- Curbs costs of hiring entry-level workers
- Increases engagement and sense of belonging for existing employees

#### **Benefits for Educators**

- Increases student retention rates, graduation rates, and postsecondary preparedness
- Expands curriculum, learning facilities, and student access to emerging technologies
- Provides opportunities for individualized instruction
- Makes education more relevant and valuable for students

#### Benefits for Community

- Creates collaborative, cooperative environments
- Builds the foundation for a more productive
- Invests confidence in the school system
- Encourages respect and tolerance between different groups
- Quickly and effectively aligns changing labor markets with talent development

In addition to the benefits of WBL, high schools may be incentivized to use the CDOS, either as part of a "+1" pathway or a diploma endorsement, in response to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA maintains the federal requirement that all students complete annual standardized testing but shifts accountability for completion from federal to state level. Following the passage of ESSA, New York State submitted a set of accountability measures that offer incentives that position the CDOS, achieved through any of the available pathways, equal to an Advanced Placement (AP) exam or International Baccalaureate (IB) certification.

Schools that do use the CDOS can offer the credential through any of the following four pathways:



## "+1" Diploma Pathway

Fulfillment of CDOS requirements—along with passage of four rather than five Regents exams—earns any student a full Regents diploma. The CDOS is one of several "+1" options that can be used in the "4+1" pathway to substitute an exam and complete a diploma. The CDOS can also be used in a "7+1" pathway for an Advanced Regents diploma.



### **Diploma Endorsement**

CDOS can be used by any student as an endorsement of a traditional diploma that meets all other requirements. In this use, CDOS serves as an add-on to a standard HS diploma (Regents or Advanced), rather than a substitute for other requirements.



# "Rare Circumstances" use

In special circumstances, the CDOS can serve as a standalone graduation credential in lieu of a diploma. Despite acceptance as a graduation credential, there are questions about the extent to which this graduation credential supports postsecondary options, such as college.



#### **IEP** use

For students who IEPs who are unable to reach scores of 55+ on Math or ELA Regent exams, CDOS can be used as part of a local diploma.



High schools that implement the CDOS through any of the four pathways have two options for how students can earn the CDOS credential, referred to respectively as Option 1 and Option 2:

### Option 1

To fulfill Option 1, students must engage in a range of work-based learning (WBL) and career exploration activities to develop tangible work skills. Fulfillment of Option 1 requires students to participate in 216 hours of CTE and/ or WBL, meet CDOS learning standards, develop an annual career plan and work skills employability profile, and submit a written notice and exit summary.

### Option 2

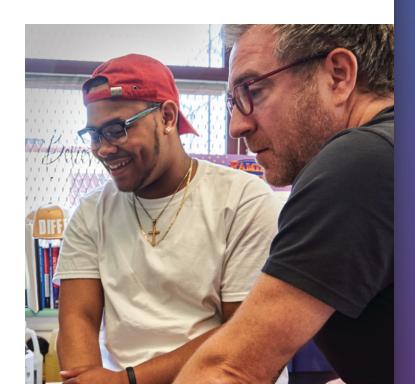
Fulfillment of Option 2 is much different, requiring students to pass any of several qualifying assessments without necessarily having engaged in any set amount of WBL experiences. Qualifying assessments included the National Work Readiness Credential, the SkillsUSA Assessment, the National Career Readiness Certificate WorkKeys, and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems Workforce Skills Certification System, among others.

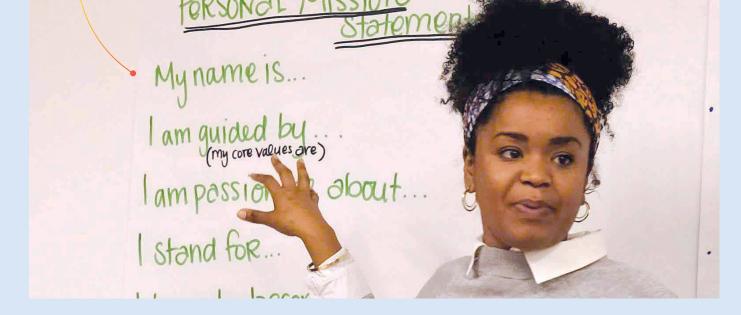
Of the above, the "+1" pathway via Option 1 offers the clearest potential to leverage CDOS as a means of providing students with intentional, high-quality WBL activities as an integral piece of a graduation pathway.

