

PROMISING PRACTICES IN WORKING WITH
YOUNG ADULTS



YDI

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

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These organizations work in several different New York City initiatives including: *Multiple Pathways to Graduation* (New York City Department of Education), *New Century High Schools Initiative* (New Visions for Public Schools) and the *Young Adult Capacity Initiative* (Youth Development Institute), as well as free-standing sites.

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INTRODUCTION

You Can Do This

You can do this,
my mind tells me you can do this.

You have no choice,
but to do this.

When will you ever make something out of your life?

You started it,
finish what you started,
Don't back out.

Think about it,
think about it hard and long.
Don't be weak
Be strong.

Don't think negative,
Think positive.

In the end
you'll be the one who's sure to win.
So keep on moving
Don't stop

You have a destination to be reached.
You have no choice.

You can do this.

– Corinne Dixon

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS

The feelings this young woman expresses speak volumes to those of us who work with youth who have left school without graduating or who are in danger of doing so. Their determination and struggle call on us to support and strengthen their opportunities and reduce the pressures both within and outside of them that threaten their success.

Today, work with these young people is gaining increased attention and support. There is recognition that efforts to reform high schools cannot succeed when large percentages of young people do not graduate. Nor can communities prosper when so many are unable to reap the economic and personal benefits of education. Strategies and models are urgently needed.

This publication describes practices and program models gathered from leading practitioners in New York City. It is compiled from in-depth conversations, written reports, meetings, and informal observations. It seeks to capture the learning of those who have successfully supported the efforts of these young people to advance, and enable other practitioners to join in this important work.

A NATIONAL CONCERN

The strongest predictor of whether a student will drop out is poor academic performance.¹ Students who fall behind in acquiring credits toward graduation who are truant or over-age for their grade level are at higher risk for dropping out than those who regularly attend school and acquire credits along with their peers. Also at risk are students who have adult responsibilities—parenthood, child or elder care, family support—as well as those involved with the criminal justice system.

In New York City at any given time, about 70,000 students, fully 20 percent of the high school population, are over-age and under-credited. Another 68,000 young people between 16 and 20 years of age have already dropped out. Once students fall behind—and nearly half of all ninth graders do—it is difficult for them to get back on track within their regular schools. Indeed, today only 19 percent of students who are over-age and under-credited graduate with a high school or equivalency diploma. That is what we seek to change.

Without a high school diploma, prospects for earning a living wage are slim. Today's economy demands at least some college, and a considerable amount of technological, verbal, and numerical literacy. Young people who are unprepared to earn a reasonable wage risk facing a life of poverty and truncated potential.

¹ Hess et al, 1987; Woods, 1995.

The cost of an uneducated population is measured by a sense of deep inequality in our communities, the enormous expense of welfare and other public support, and a threat to participatory democracy. We cannot afford this.

SOLUTIONS AND HOPE

With increased national attention to the issue, several cities have embarked on major efforts to reconnect this group of young people to their education and future. New York City has been a leader in these efforts. In 2005, Chancellor Joel Klein and his senior counselor for Education Policy, Michele Cahill, established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) to analyze the characteristics of this population and to create options that prepare these young people to meet graduation standards and move on to postsecondary education and careers. With support from Mayor Michael Bloomberg and from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, OMPG has developed an expanding and differentiated portfolio of strategies calibrated to the variety of situations and needs of this population.

Three types of programs and schools are now reaching thousands of youth in New York City: full-time “transfer high schools,” part-time Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs), and part- and full-time GED programs. Each of these strategies targets a specific segment of the population. Transfer schools are for students who are still enrolled in high school, have few credits, and can attend school full-time during regular school hours. YABCs operate in the late afternoons and evenings for 17 ½ -21-year olds with a minimum of 17 credits who attend only for the hours they need to finish their courses and exam requirements. GED programs are available during evenings at multiple locations throughout the city and confer a GED upon passage of a state exam. A cross-cutting initiative, Learning to Work (LTW), promotes student engagement and provides college and career preparation. All of these schools and programs emphasize student engagement, support services, jobs and career development, and planning for the future. Early results are promising, showing increases in attendance, graduation, and diploma acquisition rates.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT + HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION = PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

Young people, especially those who have disengaged, need both support and challenge to reconnect with learning and stay on a path to higher education and careers. Youth development principles that stress building on student assets and integrating family, school, and community make it possible to create features in schools that are essential to success: caring relationships, high expectations, engaging activities, experiences that build skills and knowledge, meaningful roles, and continuity in relationships.

These principles are increasingly understood to be fundamental to school success and need to be in place in any institution that serves adolescents.

Originally developed in connection with non-school programs for youth, they are becoming an increasingly integral part of high school reform efforts.

Academics have always been the cornerstone of formal schooling, but it is only recently that educators have systematically begun to understand and incorporate youth development principles into schools and GED settings. The models that provide multiple pathways to graduation underscore this integration of academics and youth development in their structure, organization, content, and process. They are operated by partnerships between the Department of Education and community-based organizations skilled in working with older youth. They respond to the particular strengths and needs of the young adult population and concentrate their resources on enabling young people to acquire the credentials, preparation, and networks that will ensure their success.

PROMISING PRACTICES AND DEDICATED PRACTITIONERS

The good news is that we know a fair amount about what works. Over the past 15 years, the fields of youth development and youth employment, truancy prevention, and academic learning and achievement have increased our understanding of what young people need to succeed and how to support vulnerable youths as they transition to adulthood.

