

Widening Postsecondary Pathways in High Schools

NOTES
from the
FIELD

Insights from NYC Educators

By Janice Bloom and Reid Higginson | September 2023

Notes from the Field is a series of reports featuring CARA's latest insights from our work with students, educators, and community partners.



College Access: Research & Action
www.caranyc.org

Executive Summary



Drawing on extensive conversations with educators from nine New York City public schools, this report identifies some major successes of the city's current efforts to expand career pathways, as well as several critical gaps. Four consistent themes raised by educators across school sizes and types were:

- 1 College AND career:** While wanting to remain wary of a return to tracking, educators saw the shift from “college access for all” to “postsecondary success for all” as a positive change that has potential to expand opportunities for *all* of their students.
- 2 Centralized and vetted resources for postsecondary options:** School counselors were excited to learn more about the wealth of career-focused postsecondary options that already exist in NYC, but they saw a pressing need for a centralized and vetted set of resources to make those options more accessible to educators, families, and students.
- 3 Equitable access to work-based learning opportunities:** Educators were concerned that too many of the newly created work-based learning opportunities serve high-performing students, and are difficult for students with the greatest needs to access.
- 4 Time and support for implementation:** School staff need more planning and professional development time and resources in order to be able to create a set of sequenced and developmentally appropriate career-connected experiences for their students.

Introduction

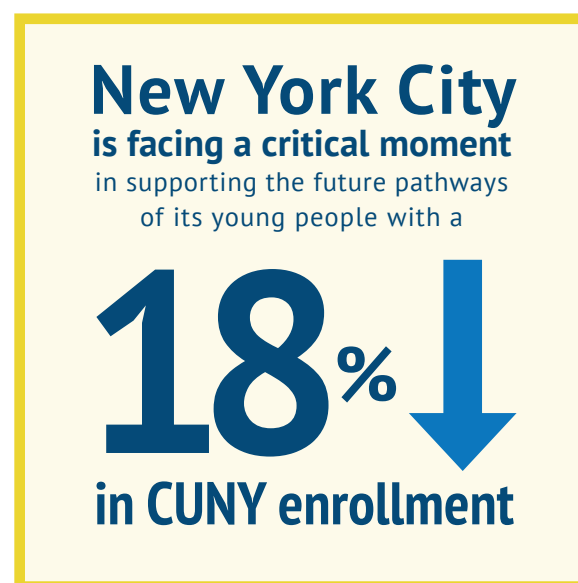
As it moves beyond the pandemic, New York City is facing a critical moment in supporting the future pathways of its young people. The crisis of the past several years has exposed a series of leaks in the pipeline from high school graduation to good jobs. These include a declining belief in the power of a college degree to provide access to a family-sustaining career, which has contributed to an **18% decline in CUNY enrollment**; emerging data showing that young New Yorkers, particularly those from Black and Latinx communities, are **under-represented in internships in high-earning fields**; and recent research revealing that earnings for New York-born Black and Latinx college graduates are **lower than those who move to NY from other states**.

To address these issues, city leadership and a set of new New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) programs are working to help high schools shift to focus on better preparing young people for career success. These efforts aim to begin career exploration earlier, provide more students with career-connected learning experiences, and more thoughtfully connect postsecondary education with career plans.

College Access: Research & Action (CARA) is one of the many organizations in New York City engaged in this effort. Over the last 12 years, CARA has played a central role in helping New York City public schools increase their students' postsecondary access. Working directly with NYCPS' Office

of Student Pathways¹ as well as with individual schools, CARA has built both a model of 9th-12th grade postsecondary access infrastructure and a set of peer leadership programs focused on college access. While career development was always part of CARA's work, the lessons of the pandemic have made it a more central goal.

In order to understand how to operationalize this shift, CARA collaborated this past year with two organizations with expertise in career pathways for young adults, **JobsFirstNYC** and **Shared Lane**. JobsFirstNYC advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults in the pursuit of economic opportunities; Shared Lane promotes youth career pathways by providing resources and customized support to schools seeking to enhance their career readiness programs.



