

With New York City having passed a record budget bolstered by a significant infusion of funds from the American Rescue Plan (ARP)—including \$6.1 billion directly to NYC government, an additional approximately \$4.5 billion for NYC K-12 programming and \$1.3 billion for higher education—and potentially other resources from forthcoming federal legislation, we have a unique opportunity to address some of the [long-term challenges](#) the most vulnerable communities faced during the pandemic and build for a better future, beginning with preparing our youth for career success.

The supporters of [Pathways to Prosperity NYC: Building an Inclusive, Thriving Economy, Powered by Our Students](#) call on New York City's leaders to use future recovery and stimulus funding to create an equitable youth talent development system that will strengthen our economy and level the playing field for all New Yorkers seeking economic opportunity.

We are advocating for a system that will yield high returns to both youth and employers. To build this new system, we propose using future rounds of recovery and stimulus funding in two ways: first, as seed money toward the transformation of the high school experience, and second, to create new models to support youth transitions to careers and college. Both of these approaches rely on braided pathways, which bring the world of work into students' educational experiences, helping them gain skills, self-direction, and networks, while providing our economy with better prepared local talent.

1 Prepare NYC Students for the 21st Century Through Braided Learning

New York City youth faced a range of disparate outcomes prior to the pandemic, with Black and Brown students less likely to complete degrees and obtain the best paying jobs. This outlook has only worsened in the past year: NYC has seen an alarming drop in college enrollment among low-income students, and the number of disconnected youth, who are neither in school, nor working, has soared. Underneath these numbers is the story of students at tremendous risk of moving on from high school without a clear post-secondary pathway in front of them, and facing a range of barriers that have been greatly exacerbated by COVID. Many students who graduate from high school having had almost no post-secondary exploration and advisement, attempt to transition without the skills, knowledge, or networks with which to select the appropriate next step that aligns with their talents, interests and the labor market, much less succeed in it.

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We must use our recovery resources to create high school experiences that position students to make informed decisions about what happens after high school. The best source for that information is students' tangible experiences with the real world. Investing in these types of experiences early on will make a world of difference and lead to cost-savings as these young people enter the working world with the professional skills, professional networks, and experience to navigate difficult job markets. We encourage NYC to use recovery funds to make that a reality through the following priorities:

- **Enact universal, school-connected youth employment.** Recovery funds give us an ideal opportunity to reorient our high schools to offer young people the broader set of skills, understanding of the real world, and invaluable social networking connections that come from meaningful, paid work. Right now these benefits only accrue to students who attend a handful of the City's schools or whose families can provide these experiences outside of school. Stimulus funds provide us the opportunity to make this a systematic part of every student's education.

Every public high school student should have the option of a paid summer job that aligns with their interests, created with the support of their schools. Schools will then be well positioned to braid learning from work into their student supports, curriculum, and course sequences beginning in 9th grade. Through **SYEP** and/or school-year programs, we can ensure that every high school student graduates with a set of real-world work experiences that can empower them with deeper knowledge about their own skills, interests and the labor market so they can make an informed decision about careers and the additional education so that they are positioned for success and to contribute to the New York's economy.

- **Fund WBL/Recovery Coordinator Positions.** The pandemic and related school closings have eroded the sense of community that many high schools rely on to keep students engaged. In September 2021, only the senior class of New York City high schools will have ever spent an entire school year in their building, and even they will not have done so for three years. More than ever, schools face the need to re-engage students through meaningful and engaging activities. Classroom academic work alone will not fill this need, and schools across the city are seeking ways to connect their programming to students' lives and needs. Remediation and acceleration may be necessary for some students who have lost ground. But students are seeking tangible ways to contribute to NYC's recovery and contribute to current and long-term solutions. not perceived as a problem that needs to be solved.

New York City stimulus money can support real-world, work-based learning with dedicated staff. Full-time **work-based learning coordinators (WBLCs)** can develop relationships and design activities in collaboration with employers, community-based organizations (CBOs) and workforce organizations to create meaningful opportunities for students to contribute to their neighborhood's recovery. This, in turn, will lead to much better graduation rates and post-secondary outcomes. Just as parent coordinators allowed schools to truly prioritize

family engagement, WBLCs can open up schools to their communities in ways that are not possible as add-ons to teachers' existing workloads.

2 Expand NYC Service Year and Corps Models to Put Youth Talent Development at the Forefront of our Recovery

As we bring our high schools into the 21st century braided learning, we must also ensure that there are options for the tens of thousands of young people who graduate each year to take the next step to careers or college.

- [Service year](#) and [youth corps](#) strategies for young people ages 18 through 25 can solve many challenges facing our economy—we can use recovery/stimulus funds to expand these investments and strengthen our youth talent development system. These investments should be directed at models that braid learning from work into traditional academic pathways for DOE high school and CUNY students. Service year and corps models should be incentivized to support participants in earning DOE and/or CUNY academic credit for their participation; building the essential professional skills and networks that are so critical to future success; developing opportunities for participants and employers to engage in meaningful learning opportunities; and transitioning from high school into the workplace and/or a post-secondary credential program including addressing any academic needs.

The [Bronx Recovery Corps at Lehman College](#), developed using the practitioner-driven [Key Distinguishers for Integrated Work Based Learning](#), and the recently announced [Brooklyn Recovery Corps](#), are examples of how schools and employers can work together to make this happen.

- **Development of new applied degrees at CUNY.** Many NYC students in post-secondary are working while they pursue a degree. Additionally, many of the skills that are critical for success in jobs of the future—problem solving, collaboration, time and project management, customer service, relationship building—are best learned in the workplace through practice. This presents a terrific opportunity for CUNY to build on its initiative to provide credit for prior learning to develop applied degree programs that provide credit for concurrent learning.

[Now is the moment to rebuild an economy that is stronger than it was before](#)—an equitable, thriving economy includes young people of color and is powered by local talent. Rather than employing a quick fix to long-term issues of economic inequality, we are advocating for an approach that leads to a proven return on investment. With these new strategies, we can position New York City's young people for meaningful careers, meet the changing needs of employers, drive economic growth, reduce inequality and create a vibrant economy that works for all New Yorkers.

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