In schools and programs across the city and country, youth workers and educators are working to help youth reclaim their futures. The briefs presented here describe practices drawn primarily from experiments in New York City, but they also reflect the national literature and research on student engagement and persistence, academic rigor and achievement, and organizational processes.

The collection begins with profiles of two successful efforts: South Brooklyn Community High School, a full-time alternative “transfer” school, and CUNY Prep Transitional High School, a GED program with college as its goal.

The briefs that follow describe key issues in reconnecting youth:

- [The Primary Person Approach](#)
- [Engaging Young Adult Learners](#)
- [Academics and Returning Youth](#)
- [Post-Graduation Planning for College and Careers](#)

They also address organizational structures and processes that facilitate implementation:

- [School and Community Partnerships](#)
- [Ensuring Program Quality](#)

Certain themes emerge repeatedly and, by nature and design, principles intersect and practices overlap. There are no easy answers. But when something clicks and young people find themselves and their way, it is important to capture what went right. As the field moves forward, it will be important to continue to document what works and evaluate its impact not just on graduation rates but on the full spectrum of developmental outcomes.

There is a lot to do. This collection also seeks to honor the caring adults who are re-engaging youth and the young people who have the courage and will to try again.

As always in describing practices, there is continuous evolution and refinement. Thus, while the guiding principles described above remain constant, the practices and program models may look different by the time you read this.

[References Cited](#)

G. Alfred Hess, et al. “‘Where’s room 185?’: How Schools Can Reduce Their Dropout Problem,” *Education and Urban Society* 19, no. 3 (1987): 330-355.

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SNAPSHOTS OF SUCCESS

SOUTH BROOKLYN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

"Last year I was considered a high school drop out. I had a record of truancy, and I did not expect to earn a high school diploma before I turned 21. But then I got these pamphlets in the mail that said I could have a second chance at a friendly and flexible school."

Najsha attended an information session at South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS) and re-enrolled for school later that month. "This place is not just a school, it's like a home," she says. "This is where I feel safe. It's like I've finally found a place that is right for me."

Within the year, Najsha had earned her diploma.¹

A COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP

South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS) is the product of more than two decades of dedication to the youth of the Red Hook and surrounding neighborhoods by Good Shepherd Services. Today it is one of three transfer high schools that Good Shepherd Services has opened, along with West Brooklyn Community High School and Bronx Community High School. For twenty-two years, Good Shepherd had run an off-site program to re-engage and educate chronic truants from John Jay High School. South Brooklyn Community High School demonstrates how a drop-out prevention program can evolve into a transfer high school and an extraordinary model of successful work with young adults.²

In 2002, a New Century High School grant³ initiated a new stage of planning and development of the school. Staff from Good Shepherd Services, many of whom had been involved with the school for more than a decade, worked closely with the New York City Department of Education. With the participation of young people, they created a school that would offer the chance to earn a high school diploma to youth who had doubted they could ever get back on track.

¹ "City Schools." Newsletter of the New York City Department of Education, November 2005. <http://schools.nyc.gov/Administration/mediarelations/Newsletters/November2005.htm>

² For a comprehensive description of the program and a guide to implementing the model, see, "South Brooklyn Community High School: A model transfer school for replication." Good Shepherd Services, May 2007.

³ From the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Open Society Institute

Staffed by a principal, eleven teachers (including art and physical education), a technology specialist, a guidance counselor, and support staff from the Department of Education side: a division director, a program facilitator, six advocate counselors, and a support team member from Good Shepherd, the staff-to-student ratio is low and the attention to each young person high.

The principal and division director jointly run the school, meet frequently, and align decisions and supervision. An advisory board comprised of members of both partner agencies guides long-term planning.

FROM TRUANTS TO STUDENTS

Students living in South Brooklyn who have been absent from school for more than 25 days, have a minimum of eight credits, and read above the sixth grade level are eligible to attend SBCHS. Staff reaches out by phone and letter to invite young people to return to school. Those who respond meet with counselors to discuss their educational history, interests, and expectations. Some are admitted to SBCHS and others are referred to programs better suited to their needs, abilities, and interests.

Among those who join SBCHS, nearly all have missed a considerable amount of school. Many are coping with a range of challenging life circumstances that further interfere with their educational success. Some are raising children or younger siblings, others are dealing with the death of a parent or other close relative, still others are managing with little or no adult support.

Central to SBCHS's approach is the expectation that each student can and will achieve at high levels, regardless of past performance.

REMARKABLE OUTCOMES

Students succeed. Students earn credits 22 percent more quickly than their counterparts in traditional high schools. In the year prior to enrolling in SBCHS, students earned an average of 5.41 credits. At that rate, they would have had little hope of accumulating the 44 credits needed to graduate. In their first year at SBCHS students doubled their credits, averaging 11.34 credits over the course of the year.⁴

They also pass the Regents exams at nearly double their former rates. Prior to attending SBCHS, students passed only one in five of the Regent exams they sat for. During their tenure at SBCHS, they were passing three out of five.

⁴ The Parthenon Group, Good Shepherd Services South Brooklyn Community High School: Business Planning and Replication Strategies. Project Summary. Powerpoint presentation, (August, 2005).

Further, the school's Regents pass rate surpasses most high schools in New York City, with a near perfect pass rate on the US History Regents. Roughly three-quarters of the students passed the Math A and Global History Regents. Nearly seven out of ten students passed the ELA and Living Environment exams.

In the 2003-2004 school year, SBCHS graduated almost a third of the young people who attended over the course of that school year—57 students out of 185 young people. Most of the remaining students returned the next school year for additional credits. The majority of graduates move on to college or employment.

A PROGRAM MODEL THAT WORKS

Five core principles and five essential components drive the operation of the school.