HERE to HERE supports CDOS pathways via Option 1, as this WBL-centered route offers students the personal advantage of field-specific skills and the professional edge of expanded networks, real-work experience, and overall increased employability. For students to gain maximum personal and professional benefit, WBL programs should be well-designed to include the following, which HERE to HERE recognizes as several key distinguishers of high-quality WBL:

- Work-based learning programs that provide on- and off-site exposure to work
- Postsecondary readiness teams that coordinate college and career exploration
- Advisement programs that support academic achievement, social-emotional learning, and college and career exploration
- Dedicated staff to run these programs
- Paid summer work-based learning experiences and internships

Although New York State discourages districts from using Option 2 in isolation from work-based learning activities, as this allows the passage of one test to act as a standalone fulfillment of the "+1" pathway, the State still allows Option 2. Due to the benefits of Option 1, this paper will focus primarily on how this pathway CDOS lends itself to increased resources for WBL.





:: CDOS IN PRACTICE

# How is the CDOS currently used in schools?

At the school level, little information about CDOS implementation has been collected systematically. This is in part due to the fact that CDOS usage is not widespread, but also to the lack of centralized monitoring of the CDOS, at either the state (NYSED) or local (NYCDOE) level.

Schools that do implement the CDOS credential for a wider population of students (beyond those with an IEP) tend to favor the "+1" pathway via Option 2, as the resources, infrastructure, and support required are significantly less than that of a robust WBL program.

One charter high school assessed for this paper uses the CDOS as an option for students who do not pass a fifth Regents Exam. Their preferred assessment, like other schools who have adopted Option 2 of the CDOS, is the SkillsUSA Exam. This charter school reports that the SkillsUSA Exam has proven easy for students to pass with as little as four preparation sessions, offered to students during lunch time for a single week of the academic calendar.

Although this specific charter school does offer a range of activities that align with the work-based learning requirements of the CDOS Option 1—internships, college and career readiness prep that begins in the 9th grade—these activities have remained disconnected from CDOS credentialing. According to one school administrator,

"our internship program is for our high flyers; our CDOS program is more for our low flyers."

Rather than programming intensive activities that can both qualify some students for Option 1 of the CDOS and complement the diplomas of "high flyer" students who have passed five Regents exams, the school reserves WBL opportunities for a small portion of the student population.

Across local high schools, the CDOS is often relegated to a particular use: a safeguard or alternative for students unable to meet other graduation requirements. Oddly enough, this is particularly true of schools that have significant resources for WBL programming.

One reason why schools may utilize Option 2 rather than leveraging the CDOS to support existing WBL programs through Option 1 is low levels of public sector support. Despite the expansion of credential eligibility to all students, public sector support has been slow to meet state-level policy reforms. Unlike CTE schools, which exhibit resources similar to those of the CDOS and receive funding to support these resources, schools that embrace CDOS Option 1 of do not receive funding to staff and run their programs. Funding specifically allocated for CDOS program development or expansion has yet to be identified or secured. Furthermore, implementation of credentialrelated programs is far from systemized, as each school exhibits a unique set of student needs, pre-existing infrastructure, and networks of local employers and community-based organizations that can support work opportunities for students.

One administrator at a high school we spoke to—a school that currently awards the CDOS only to students with IEPs—is interested in the credential's potential for general education students, but concerned by how much support partner organizations may offer. "There is often a trail of consultants that come with every new initiative like this," the administrator shared. The potential costs of building out a rigorous CDOS program and the precarity of dedicated support may impact the school's ability and willingness to take advantage of the credential. This underscores a substantial obstacle to enhancing the perception and use of the CDOS.

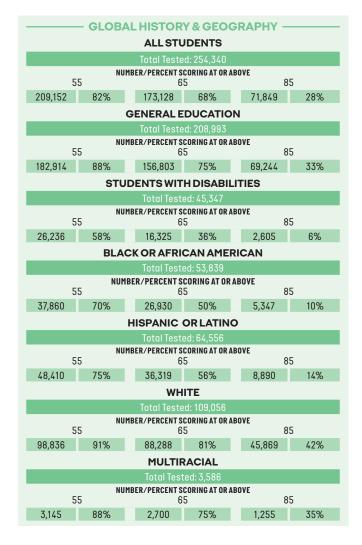
# How can the CDOS support career pathways and work-based learning for students?