¹ Previously the Office of Postsecondary Readiness.

Together, we hosted a series of summits with nine NYCPS high schools, all of whom had previously worked with CARA's College Inquiry program for at least 3 years to build a 9th-12th grade college access infrastructure. Each school sent a team of administrators, counselors,² and teachers to the summits. Over the course of the year, through providing resources, sample lessons, and time for collaboration, the summits helped school teams meaningfully integrate career exploration, career experiences, and application processes for non-college career programs into their existing postsecondary infrastructure. Coming out of these summits, CARA and JobsFirstNYC created a set of **Ways to Get Started on Career Pathways** one-pagers for school leaders, counselors, and teachers.

As part of its policy research, CARA also took the opportunity to learn about the challenges schools face when doing this work. During site visits, coaching sessions, focus groups, and interviews, we listened carefully to the reflections of these educators to understand what they were excited about, to observe what efforts were successful, and to come away with a wider set of strategies to better support them.

While the nine schools that participated in the summits are only a tiny fraction of the hundreds of public high schools in New York City, they represent a cross-section of the city's diverse school structures and student demographics. Among participating schools, two are public charters, two are large comprehensive high schools, and five are small schools;³ one of the small schools

specializes in serving English Language Learners. The nine schools span all boroughs but Staten Island and represent the diversity of the city, enrolling 95% students of color, 83% students with high economic need, and 17% students with IEPs. Their postsecondary enrollment rates range from 57% to 93%.

Importantly, the schools also have varying experiences with career education. Several were participants in the city's new **FutureReadyNYC** and **Career Readiness and Modern Youth Apprenticeship (CRMYA)** programs and they range from having all students in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to having no CTE programs. In this way, they reflect the sweep of issues that schools across the city are encountering as they work to expand career exposure and widen postsecondary pathways for their students.

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² Because there has historically not been an official college or postsecondary counseling position in the NYC public school system, this role is played by a range of people at different schools, including guidance counselors, teachers, and non-NYCPS staff.

³ With fewer than 550 students.

Below, we share what we heard as we listened to these conversations over the course of the year. Four themes emerged across all of the school types and sizes; they reveal important progress, but also some critical gaps that need to be addressed.

- 1 **College AND career:** While wanting to remain wary of a return to tracking, educators saw the shift from “college access for all” to “postsecondary success for all” as a positive change that has potential to expand opportunities for *all* of their students.
- 2 **Centralized and vetted resources for postsecondary options:** School counselors were excited to learn more about the wealth of career-focused postsecondary options that already exist in NYC, but they saw a pressing need for a centralized and vetted set of resources to make those options more accessible to educators, families, and students.
- 3 **Equitable access to work-based learning opportunities:** Educators were concerned that too many of the newly created work-based learning opportunities serve high-performing students, and are difficult for students with the greatest needs to access.
- 4 **Time and support for implementation:** School staff wanted more planning and professional development time and resources in order to be able to create a set of sequenced and developmentally appropriate career-connected experiences for their students.

Our conversations also revealed that while a stronger focus on careers is needed, it is not a panacea for the many deeper challenges facing students, educators, and schools in the post-pandemic city.

For each theme, we include the voices of educators. Each of the sentiments quoted below were echoed by many of their peers.

1 **College AND career:** Talking about college AND careers in grades 9-12 expands opportunities for all students.

While staff can be wary of new initiatives, there was a rare consensus among the educators we spoke to across schools about the value of the move from “college access for all” to “postsecondary success for all.” Educators described several reasons for welcoming this shift.