Core Principles:

- High expectations
- An active and rigorous learning environment
- Building healthy relationships
- Student voice and responsibility
- Community building

Essential Components:

- Partnership and shared leadership
- Integration of the advocate counselor within the school setting
- Youth development approach to instruction
- Defined target population and admissions process
- Personalized small-school environment

SOLID ACADEMICS AND A PERVASIVE FOCUS ON LITERACY

A demanding standards-based instructional program focuses on the core academic subjects—math, English, science, and social studies—and prepares students to pass the required Regents Exams. Through year round classes, longer periods, ungraded cohorts, and more frequent meetings, students earn more credits per semester and in a year than they could at a typical high school.

The entire faculty is trained in a balanced literacy approach to improve comprehension while making reading a more enjoyable activity. Writing is integrated into every subject area. Technology is infused across content areas to ensure that students graduate with the skills to connect to today's job market and to compete in other post-secondary opportunities. Hands-on activities

connect students directly to learning: “In science, we grow the plants instead of reading about it in a textbook.”

Individualized scheduling and programming take into account each student’s strengths and challenges to maximize their chances of graduating in a timely fashion.

TRANSPARENT REQUIREMENTS AND CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

When the school was in the design phase, student team members remarked that throughout the course of their educational histories, no one had ever told them what they were supposed to know at the end of each year to progress to the next grade. Enabling young people to take charge of their learning was a top priority.

At SBCHS, all students know exactly what they must do to succeed. Each course has clear proficiency targets that are shared with students and posted in the classroom. Every two weeks, students are assessed in each of their classes to measure their progress toward meeting the course goals. There are no surprises. When students are not meeting the goals, teachers examine their own practice to develop better strategies and advocate counselors work with students to improve their performance. When necessary, teachers, advocate counselors, and students come together to help students develop a plan that will assure their success.

AN INFUSION OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS

SBCHS blends the best practices in youth development with rigorous academics and a support structure that focuses on leadership development, goal setting and community building. The needs, interests, capacities, and desires of the students are the raw material around which the school and curriculum are structured.

Young people played a central role in the development of the school and they play critical roles in its ongoing operation and growth. The school culture fosters relationships between youth, adults, and peers in a safe environment that provides multiple opportunities for participation. Small biweekly group meetings and monthly full-school gatherings build a sense of community and mutual responsibility within the school.

Advocate counselors provide a strong personalized support system for each student, identifying needed services including health care and day care and working with students to overcome barriers to success. Each student meets at least twice a month with his or her counselor. Twice a week young people meet as a group of “Community Scholars,” an opportunity for positive peer interaction and influence, and for youth voice in the operation of the school.

Teachers and advocate counselors meet regularly to identify areas in which students need academic improvement, enrichment, acceleration, and personal growth. “In my old school, the teachers didn’t care,” said one student. “Here they watch out for us and make sure everyone understands.”

Post graduation planning is a major focus, as advocate counselors help students consider post secondary options and prepare for careers. The Learning to Work program is tailored in response to student interests. Intern readiness workshops introduce young adults without experience to the world of work with discussions of expectations, goals, interviewing, and transferable skills. One-on-one counseling addresses the needs and interests of those with some work experience, and weekly seminars provide a forum for discussing on-the-job issues and experiences. Internships offer varied opportunities for growth—from legal work to silkscreen printing and glass blowing—in diverse organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the NYC Parks Department, and after-school programs.

Within the first month of her internship at the New York Aquarium, 18-year old Crystal earned a promotion, increased responsibilities, and her own set of keys to the aquarium offices. This kind of recognition was a new and exhilarating experience for Crystal, who suddenly realized that her passion for animals could translate into a job that she loved and a future with promise.

“This is how a program can help someone who struggles,” said the SBCHS job and internship coordinator. “When they experience some on-the-job success, you can see an immediate change in their sense of themselves. Their self-esteem increases when they realize that they have something of value to contribute. If you can get them in the right place, they can see pieces of themselves they didn’t know existed.”

THE REAL PRIZE

SBCHS is dedicated to helping students discover and develop their potential. Everyone at Good Shepherd Services and at South Brooklyn Community High School believes deeply that with the right support, young people can get their diplomas, go on to college, get jobs that pay a living wage, and lead positive and productive lives. They have translated these beliefs into strategies that work for young people, and into practices that inform the field.

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CUNY PREP TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

A GED School with College as the Goal

“At first I thought CUNY Prep was just another GED program,” said Yvelisse, who had dropped out of a large crowded high school. “But I was surprised that the teachers cared so much about preparing you for college. They teach and explain things to you. With the teachers’ and students’ help, I’ve learned to take the hard work one day at a time and be more patient in my journey to be finally done with school so that I can go to college.” Before finding CUNY Prep, she was turned down by other schools due to low grades and poor attendance. She has since passed the GED and enrolled at Lehman College.

AN INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION

Founded in 2003, CUNY Prep is a joint effort of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the New York City Department of Education (DOE), the City University of New York (CUNY), the Mayor’s Office, and the City Council. It is operated through a partnership between CUNY and Good Shepherd Services, a leader in youth development and an expert in serving young people who are overage and under-credited, and funded through the Workforce Investment Act.

STUDENTS WHO MAKE THE DECISION TO COMMIT

To be considered for admission, students must be 16-18 years old, out of school for two months (or have a long-term absentee designation), and have at least an eighth-grade reading level.¹ But the real requirement is their ability to convince one of six case managers of their commitment to the full-time, year-round program. Those who are admitted attend classes for a year and receive support services that begin at enrollment and continue for another year after graduation.