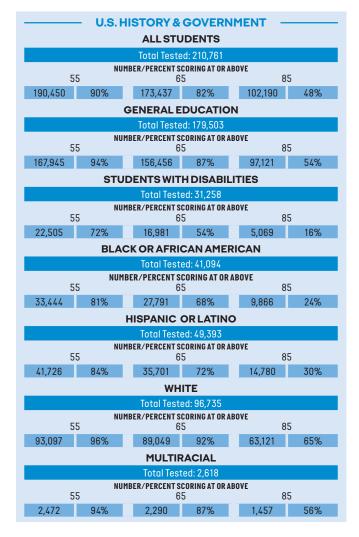
Through endorsement of the CDOS as a fully recognized graduation pathway for general education students, the New York State Board of Regents offers an opportunity for high schools and high school allies interested in WBL to more intentionally embed activities, particularly through the "+1" pathway.

CDOS Option 1 offers schools the chance to certify a set of experiences, including 216 hours of WBL activities that help students develop interests, sustain engagement in high school curriculum, increase their understanding of labor markets and postsecondary pathways, and learn skills that increase their likelihood of post-graduation success, among others. By validating WBL experiences as a metric of achievement toward a diploma, CDOS allows high schools to redirect resources previously used to prepare students for a fifth Regents exam—notably teaching staff

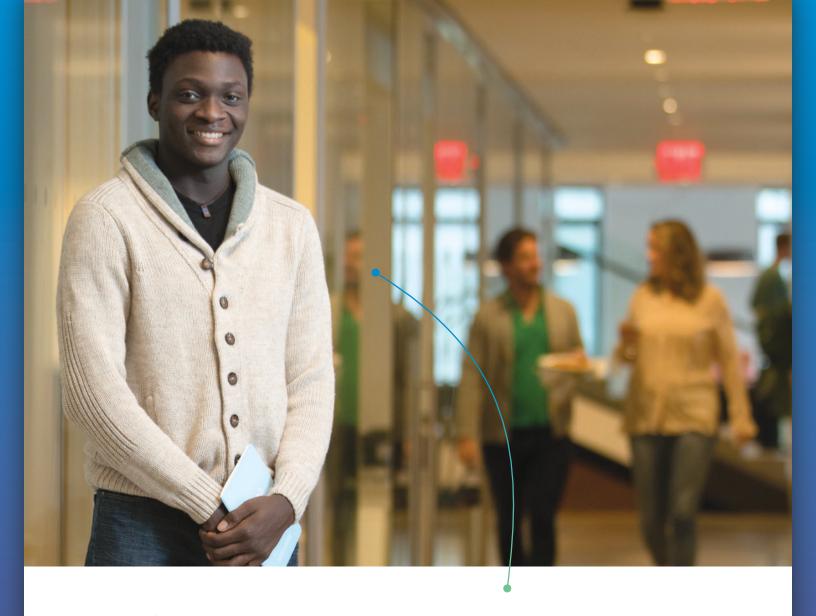
and time—toward a "+1" graduation pathway or a diploma endorsement.

The Global and U.S. History exams, notoriously difficult Regents exams, are strong candidates for CDOS substitution and a prime example of an area where schools can repurpose resources and programming toward WBL, all without tapping new resources or staff. Because these tests are difficult to passyet, along certain pathways, required to graduate, many students can become trapped in a cycle of preparing again and again for an exam—resulting in schools carving out even more time for preparation and re-tests, often pulling students away from other lessons or learning experiences. Although the content of these two exams may help build a solid sense of civic engagement, students might benefit as much if not more from the authentic civil engagement of fered by internships.





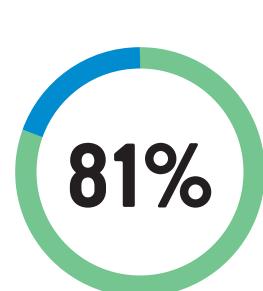
The CDOS Pathway | Fall 2019 Source: NYSED



To encourage NYC schools to commit exam resources to CDOS, WBL supporters like HERE to HERE and our partner organizations should work with school staff to identify pre-existing structures and activities—including community service projects, internship programs, college prep, and advisory activities—as programs that can be more intentionally embedded in curriculum and built out to benefit entire student populations. Many schools offer hands-on opportunities like those mentioned. Others offer programs that go far beyond advisory programs or student service projects.