Starting conversations about life after high school with a focus on careers engaged MORE students in thinking about postsecondary paths: School staff noted that in previous years, students who were unsure about going to college often felt like they had no place in postsecondary conversations. As one counselor said, “When we start by talking about college, then that automatically shuts down the conversation for anyone not thinking about college.” By starting postsecondary lessons with discussions of careers, teachers saw more students feel included. One teacher, for example, explained the energizing effect of starting her postsecondary pathways class with a lesson on career exploration instead of the college essay:

“I would say when compared to last year, kids were much more invested in what they had to write about. They were asking these really great questions when our counselors came in. Like, Rafael Mendoza⁴ usually has his headphones on, but he was on fire, one question after another, one question after another. So I can see the difference that’s being implemented because of what I had learned here and bringing it back into the classroom.”

Career conversations helped ALL students make more thoughtful and informed postsecondary plans:

For students who planned to go to college, career lessons helped them think more deeply about their choice of major and how their education could lead to specific careers.⁵ One high school counselor explained how her team is helping college-bound students think more about connecting interests to career goals:

“I feel like so many kids go to college and they’re just like, I went because it’s what you told me to do. But we’re like, okay, but why are you there? And they have no idea. They don’t know what they want to study. They heard that [a business major] is going to make them become Bill Gates and become a millionaire overnight. But they actually have no idea [why they’re there]. Getting to that core of how what you like to do right now can actually translate into a career later on, that’s what we’re trying to focus on.”

Simultaneously, for students who did not plan on going to college, expanded career lessons gave educators a chance to help them think about obtaining additional training and

credentials, which are essential for getting a good job.⁶ As one teacher told us:

I can ask more questions, find out more, what else are you interested in? And for kids who feel like “I’m set, I have a job,” I can push them: Okay, [you have a job,] but you could make more money if you do this shorter program that’s not a four-year commitment. So it feels exciting to be better versed in that and to be able to rattle things off [for career training] the same way I can from my lived experience for college.

Despite harboring concerns about lowering expectations, on balance educators feel these changes are expanding rather than narrowing opportunities.

Cognizant of the ways in which vocational education had been used in the past to track low-income students and students of color away from college and high-paying careers, many educators started the 2022-23 school year concerned about the city’s shift away from college for all. While many see the need to continue to guard against lowered expectations, by the end of the year, they overwhelmingly saw talking about college and career rather than college or career as expanding options for students instead of taking them away. One counselor shared,

“I think sometimes people get a little nervous about, you know, we don’t want to backtrack and feel like we are maybe underestimating the kids again, trying to encourage workforce training programs when we should be still encouraging college. But I think they don’t have to be two separate things. They very much go hand in hand.”

⁴ Pseudonym

⁵ This aligns with [research on career development](#), which finds that students who pick majors aligned with their interests are more likely to persist in college.

⁶ According to [Georgetown University’s Center for Education and the Workforce](#), 80% of good jobs—defined as paying at least \$35k/yr for workers 25-44 and at least \$45k/year for workers 45-64—require some form of postsecondary education or credential.

Instead, over the course of the year, summit discussions often centered on the need to confront their own – and their fellow staff members’ – biases that college is the only path to a “good” job. Confronting those biases while guarding against tracking along the lines of race and class felt like a difficult, but critical, balancing act.

Educators also saw a need for school accountability measures to reflect this larger shift toward valuing a wider range of pathways, rather than focusing more narrowly on college matriculation. One administrator noted,

“There is always pressure on us in terms of what’s measured, what’s monitored, how our school is evaluated and presented to the public, what makes it appealing to families or teachers who might want to work with us. And a lot of what is publicized and published still really has to do exclusively with our success at getting students into college. So while our mindsets are shifting, it feels like there’s some catch-up to do there.”

Encouraging workforce training programs and encouraging college don’t have to be two separate things. They very much go hand in hand.

2 Centralized and vetted resources for postsecondary options: NYC has a wealth of career-focused postsecondary options; to make these programs more accessible to traditional high school students, information about them needs to be centralized and vetted.