The school admits new students in cohorts instead of by grade levels, in three-month cycles. Most students are referred to the program by their previous high school guidance counselors, the Administration for Children’s Services, or the court system.

Approximately 200 students are enrolled at any given time with a waiting list of 200 at each quarterly enrollment. The students are 95% African American and Latino, primarily from the Bronx.

¹The entry requirement for eighth-grade reading level reflects what CUNY Prep was designed to do well. CUNY, the sponsoring organization, is seeking to expand to reach young people with lower reading levels either in this program or in a new program.

RESULTS

The program has conferred more than 150 GED's and more than 90 students have gone on to post-secondary education, primarily to CUNY. Other students have found jobs that the program helps them prepare for and secure. While many of the students at first want to seek employment to meet immediate financial needs, the program works to raise their aspirations and get them to consider college.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS RIGHT FROM THE START

The school starts with a two-day orientation that helps young people reinvent their identities as learners and achievers. Drawing on the work of social scientist John Ogbu and celebrity Bill Cosby, the orientation challenges students to consider how race and ethnic differences play out in educational and economic achievement.

We let them know that they have a social responsibility to go to college and help build their communities, and we are clear that we aren't settling for less. We say very directly, "This is a college prep program and this is where you should be heading in the name of uplifting your community."

Derrick Griffith, Principal

Students write a five-page biography, the first step in assuming the habit of what the Student Handbook defines as "reflective practice," an ongoing process of thinking about who they are, how they arrived where they are, and what they hope to achieve. Visual representations of their autobiographies are displayed in the cafeteria and throughout the building. The autobiographies are used by faculty and staff to assess how best to meet the students' needs. Faculty in turn write and share their autobiographies, emphasizing the importance the school places on students knowing their teachers as well as teachers knowing their students.

During the first week of each cycle, members of the school's twelve-person faculty adhere to a routine that establishes its rules and regulations, sets the standards for attendance and class behavior, and defines student and teacher accountability. In-class exercises, such as students interviewing each other about their expectations, provide teachers with additional insight into students' experiences and attitudes.

"The first week is the most important," says Griffith. "We want all the students to hear the same thing and be doing the same thing in order to clearly establish our expectations."

HIGHLY QUALIFIED STAFF, REAL WORLD LEARNING, AND CREATIVE INSTRUCTION

Faculty members are hired through CUNY and all have advanced degrees in their subject areas, although they are not required to have state teacher certification. They bring passion to their teaching with interdisciplinary curricula and interesting projects.

In forensic science, for example, students might stage a murder and study patterns of spattered blood and finger-prints. They learn how to take notes, measure, use a microscope, and analyze and document their findings in college-level labs, and they grapple with scientific theory, physics, math, deductive reasoning, and critical thinking. In humanities, students recreate famous court cases such as *Brown v. the Board of Education* or *Roe v. Wade* and act out the various roles from the defense and prosecution to the judge, court reporter, and artist.

For out-of-school youth for whom attendance is a major challenge, in-class activities have to go way beyond “chalk and talk” and be very engaging. The learning has to have real world application in order for them to gain a deeper understanding of how different disciplines interconnect. It’s also important to give them a chance to showcase skills they might have that, while not traditionally academic, have value to the school community as well as out in the larger world.

Eve Bois, Assistant Director for Staff and Curriculum

In all courses—social studies, humanities, science, math, health and physical education, literacy, advisory, and portfolio development, as well as such electives as Spanish, computers, art, and theater—students participate actively in their own education through hands-on instruction and critical self-assessments.

SELF-ASSESSMENT, REGULAR FEEDBACK, AND RAPID ADVANCEMENT

The first three-month cycle semester is devoted to skill development in core subjects—math, science, and humanities. Throughout each cycle, students take surveys to continue the practice of self-reflection, and develop their ability to look critically at their own work, and assess their learning, challenges, successes, and goals. At the end of each cycle, students demonstrate proficiency in the core subjects through portfolios.

Students receive report cards every six weeks to provide feedback to parents and guardians and the students themselves. If they fail one or more courses during any cycle they are given additional opportunities to master course content and skills in the next cycle. If they are older than 17 ½ they are referred to a semester

of Saturday classes to develop study skills and effective learning behaviors.

After the first six months, 40 percent of students are ready to take the GED tests. While the students are waiting for their results, CUNY Prep provides a career-related program to support the transition to college or employment on a schedule that very closely mimics a college schedule and includes an SAT Prep class and Fridays off for internships or supervised trips to colleges.

Students who don't pass the GED tests return for another three months; those who do, spend the next three-month cycle semester preparing for the University's freshman skills assessment tests and for college itself.

MANY LEVELS OF SUPPORT

"In order for academics to take root, kids need to have their issues addressed," Bois explained. "When teachers are open to them, it makes all the difference."

Student support is built into the curriculum through advisory sessions. Groups of 12-15 students meet twice weekly with a staff member to discuss current events, independent living, college opportunities, and work readiness. Advisories build community and interpersonal skills with team-building exercises and training in conflict resolution. Student support needs are closely monitored by six case managers and two counselors from Good Shepherd Services who provide counseling, college and financial aid advice, housing, employment, health, legal, and childcare services and referrals.

The program also offers peer counseling, leadership training, college visits, and health and wellness workshops, online test preparation, personal growth and development workshops, and literacy/numeracy skill building software. Extracurricular activities involve students in poetry jams, dances, holiday festivals for neighborhood children, sports, student publications, and school governance.