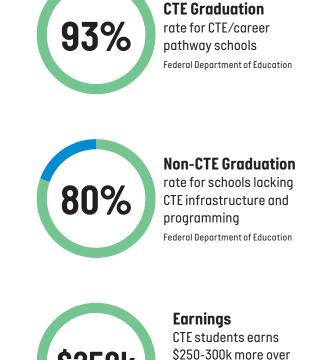
**New Visions** schools, for example, offer opportunities for students to learn about career clusters of interest (such as health sciences, criminal justice, law and government, communications, environmental sciences, and engineering) in which students develop a knowledge of the field through work site visits, job shadowing, and engagements with professionals. Schools that offer similar programs would find great benefit in utilizing the CDOS, as they already have the infrastructure to redirect resources toward WBL programs.

In addition to any
pre-existing infrastructure,
WBL supporters should point
to the benefits of WBL, listed
earlier in this document,
and research regarding
the specific benefits of
CTE programs. CTE can
be elevated within a CDOS
program as a way for
non-CTE students to reap
the same gains.



...of high school dropouts would have remained in school if they had CTE options

Association of CTE



their careers than non-CTE students Advance CTE 2016 Report

Supporters might mention that in 2015 alone, 39 states instituted 125 CTE-supporting laws, policies, and regulations with some states doubling or tripling state funding for CTE programs. Or, that Brookings reports show students who participate in CTE programs will experience, on average, a 2% wage increase for each year of upperlevel vocational coursework, suggesting CTE participation leads to increased earning power.

Furthermore, the collaborative research of Janine Bempechat, Maureen E. Kelly, David L. Blustein, and Joanne R. Seltzer in "Fostering Positive Youth Development Through Work-Based Learning: The Cristo Rey Model", finds evidence to support the relationship between enhanced graduation and post-graduation outcomes and a workoriented curriculum. The Cristo Rey Network of high schools is a collective of Catholic college preparatory secondary schools and a WBL exemplar. This paper finds that the appropriation of work-based learning into the academic sphere helps Cristo Rey Network students develop better time-management skills, build adaptive social skills, and increase their capacity to apply academic knowledge to workplace tasks—all of which supports increased graduation rates and post-graduation outcomes. Given these findings, Bepechat et al. encourage scholars and

policymakers to seriously consider introducing rich, rigorous, work-based learning tools to help students identify integral connections between academic achievement and career achievement.

WBL supporters should also direct state attention to the growth of career readiness programs connected to NYC public schools, such as Summer Scholars, Industry Scholars, Career CLUE, and other opportunity-offering programs that showcase the positive effects of WBL.

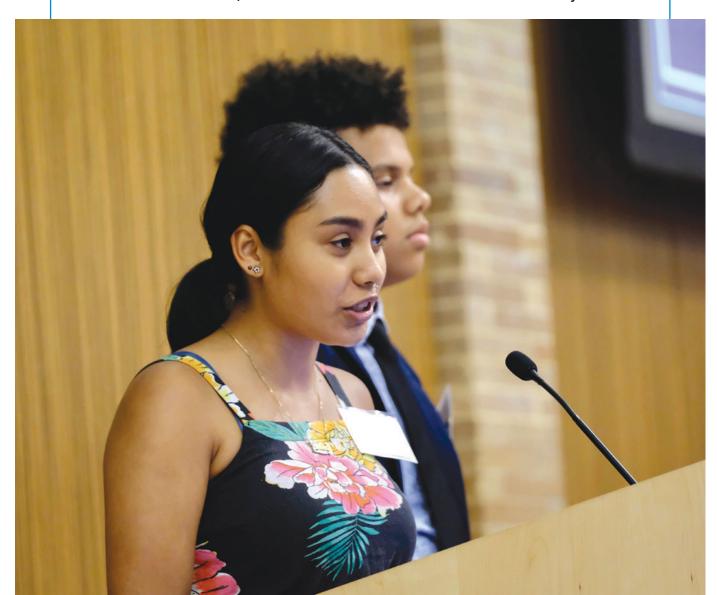
One example is SYEP (Student Youth Employment Program), a program run by DYCD (Department of Youth and Community Development) that provides paid summer opportunities for students between the age of 14 and 24. In 2018, DYCD launched its SYEP School-Based Initiative in partnership with the City of New York and HERE to HERE. Unlike traditional SYEP, which has a general application for students applying to internships, this program allotted a certain number of opportunities to individual high schools, including five schools in the HERE to HERE network: Bronx Academy for Software Engineering, Bronx International, DreamYard Preparatory, Fannie Lou Hamer, and H.E.R.O. High.

The pilot program
was highly successful,
providing 516 paid,
5-6 week, summer
opportunities for
high school students.