Over the course of the year, educators – especially postsecondary counselors – expressed excitement as they discovered more about the tremendous range of programs available for students wishing to access career training directly after high school. However, they felt overwhelmed by the task of learning about and keeping track of the huge variety of programs across the five boroughs. Since helping students explore career training programs was new to many counselors, they commented that this difficulty finding and organizing information about programs “feels like a barrier for kids.”

One ‘aha’ coming out of the career pathways summits was that many of the systems for enrolling in workforce training programs were developed with young adults who are out of school and out of work as the intended audience – they were not designed to be used by high school counselors and students working within a traditional public school framework. Thus, the structures for sharing information about individual programs, their application processes, and their data on completion and employment outcomes were not built for the much larger group of adults and students now looking to understand and utilize them.

A number of intermediary organizations, including **One Goal, New Visions for Public Schools**, and **NYC Outward Bound Schools** have worked to fill in this void over the last several years.⁷ However, counselors tasked with advising high school seniors through the postsecondary application and matriculation process called on the city to create a more comprehensive database of programs that would be significantly easier to utilize. Specifically, in order to improve advising around career and workforce training options for high school seniors, they called for:

Detailed and standardized information on program quality, application processes, and location:

First, counselors commented on wanting more information on application processes. Because timelines and student eligibility can vary dramatically across programs and because many staff had never helped students with this type of application before, staff wanted information on applications to be more transparent. One counselor told us,

“I feel like I still don’t give or even know fully how to give the information to students who college isn’t their option. I’ve never even done an application with a student to get them into some kind of alternate program. I still feel like there’s so many, and I haven’t had students do them.”

Second, staff shared that a database would need to be searchable based on a range of characteristics, such as career field and location. This was especially common among staff working in areas with fewer programs, as one counselor described:

“Many of these programs are regional. I used to work at a high school in Brooklyn and the programs I knew and that we sent students to were completely different from where I am now, where most of our students are from Manhattan and the Bronx. I’m still working to learn what’s available over here.”

Finally, as Americans across the country have begun to question whether or not college is in fact a good financial investment, educators are rightfully asking about the return on investment (ROI) of the alternatives that are being offered. As they thought about directing students to these new pathways, they wanted information on program cost, completion rates, and job placements/earnings. Without this, many staff raised concerns about students choosing low-quality programs that would, in fact, lead them down the dead-end pathways they had been working for many years to help their students avoid. As one assistant principal told us:

I feel like the New York City Department of Education should be providing for us, here are all of these programs, here are the ones that have no cost, here are the ones that you have to pay back when you start earning, here is the rate of people actually getting jobs at the end.

⁷<https://onedegreecareers.com/> is another database working to fill this need.

“I feel like the New York City Department of Education should be providing for us, here are all of these programs, here are the ones that have no cost, here are the ones that you have to pay back when you start earning, here is the rate of people actually getting jobs at the end. I mean, how is anybody doing this now? You don’t know if you’re steering a kid to something that really is some for-profit.”

A format easily accessible for staff, students, and families, in multiple languages:

Counselors noted that because their role is not to pick programs for students – but rather to help students and their families explore and choose one – it is important that a database be accessible not just for them, but also for students and families and “in terms that people who aren’t educators can understand and not feel like it’s too overwhelming.” One teacher explained:

“If New York City is saying career training is an important component of education, then there should be a more centralized resource than a spreadsheet that you guys are providing to us. CUNY, SUNY, like those are all things you could access really easily and then very straightforward. Why can’t there be just a more uniform system, for students, for families that are in multiple languages, just like a lot of the New York City resources are? So that the process doesn’t seem like a mystery.”