Attendance, which rose in 2005 to a daily average of 68 percent, up from 53 percent the previous year, is one of the program's main challenges, particularly during a student's first three months. Case managers follow-up on absences with daily calls to parents, group homes, or friends. After three unexcused absences, students are dropped from the program until the next cycle.

FOLLOWING STUDENTS TO THEIR NEXT STEP

After students complete the program, case managers track their progress for one year in college or on the job through phone calls, in-person conversations, and monthly "alumni Saturdays" at the school. Case managers also keep track of alumni schedules, grades, or pay stubs. The program sends liaisons to college campuses to help students who have had one-on-one support throughout the

application and financial aid process negotiate the often-daunting registration process.

A NEW START

“Young adults need caring, responsible adults in their lives who have the ability to say ‘no’ and hold them to expectations,” says Griffith. “We expect them to work hard but the kind of support we provide allows them something which is lacking in many of their lives. As one student said, “This is the only place I can be a child.”

In starting CUNY Prep, the University’s leadership decided to that it was important to rise to the challenge and serve this population. Griffith said, “They took a chance and I think they were right. A good program can really make a difference.”

This report was prepared by Betty Marton.

THE PRIMARY PERSON APPROACH

THE PRIMARY PERSON APPROACH

How do you make sure that young people who have felt lost and ignored in their previous experiences in schools and programs get the support they need? How do you convince them that someone cares how they're doing, and is there to help them make it? How do you build a system of continuous, personalized connection for each and every young person?

Youth development research has demonstrated the importance of caring adults in young people's lives. The Primary Person approach takes this idea further with the establishment of one-on-one relationships from the beginning of a young person's tenure in school or a program through graduation or completion, and beyond. It provides a structure to help each young person stay on track and prevent anyone from falling through the cracks, even in a small program or school.

We've talked to so many of our youth and one of their biggest problems is they just felt so anonymous in the past. In their former schools, they would be out for a week or they would come in depressed and no one would pay attention, and it's amazing to them just knowing if they're out someone will call them or that someone would notice

Principal

Primary Person is a relatively new strategy, and schools and programs are currently testing a range of approaches appropriate to their institutional structures, staffing models, cultures, and level of resources. This brief provides examples of some tested practices as well as questions and issues not yet resolved. This information is presented to help readers identify decision points and reflect on alternative choices as they put the Primary Person in place.

WHAT DOES A PRIMARY PERSON DO?

A Primary Person is guide and advisor, monitor and cheerleader, broker and advocate. What distinguishes this role is its combination of vigilance, kindness and constancy, and its singular focus on the young person as a complex individual. Young people can expect these special adults to be people they can trust and confide in, and who can help them to:

- Identify their strengths and obstacles to success.
- Confront and overcome barriers before they become reasons to drop out.
- Identify additional resources, such as social services, that will remove obstacles to a young person's success.

- Understand graduation requirements, set goals, and monitor their academic and social progress.
- Secure the academic, career, and social services and supports they need in order to focus on their education.
- Serve as a broker with their families, staff, and peers in the program.
- Design a plan for after the graduation or completion of the program and see it through to successful execution.

PRIMARY PERSONS:

- Track their young person’s attendance and progress in the classroom, in other school or program contexts, and even outside the school or program.
- Advocate for young people in broader forums, and help them understand the implications of their actions without making them feel powerless or pressured.
- Use their networks to help young people develop other positive relationships with teachers, counselors, and adults in the program so they can connect with the services and supports they need to be successful.

Primary Persons do not do everything for each youth. Part of their job is to identify and broker resources to support young people in areas where they do not have skills or expertise.

THREE ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS FOR THE PRIMARY PERSON APPROACH

At South Brooklyn Community High School, a transfer high school,¹ six advocate counselors serve as the backbone of the Primary Person support system. Each advocate counselor has a caseload of approximately 25-30 young people, and stays with them during their entire time at the school, typically two years. The counselors are responsible for daily attendance outreach. They are young peoples’ primary contacts for accessing services and supports in the school. They are responsible for building relationships with parents. They facilitate a “Community Scholars” group with the 25-30 young people in their caseload, which is designed to connect young people with a peer group that can serve as another supportive forum for them

¹ See the end of this document for a description of Transfer High Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers, two New York City Department of Education models for serving over-age and/or under-credited students.

to build relationships and discuss issues of concern. If young people have a problem with their advocate counselor, they can go to a supervisor, the principal, or the program director and one of these adults will serve as a broker for resolving these conflicts.

CUNY Prep High School shifted its entire personnel structure from connecting youth to guidance counselors, whose responsibilities were helping young people get admitted to college, to a system in which trained social workers are responsible for providing youth with the wrap-around services and supports they need to thrive in and outside of school. With a case-load of approximately 35 to one, these social workers serve as a young people's Primary Person throughout their time at CUNY Prep as well as during their first year in college or on the job. Counselors are supported by a paraprofessional case worker who helps with college registrations and enrollment, as well as one additional staff person who is solely responsible for crisis management.

At the John Adams Young Adult Borough Center (YABC), young people are introduced to their Primary Person at orientation. The Primary Person is an employee of the CBO partner and works with the young people throughout the time that they are enrolled at the YABC to provide support, help them address barriers to attendance, and support their progress toward earning a diploma. The Primary Person functions as the young person's advocate and liaison within the YABC community, facilitating their access to on-site services, and referring them to off-site services when necessary. In order to support the large number of young people at the YABC—more than 300—John Adams' staff has developed a meeting strategy, where each Primary Person meets with all their young people in a group setting once a month and also schedules an individual meeting during the month. The Primary Person is responsible for making follow-up telephone calls when young people are absent and participates when home visits are scheduled. When necessary, they also set up and facilitate family meetings at school to discuss attendance or other issues. Finally, the Primary Person talks with the young person about his or her future and helps to develop an individual plan for moving ahead.