In participating HERE to HERE network high schools, the program significantly expanded the number of students engaged in summer internships. At Bronx Academy for Software Engineering, 43% of the entire student population had summer internships. At Bronx International this number was 27%, at DreamYard just over 50%, at Fannie Lou Hamer, 43%, and at H.E.R.O. High 41%.

SYEP's school-based option represents an important step forward for DYCD and the youth it serves, as it offers students the chance to experience work related to their academic experience, and empowers schools to have a year-round impact on their students' lives. Across the country, programs that support WBL are growing in response to increased conversation around the need for career readiness and the exciting, potential methods in which students can get there.

Wildlife Conservation Society Intern (WCS) speaking about her experience. In summer 2018, WCS hosted 85 interns from the HERE to HERE network)



# What are possible directions for the CDOS moving forward?

The CDOS has strong potential to be a vehicle for expanded WBL programming but may need to overcome certain challenges associated with its origin as a credential traditionally earned by students with an IEP or students unable to meet more rigorous graduation requirements. As a step forward, HERE to HERE offers the following recommendations for how the CDOS can be elevated, supported, and used to expand workbased learning in New York City high schools:

- The CDOS must be rebranded as a preparatory credential for all students. Although the CDOS was initially intended for a select group of students, it can now ensure all students are prepared to exit high school and achieve high levels of success in their postsecondary education and careers. With the support of public education officials, CDOS advocates should broadcast the accessibility of the CDOS to all students and promote the benefits of WBL. It is important that both the short-and long-term advantages of WBL are highlighted, including the immediate value of internships and skills development, the future value of increased high school and postsecondary graduation rates, and greater earning power.
- Schools seeking to expand the use of the CDOS credential must determine a route of implementation

- involving high levels of academic rigor to ensure robust programs and dedicated support. Schools and organizations that support CDOS must articulate how the credential provides a high-quality pathway for all students, either as an endorsement to a diploma or a "+1". The more the CDOS is utilized as a pathway for all, including low-, average-, and high-performing students, the more that it will garner needed, broad support. When CDOS provides quantifiable success for students across achievement levels—meaning all CDOS-earning students are prepared to exit high school and well-positioned for entry-level jobs—schools and supporters gain evidence for continued or increased support and resources.
- Integral to establishing a student-wide, high-success reputation of the CDOS is developing assessment metrics that certify the credential's value, including transparency about the pathways students take to graduate. To date, there are no explicit measures for assessing CDOS program quality and little testimonial encouragement for schools interested in developing CDOS-aligned programs. Advocates for CDOS expansion in the public sector must develop tools—program guides, examples, rubrics, and practice standards, among others—to outline best practices and provide a structure for implementing strong programs.



- Within schools and organizational partners, tools should be created to manage and assess the WBL opportunities embedded within the CDOS pathway. Schools may consider adopting an internship management tool such as ImBlaze, which provide students a platform to review and apply for opportunities. Schools should also create or embed tools to determine internship quality, including how deeply work experiences relate to academic learning and student interests, the level of agency and responsibility offered by the work experience, socialemotional growth attained, and student capacity to grow professional networks within the work environment. Schools should recognize and embed a set of previously mentioned key distinguishers to guide all graduation pathways and prepare students for life after high schools.
- Public education officials should assist broader, high-quality CDOS implementation with supportive infrastructure that schools can access. The NYCDOE is developing informational materials about the CDOS and should expand these efforts to include helping schools identify, develop, and promote quality within CDOS-qualifying experiences, and the administrative measures—such as programming in STARS—that realize CDOS implementation.
- Public officials should begin their effort by conducting a review of existing CDOS programming and assessing their potential. At a local level, NYC will have to take an additional step, prior to assessing existing CDOS programs, to enhance its internal coding for exit diplomas to reflect different pathways. Internal coding should make transparent if students reached graduation via the CDOS credential and if so through which pathway. A comprehensive coding system would clarify if a student earned the CDOS through a "+1" pathway versus any other, and whether or not the credential was earned through Option 1 or Option 2. Such nuanced internal coding would assist NYCDOE and NYC advocates in establishing a more detailed understanding of the pathways and supports that lead to student graduations.
- Strong WBL programs require resources to assist staff, such as work-based learning coordinators and dedicated teams of college and career advisors: NYCDOE support is needed to ensure schools are properly staffed with teachers certified to teach WBL-centered courses. In order for CDOS implementation to be rigorous and comprehensive, schools need CTE teachers and WBL coordinators to support student opportunities and progress along graduation pathways. These teachers must receive special training that qualifies them as CTE teachers or WBL coordinators, and the NYCDOE should allocate funding to grant these schools the access and



resources required to certify their teachers. CTE and WBL certification, at present a good practice, should become common practice. Certified teachers are essential to quality CDOS pathways; every school should have the tools and funding to build qualified staff. .