Centralized information about career-focused programs at CUNY, and the financial aid available to pay for them: Counselors already had a sense that career-focused programs at CUNY – such as AAS (Associate of Applied

Science) programs and nondegree programs – could be strong postsecondary destinations for many of their students. However, they wanted to know more about these programs, explaining that they are much harder to find information about than traditional CUNY degree programs. In particular, they wanted information about the availability of financial aid for these programs to be more transparent, as there was confusion around which are eligible for aid. Lacking confidence in their knowledge about these programs’ cost made counselors hesitant to recommend them to their students.⁸

While developing a centralized database of career training programs would take work to create and maintain, many educators noted that these kinds of centralized and standardized resources are what have allowed them to increasingly support students’ navigation around college over the past 20 years. If the city wants to prioritize access to high quality career pathway programs, such a system, as well as time and training on how to use it, is needed. In the words of one counselor, “There needs to be a central resource place for these programs so that people can access these pathways. That exists for college stuff and that makes it more easily accessible.”

There needs to be a central resource place for these career training programs so that people can access these pathways.

⁸ While increased interest in CUNY’s career-focused programs indicates an opportunity for CUNY to expand these programs, there are several barriers that stand in the way of this expansion, including the lack of ASAP-type student supports for career focused and/or nondegree programs, and many certificate programs’ lack of eligibility for federal financial aid.

3 Equitable access to work-based learning opportunities: Too many of the newly created work-based learning opportunities for high school students are inaccessible to the students who need them most.

All of the schools we spoke with noted an expansion of work-based learning opportunities for their students over the past year, from the growth of SYEP slots over the summer, to NYCPS' new programs, to a range of programs run by intermediary organizations. At the same time, educators were unanimous in stating their concern that students who needed these opportunities the most – those already least likely to enroll directly in college – faced significant barriers in accessing them. The reasons for this included technical challenges, a lack of available programs, and issues with students not having time to participate while also meeting academic requirements.

Work-based learning programs for high school students often have more stringent documentation standards than public schools. School staff described a number of specific challenges that made participation in WBL programs more difficult. The most acute of these is for undocumented students, who are often unable to participate because legal issues prevent them from being paid.⁹ As one counselor told us, “unless you actually find someone who’s willing to pay you off the books and do all the workarounds, they really have limited options.”

Documentation was also an issue for many students who were U.S. citizens because many programs require filling out an I-9 form, which includes providing a driver’s license (or an NYC ID), a birth certificate, or another official document. One teacher described her school’s challenges with this:

“The driver’s license thing, that’s another goal. Figuring out a way that all students can either get New York State IDs or something else. That holds a lot of kids back because they don’t have them, but they need them for I-9 verification [for paid internships]. Documentation has been a big issue.”

Many work-based learning programs seek to enroll only the highest-performing students: While there are a growing number of work-based learning programs in NYC, educators noted that there are still far fewer opportunities than students (and it takes a tremendous amount of work to connect students to opportunities). Compounding this, many new internship and WBL programs for high schoolers, like many colleges, privilege the highest-performing students. As one school leader told us, “so many of the professional pathways partners that come to you, they’re looking for those higher-performing students.”

So many of the professional pathways partners that come to you, they’re looking for those higher-performing students.

⁹ Undocumented students had difficulty enrolling in workforce training programs after high school for this same reason and because many workforce organizations’ funding is contingent on job placement rates, making them unable to enroll undocumented students who may be unable to secure employment upon program completion.

This message came through in several ways. Some programs have academic requirements that disqualify many students, such as GPA cutoffs. Some include competitive applications for internships at “fancy” companies that give educators the impression they should only send their “fancy” students. Some programs even gave implicit indications that all students were not welcome; one teacher told us that their work-based learning partner said that they “don’t really have resources to accommodate students whose second language is English or students with IEPs.”

This meant that many of the students who benefited from new work-based learning programs this past year were students who already planned to go to college and were already participating in other career enrichment activities. Schools described a need for programs that aim to provide experiences to a broader range of students. As one counselor told us:

Educators felt strongly that participating in work-based learning was a critical way to support students who are less academically engaged.

“[We need] internships for not just the highest performing students. ‘Cause that’s who needs them the most. That’s who needs that confidence, who needs that ‘Oh this is what my vision is for my future.’”