WHO ARE PRIMARY PERSONS?

Primary Persons may be teachers or other traditional school staff members, street-workers, social workers, or counselors. Specially designated staff may be hired for this particular purpose, or existing jobs expanded to include new functions. In at least one program, every adult is considered a potential Primary Person, and trained to assume the role.

In some schools or programs, teachers serve as Primary Persons. This approach has benefits as well as drawbacks. It integrates the support system firmly within the organization and keeps academic demands compatible with socio-emotional considerations. When teachers assume this role, then they must reduce their teaching hours to make additional time for it. Still, it can be a struggle for one person to tend to both sets of needs:

There are so many compromises when you're in the position of being the advisor and teacher. I don't know how many times I've been approached on my way to class. Just the other day a kid came to me and said, "My father threatened me this morning. I might be getting kicked out of my house." And I was like, "Oh, that's terrible. We've got to talk about it but I'm late for my class." And then I got into my class, and then another class and then at the end of the day I finally remembered and I felt terrible. But there are just other gods that I have to serve and it's very difficult to balance.

Programs may take different routes to staffing their Primary Person system, but they agree on the need for a diverse skill set. While not every Primary Person will have all the necessary attributes, schools and programs can put together a pool of people to comprise the full complement. If there is good communication and exchange among the adults, they can seek each other's help when they have limited expertise in one area or another.

PRIMARY PERSONS SHOULD BE:

- Personable, comfortable, and friendly to young people.
- Able to work well with colleagues.
- Problem-solvers in matters small and large.
- Determined, resolute, and unfazed by bureaucratic hurdles.
- Confident that they can make a difference and that young people can and will succeed.

THEY SHOULD HAVE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN:

- Counseling and advisement.
- Work requirements, graduation requirements, and the preparation needed for Regents exams and other qualifying assessments, as well as the resources that are available within and outside the school to help young people meet these requirements.
- Planning and goal-setting for current and future education and careers, and knowledge of options for higher education, internships, and youth employment programs.
- Mediation, conflict resolution, and problem-solving.
- Networking and resource acquisition.
- Outreach and working with families.

Depending on how the position is staffed, organizations provide additional training and support to address gaps in experience or knowledge, such as about college preparation.

SETTING UP A PRIMARY PERSON SYSTEM

The Primary Person system requires the school or organization to allocate human resources, make time in the schedule and create private space for meeting and discussion. Decisions require a balance between logistics and sensitivity to encouraging the warmth and sense of connection that are at the heart of the effort to guide, support, and nurture young people. Involving staff, young people, and families can contribute to the development of a system in which everyone is invested.

IDENTIFY AND DESCRIBE THE POOL OF PRIMARY PERSONS

Prior to the start of the school year, it is important to develop a clear plan for how the Primary Person system will work in order to speed the matching process, acquaint young people and their families with the role of the Primary Person, and enable young people to understand that they are to be active participants within the relationship. Delays at the beginning of the program year can set back young peoples' hopes for the program and result in discouragement and withdrawal from the program.

START WITH THE FIRST CONTACT

Schools and programs use their first contact with young people to make them feel cared for and connected to adults in the school community. Intake sessions, interviews, orientations, and meals are all designed to set expectations and establish relationships. In some programs, they may go out into the neighborhood to identify youngsters and bring them to the program.

At intake interviews, young people meet with a staff person (guidance counselor, teacher, administrator, or social worker) to discuss:

- Short and long-term reasons for returning to school or a program.
- Past barriers to academic success both in and out of school.
- The supports available or lacking at home.
- Current obligations such as a job or childcare.
- What they believe they need in order to attend regularly and complete school.

Schools and programs set the context with opening events that introduce young people to their new environment and familiarize them with key members of the staff.

- Dinner meetings offer incoming young people and their parents a chance to meet the principal, speak with current young people and graduates, and spend time informally talking with teachers and other adults in the program.
- Multi-day orientations provide intensive contact with peers and staff, set expectations for full participation, and offer teambuilding and bonding activities. They emphasize the difference between the new school or program and the young people's previous experience. They include in-depth discussions about what it takes to be successful in school, and how each young person in the program will receive the support he or she needs to be successful.

We hold a three-day orientation that “tests” the incoming young peoples’ commitment to returning to school. We expect them to arrive on time, not to miss a session and to participate fully in all orientation activities. We assign homework, like writing a brief essay describing their last school and the elements that contributed to them being unsuccessful. On day three, young people break up into small groups with a teacher. They spend about two hours engaged in icebreakers and bonding/teambuilding exercises. The group leader also has in-depth discussions about what it takes to be successful in school and explains how, in our program, each youth receives the support to be successful. We hold discussions about the mission and vision of the school, the importance of their culture in the development of the curriculum and college as an option. The purpose of orientation is

not just to familiarize young people with the staff and rules, but to create a close connection immediately with at least one staff person who will provide them with primary support.

Principal

At one YABC, orientation begins with the individual intake that informs young people about the expectations of the program and begins to identify the needs of the young person who is enrolling. A Primary Person is assigned. After a couple of weeks have passed and young people have a regular routine, the staff organizes an event during the dinner break to review youth contracts, the services available from the CBO and DOE staff, and to provide an opportunity for young people to talk with the assistant principal in charge of the program. A few weeks after the orientation, the YABC organizes an Open House for parents to continue the process that began with the initial intake. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved with the program and to participate in holiday celebrations, project presentations, and special events.

ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT TIME AND SPACE FOR THE PAIRS TO MEET

- Schedule regular, one-on-one meetings between young people and their Primary Persons for one or more hours every week.
- Provide informal opportunities for youth and adults to develop and strengthen their relationships, and for Primary Persons to learn how best to support and engage their youth.
- Set aside spaces that are comfortable for conversation and can offer some degree of privacy.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND LAY THE GROUND RULES

Young people need to know they can freely discuss family and peer relationships and other issues of concern without fear of judgment or critique. Given the nature of the relationship, programs and schools need to be clear about their legal and ethical obligations:

- Let staff and young people know what information is confidential, and what kind of information may be shared with other staff or family.
- Make clear what the law mandates staff to report to police or health authorities (e.g. abuse, suicide threats, certain health issues), and how staff will handle that reporting.

The trust that builds between a young person and the primary person increases the likelihood that young people will open up and reveal serious issues. In instances when a young person reveals a serious issue, such as abuse or suicidal

thoughts, it is important that a clear process be in place to address the issues. Key staff should review and discuss procedures at the beginning of the program so that any conflicts are addressed and established procedures are followed when an emergency arises. A clear process and swift action are essential:

- Make sure that every staff member knows what to do if a young person talks about abuse, suicide, or other issues that are threatening. New staff must be oriented to these procedures.
- Clarify what information should be passed on, to whom, and within what time period.
- Identify steps to make sure the young person gets help.

CONNECT TO FAMILIES

The Primary Person is a logical designated link between the school and the significant adults in young people's lives. Families are a central part of a young person's support system and can do a great deal to encourage his or her progress and alert the school to problems. If parents are not available for a young person, then it is important to identify a "significant other" such as a grandparent, older sibling, or other relative, or perhaps even a close adult friend.

Involving families can take work at the outset. Parents themselves may have had limited or unfulfilling educational experiences. They may be discouraged by their child's history of disengagement, and unwilling to invest again for fear of being disappointed, or because they were blamed in the past for their child's educational struggles. They may feel that the responsibility lies with the school and should be handled by educational professionals, or believe that their children are too old for parental intervention.

But programs that offer positive experiences for families, conveying the school's or program's commitment to their young adults and welcoming them with grace and appreciation, find that parents are ready and willing to engage. Once this culture of openness is established, the word will get out, and incoming parents will be less difficult to convince.

- Engage parents in one-on-one conversations about their own experiences in education, what they want for their young adults, and what roles they can play in supporting their children.
- Involve parents in their young person's orientation and intake interview. Show parents how the program is different from their young person's previous school or program. Introduce them to staff, administrators, and other young people.

- Find out the best way to get in touch with parents. Identify the person who can serve as an emergency contact, provide basic health and safety information, and inform the school about any changes in the young person's address.
- Engage families early. As soon as the Primary Person is chosen, notify the families and include contact information. Invite them to be in touch whenever they can and want to, for good news as well as concerns.
- Conduct workshops and open houses around health care insurance, tax preparation, immigration or other issues of concern to families; around financial aid, college, and other post-secondary opportunities; and internship and youth employment resources.
- Hold informal gatherings—coffees, breakfasts—for parents to socialize with one another and with staff, and formal catered celebrations for parents around holidays or other notable days. Invite parents to performances, events, and recognition ceremonies, and make them feel welcome and integral to the celebration.

MAKING IT WORK

The Primary Person approach is a key mechanism for insuring engagement, career, and academic achievement and should be fully integrated into the daily functioning of the school or program. Optimal operation means full communication among all the adults concerned with a young person's welfare, adjustments in roles, and willingness to work through issues.

COME TOGETHER FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE

To ensure full exchange and communication, schools and programs:

- Map out their physical space so that all staff including teachers, counselors, and Primary Persons are located near each other and can collaborate easily.
- Bring responsible staff together in planning sessions, social events, and activities—such as sports leagues—to ensure that they are talking with each other on a regular basis.
- Hold regular staff meetings of Primary Persons with other staff to review the progress of their young person. If there are issues, the young person in question might be present to join in the discussion. Some programs use formal protocols such as KidTalk² to facilitate these conversations and create action plans that spell out what a young person and supporting staff can do to improve the situation.

When we do counseling, the young person is in the room usually with six teachers. We sit in a circle with the young people. The environment is very trusting. It's almost like a group interview. Sometimes it can be intimidating for the young person if we're putting them on the hot seat, but usually it's the kind of setting where we're trying to get to the bottom of the issues so that we can re-engage the young person. When the stories we hear are in conflict, we bring everyone together in one place, and then we make decisions with the young people. The young person is in the room sometimes, and sometimes we ask them to step out. Then the young person is informed of what those decisions are and how we are all going to work together to support them.

Principal

CLARIFY ROLES AND ANTICIPATE AREAS OF TENSION

A Primary Person provides a level of support that may go well beyond traditional definitions of teacher, guidance counselor, or other staff person. Everyone in the support system needs to understand what is happening in each young person's life. That very concern can be the source of tension: teachers want young people to do their work so they'll be prepared for Regents and GED exams, and counselors want teachers to ease up while the young people resolve serious issues in their personal lives. The outcomes are equally important and legitimate—and difficult to prioritize. Schools have found it helpful to:

- Delineate the primary responsibilities of Primary Persons along with those of teachers, counselors, and other staff.
- Diagram the relationships among staff, with young people and desired outcomes at the center.
- Define expectations of how staff will interact with each other when their actions conflict, and also when their interests converge in supporting the young people.
- Set a culture of exchange, compromise, and discussion that keeps the young person's needs as the driving force.