• Ideally, local or state education officials will provide funding for schools seeking to develop high-quality CDOS programs with strong connections to external organizations. Schools that provide comprehensive, WBL-focused CDOS programs should be funded as CTE schools are funded. This level of funding is especially critical as certain school districts do not have the luxury of opportunity in close proximity and must confront a set of logistical costs, such as transportation and insurance. Although CDOS can ultimately curb costs, as resources that might traditionally go toward preparing students for a fifth regents exam can be redirected into a CDOS program, adequate funding and support allows CDOS programs to expand more quickly and with less logistical hurdles.

If the CDOS remains unfunded or undersupported, the credential's capacity to support meaningful WBL opportunities as essential components of college and career preparation for all high schoolers in New York State will take more time for full realization and may remain concentrated only among schools already engaging in WBL. Another danger is that inadequate support may reinforce the credential's use as a backup option for students who cannot pass all five Regents exams. Without proper funding to drive the initiative forward with support and urgency, the CDOS may remain in a position of limited use despite its potential to enhance all students' high school experience.

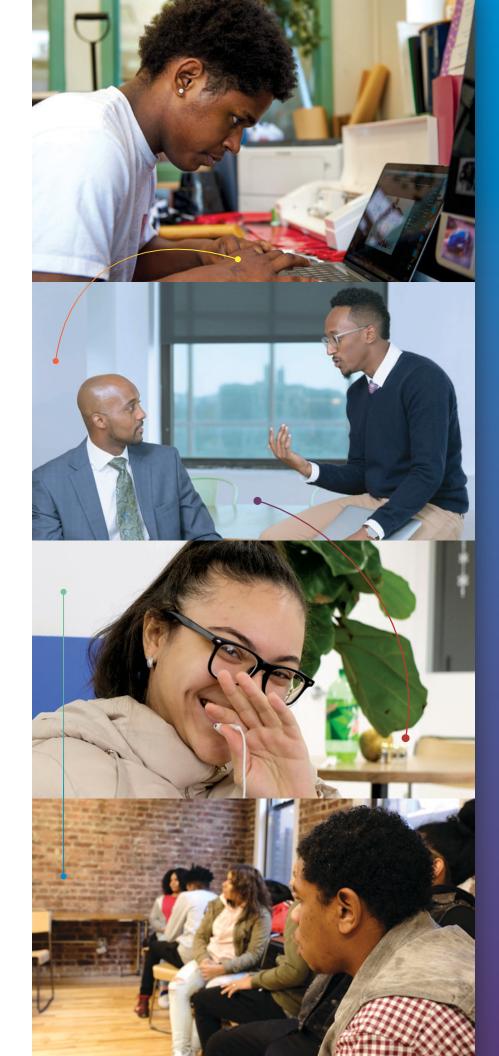
Although some of our recommendations for leveraging CDOS to expand WBL fall specifically on schools and public policy officials, the concerted effort of all, with additional support from community partners, is required to mobilize a shift in the use of and culture around CDOS to benefit all students. Through these recommendations HERE to HERE aims to galvanize schools, community-based organizations, and policymakers interested in work-based learning.

# **Conclusion**

This HERE to HERE Policy Brief seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the CDOS credential, its current uses and challenges, and its potential to develop and amplify work-based learning in New York City high schools.

New changes to CDOS policy make the credential an enticing option for expanding WBL and career pathway programs in New York City high schools, programs that provide students with the knowledge, skills, experience, and agency to graduate and progress toward continued education and rewarding careers. Because CDOS and WBL require similar resources, and because strengthening CDOS-aligned programs can effectively strengthen WBL programs, supporting the credential is a smart, intentional investment in the academic and professional success of students. We hope this brief provides a foundation to determine how NYC and other communities might support a more conscientious, deliberate use of the CDOS.





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Burman, J. & Beattie, J. Board of Regents Expands Safety Net Option for Students with Disabilities to Earn Local Diploma. nysed.gov

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Universal Foundation Skills. p1-46.
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casas.org

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p12.nysed.gov

Learning Standards for Career Development and Occupational Studies at Three Levels. p1-53.

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