Credit accumulation is a barrier to work-based learning for many students: Another obstacle to participating in work-based learning is that students who have failed classes or are missing credits often must make those up before they can participate in career-related opportunities. As one school leader said, “If you fail classes and need to go to summer school, you can’t participate in SYEP.” Similarly, leaders at schools with CTE programs said that when students fail classes, they need to prioritize repeating academic subjects with Regents exams, which often means these students cannot enroll in CTE classes.

Educators felt strongly that participating in work-based learning was a critical way to support students who are less academically engaged and struggle to feel that school is relevant. One teacher noted that there are many students “who feel like they have been looked over in our school.”

However, they found that the way opportunities are currently structured creates a vicious cycle that prevents these students from participating in WBL programs that might give them a greater sense of purpose and improve their achievement in school. One school leader explained:

“You’re constantly on that hamster wheel of failing classes during the year, making up for them in summer and never getting the exposure to careers that could inspire you to think, okay, wait, maybe I can figure out the school thing. You’re just constantly told that you can’t. And then you feel like you have no pathway out of that hamster wheel.”

Many educators pointed out that existing NYC Public School programs – including Learning to Work and Coop Tech – have served this group of students successfully in the past, but do not appear to be getting additional funding proportional to their importance, despite their explicit career focus. Some educators lamented that in recent years, “lots of the students who really needed [Coop Tech] didn’t get in.”

Increasing work-based learning opportunities is not a panacea; other underlying issues must also be addressed:

Concern about these other issues ran as a thread throughout our conversations this year, and a sense that many of the **challenges facing a large group of the city’s young people** – and their teachers and schools – are not ones this initiative

can address. Many school leaders noted that their student body includes higher percentages of students in temporary housing than before the pandemic; more students who are immigrants and still learning English; more high school-aged students who are still developing foundational math and literacy skills. These deeper needs often preclude students from focusing on the wonderful career exposure opportunities that schools might have to offer.

One school leader gave an example of the ways in which struggles with credit accumulation compound at both the individual and school level, such as precluding leadership from working with teachers to help connect students to career aspirations:

“As an administrator if I know that 50% of the 11th grade failed algebra, that means they have to go make up that credit. So if I’m talking to that math teacher, I’m not talking to that math teacher about making sure they’re interweaving careers in mathematics into their curriculum – because I need to talk to them about why 50% of the students are failing.”

Addressing these underlying needs cannot be worked around through career initiatives, but must be addressed directly. A school leader told us at the end of a summit,

“We get back to school tomorrow – and I’m just going to say something very bluntly that I don’t mean in any sort of disparaging way – but we get back to school tomorrow and it’s like, oh yeah, the kids can’t read.”

While helping students connect their learning to career pathways is a positive step forward, it is not a panacea.

You’re constantly on that hamster wheel of failing classes during the year, making up for them in summer and never getting the exposure to careers that could inspire you to think, okay, wait, maybe I can figure out the school thing.

4 Time and support for implementation: Creating an effective set of career-connected experiences for students requires a high degree of planning, professional development, and school-wide coordination.

As CARA wrote in **Organizing for Access: Building High School Capacity to Support Students' Postsecondary Access**, we have found that an effective college access program requires “close attention from school leadership in the first few years of implementation, shared ownership and accountability among teachers, as well as sufficient time to undertake this new strand of work.” School leaders and educators were excited by the possibilities of expanding WBL and career-connected learning¹⁰ in their schools, but noted that doing so successfully required the same type of leadership and coordination as it had for college access programming; if anything, it requires even more because the career work “is much more comprehensive.” School staff noted a greater need for this type of 9th-12th grade planning and coordination in the years ahead. They noted:

Effective pedagogy requires coordination from 9th-12th grade: CARA’s whole school approach emphasizes that conversations about postsecondary options need to begin no later than 9th grade, and then increase in amount and complexity each year that students are in high school.¹¹ Before the city’s current push for career exposure, some schools struggled to find ways to make space for early grade exposure to postsecondary options. NYCPS’ two new programs – **FutureReadyNYC** and

CRMYA – are creating an important push for this early awareness work by providing career curriculum and experiences for some students in grades 9 and 10. A leader at a large high school described the ways in which this had helped them to include some form of career curriculum in every grade:

“We’re now introducing information about career planning in different places – like in 9th grade English next year, and then for the kids in the apprentice program in 10th grade, and then we’re changing and expanding the junior and senior year [postsecondary class].”

However, this expansion has also overwhelmed schools with the level of curricular coordination required to implement so many new lessons, link them in a meaningful way, and differentiate them for students. As the leader above said:

“We need to go back and have a logical [approach to] what is happening in what year, when should it be introduced ... so that we’re not just saying the same thing over and over. And then that could connect to this idea of being able to identify students that need a different level of support by the time they’re reaching senior year.”

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¹⁰ Career Connected Learning and Work-based Learning are related yet distinct terms. As we understand it, work-based learning includes actual workplace experiences, while career-connected learning is more general and may be entirely classroom based.

¹¹ For more information on implementing this curriculum, such as what to include, where it can be taught within the school day, and the professional development needed to support it, see CARA’s **Organizing for Access** report.

Implementing career-connected learning is an area that many schools are inexperienced in, and struggle to coordinate:

Along with expanding career lessons in classrooms, schools are working to increase career connections outside of class, such as career fairs, workplace visits and internship programs. As with curriculum, however, educators noted the difficulty of ensuring that these opportunities were integrated in thoughtful ways so that they could connect to students' interests and make their way to the right students at the right time. One teacher, for example, described the intricacies involved in connecting in-class career lessons to outside internships:

"In my writing class, I had this week of career readiness lessons, but we're just trying to make sure it matches up with [opportunities]. Okay, you just made a résumé, let's use it now to actually apply to this internship."

Educators saw additional, shared PD time as critical to increasing the effectiveness of their work around careers.

Teachers and counselors also spoke about the difficulty of tracking students' interests and the opportunities they have participated in so that they can get connected with the most relevant experiences.¹² One school leader noted,

"What internships do kids have? Often I don't even know all the different internships they're doing. We have kids doing a character design workshop, we have kids doing this partnership, we have kids signing up for SYEP. How do all the teachers find out about this information and know what their advisees are doing?"

While some schools with strong CTE programs had many of these pieces in place in relation to their career theme, be it health science, hospitality, technology, or design, they noted that they were still unable to support the large number of their students who decided at some point during high school that they were not interested in the school's CTE theme. Unsurprisingly, given how few 13- and 14-year olds are able to identify lasting career interests when they are choosing a high school, this often comprises a large percentage of a school's students.

School-wide professional development is needed to do career work effectively:

Increasing the number of career-focused lessons means schools need staff capable of effectively delivering those lessons. School leaders appreciated receiving career-connected curriculum from NYCPS, but they also saw a need for more time and professional development to help teachers integrate the lessons meaningfully into their

¹²While there are tools that can help with this, such as [New Visions' Portal](#), using them consistently across grade levels and teams requires time, careful coordination, and professional development.

classes. Especially because many of these lessons were being taught in academic content areas, they wanted career connections to feel authentic, not like add-ons. One counselor explained the need she saw:

“I think people hear career-connected learning and then they don’t necessarily have the toolbox to actually do it. But if we make it really approachable then I feel like it would live a little more naturally. Instead of these like one-off lessons that are a little sometimes too mis-matchy.”

Educators saw additional, shared PD time as critical to increasing the effectiveness of their work around careers. A counselor noted that regular meetings that brought together the entire postsecondary team – teachers, counseling staff, and, critically, school leaders (as was done at the summits) – were important means of achieving this type of coordination and ensuring that staff across disciplines were having explicit conversations with students about career pathways.

“I think it takes a lot of stakeholders coming together. I think what worked best in this [the summits] was that a member of the administration was here. We have our work-based learning take place through the college office, and then to expand on that, we have conversations happening amongst leaders of advisories. Having all these stakeholders [be a part of those conversations is what] potentially could shift a culture.”

As high schools struggled to recover from the difficulties of the pandemic years, undertaking this new and additional mission often felt quite overwhelming. As they continue to engage with the many layered challenges of serving their students, coordination, time for professional development, and clear, long-term planning are essential to enable educators to be successful.

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Implications



In the emerging post-pandemic world, New York City is taking important steps to help link students' high school education to successful and sustainable career pathways. In order to ensure that these efforts are successful, and that all students benefit from them in the years ahead, we heard the following advice from school-based educators:

1 Continue efforts to shift from “college access for all” to “postsecondary success for all.” Current NYCPS efforts are critical steps in this direction, and attention, support, and funding for this work should continue. One school administrator told us, “It’s early days on apprenticeship. But if the DoE maintains focus and financial support, it will ultimately be beneficial.” Moving forward, it is important to a) align school accountability measures to these more varied outcomes, and b) be vigilant in ensuring that adding more career pathways options does not lead to a return to postsecondary tracking along race and class lines.

2 Carefully vet and centralize information about career-focused postsecondary programs for easy use by educators, students, and families. Many of the current workforce training programs – from programs designed for out-of-work, out-of-school youth to CUNY certificate programs and apprenticeship programs – are not well aligned to work with public school systems. These systems should be connected through a central database that includes:

- > application timelines, processes, and student eligibility
- > program costs and eligibility for financial aid
- > the ability to filter by characteristics such as career field, program length, and location
- > student outcomes (e.g., completion rates, employment rates, and earnings)
- > a format that is easy to navigate and understand
- > translation into multiple languages
- > PD and time for educators to integrate the system into their work

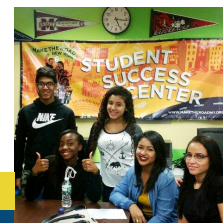
3 **Ensure that career-connected learning opportunities reach all students.** This was, hands down, the biggest concern of all the educators we spoke with. In order to do so, the city needs to:

- > **Work with employers and educators to broaden ideas of who will do well in internships.** For example, in our experience running peer-to-peer advising programs at CARA, many of our strongest peer leaders are students who are not the highest academic performers, but are committed to helping others.
- > **Be more creative in finding ways to combine credit accumulation with work-based learning,** rather than making credits a prerequisite to career-connected opportunities. This may include **integrating academic supports into career training programs**, or other approaches.
- > **Expand longtime programs with work-based learning elements, such as Learning to Work and Coop Tech, that are already part of NYCPS structures.** These programs have already solved for many of the complications newer workforce training programs are encountering, including cost (free!), a simple application form, longtime relationships with hands-on trade fields, and compatibility with high school schedules and graduation requirements.
- > **Continue to look for ways to expand opportunities for undocumented students.** The city has made admirable efforts **in this direction**; with the influx of migrants to the city, this need will only grow in the coming years.

4 **Provide time and resources for schools to coordinate and intentionally develop their career-connected programming.** Curriculum and connections to workforce partners are extremely helpful to schools, but they also need additional resources in order to integrate these pieces into their existing structures. These include time for relevant teams to meet, coaching by organizations who understand NYC school structures, and additional postsecondary advising staff with the bandwidth to develop expertise about both college and career pathways.

As the city continues its work to equip New York City's youth with the foundational skills they need to thrive as adults, it will be essential to listen carefully to the educators who work directly with those young people every day, and to center our students with the greatest needs at every step.

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About CARA

CARA's mission is to ensure that first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color have the knowledge and support necessary to enroll in and persist through postsecondary education. CARA works with high schools, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions to move access and success guidance from an 'enrichment for some' to an 'entitlement for all' model, and conducts applied research with practitioners and young people to advocate for more equitable postsecondary pathways.

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