Make it clear that no one person is responsible for everything. Schools and programs report that teachers are relieved to pass responsibility on to Primary Persons for serious personal issues and crisis intervention. And Primary Persons report gaining invaluable insights from teachers who are looking out for signs of

² For more information on KidTalk, see: *In Focus, Advisory and Family Group for Schools*, no. 2 (June, 2004), The Fund for the City of New York Youth Development Institute.

distress and communicate with them right away when potential problems are identified.

Designate a senior staff member to oversee the Primary Person structure to:

- Ensure that follow-up actually takes place when responsibilities are distributed among multiple parties.
- Supervise Primary Persons, providing both oversight and opportunities for them to address issues and problems that may not be appropriate in other forums.
- Serve as a neutral party for reflecting with staff on the effectiveness of these joint interventions with key staff.
- Smooth out conflicts and difficulties.

Place responsibility for resolving organizational issues with the adults and the organization, not the young people.

We've had many fights between teachers and counselors over academic work. The bottom line for the teachers is, "I understand all the issues of home life. When am I getting the young person's work?" The counselors say, "You'll get the work when the kid finds a place to live." It is enormously challenging, and there have to be continuing conversations to work out these tensions. I had one counselor tell me, "I do case management, I don't do teaching." My model is that every teacher needs to occasionally take on the role of a counselor, and every counselor that of a teacher. When you create this open environment, when you apply this strength-based approach and when you create this place where kids are supported on all sides, only then will you start to see the fruits of every labor.

Principal

KEEP THE CASE LOAD MANAGEABLE

To maintain the vigilant attention required to keep every young people on track, Primary Persons can only be responsible for a finite number of young people. Programs report that the upper limit is a ratio of between 1:25 and 1:35. This is no small requirement from a logistics or funding perspective, and some programs wonder if even this ratio is too high for the kind of support that these young people may need. On the other hand, if a Primary Person support system is functioning well, young people will feel safer and may require less time on behavioral and attendance issues, leaving more time for positive feedback and really serious family or health issues. Still, this is an issue that requires examination as the approach is more widely implemented.

PROVIDE TRAINING AND EXPERT ADVICE

As Primary Persons come from a variety of backgrounds and positions, they need opportunities to build additional skills in areas such as counseling, conflict resolution, and dealing with families. Training should begin with the school or program's philosophy and approaches, and then be supplemented by additional outside sources.

If Primary Persons are to handle the college or employment process, then they must be thoroughly knowledgeable and have appropriate supports. Strategies for effective family outreach are particularly important, and training by experienced social workers or agencies can help Primary Persons address such issues as:

- Their views and expectations of parents and how they can play appropriate and constructive roles in young people's lives.
- Cross-cultural communication, to ease differences of class, race, education, and language.
- Responding to young peoples' conflicts at home with the right amount of empathy and recognition of parents' viewpoints.
- Managing an appropriate level of interest in a young person's home life, and knowing when and how to intervene directly with family members.

A POWERFUL MEANS TO A VALUED OUTCOME

A Primary Person support system for a young person can mean the difference between another failure and the chance to reclaim their future. It requires good planning, good relationships, and good will. It demands thoughtful choices and flexibility. But in the end, it is a common sense approach: pay attention, provide support, and a young person will respond and thrive.

ENGAGING YOUNG
ADULT LEARNERS

ENGAGING YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS

How do you help young people rekindle a love for learning and a belief in themselves? How do you help them transform their initial decision to reconnect to school or a program into a commitment to participate fully and avail themselves of all available opportunities? How do you enable them to focus their sights on a vision of a productive future?

Young people seeking alternative pathways to graduation must be immediately involved and continuously supported. Since engagement is crucial to nearly every other part of the school experience, the promising practices cited here are also discussed in companion briefs: *The Primary Person Approach*, *Post-Graduation Planning for College and Careers*, and *Academics and Returning Youth*.

Because the term is used widely and with many meanings, we are defining engagement to mean “active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention, in contrast to superficial participation, apathy or lack of interest.”¹ Effective schools and programs engage young people in a variety of ways, so that they are not just physically present, but intellectually immersed, socially connected, and emotionally centered. Above all, they help young people gain a sense of control over their lives and take an active role in shaping the programs and activities around them through their words and actions. Promising strategies to increase engagement offer young people:

- A welcoming environment in a community of support.
- Clarity about what they need to do now and a clear path to the future.
- Content and activities that are stimulating, relevant, and meet their interests and needs.
- Opportunities to assume roles of responsibility and leadership.

A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT IN A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

Effective schools and programs are intentional about their culture and the social organization they create. They give careful thought to climate, norms and values, and roles and relationships. Programs can engage young people by cultivating a sense of belonging to a community that has high expectations of behavior and accomplishment, and that in turn provides a high degree of connection and support.

¹Fred M. Newmann, ed. *Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 11. See also literature on school “connectedness,” e.g. *Journal of School Health*, vol. 74, no. 7, September 2004; and “attachment,” see National Center for School Engagement, University of Colorado <http://www.schoolengagement.org>.

The environment is a physical as well as a social space. A setting that allows young people to feel comfortable and secure makes it easier for them to focus on their own growth.

Safety is paramount. To engage fully, young people must believe that:

- They can move about freely, without the threat of physical or verbal harm.
- They can express themselves freely, without fear of reprisal or destructive criticism.
- Bullying and teasing are not tolerated and prohibitions against weapons and fighting are strictly enforced.

The space speaks volumes, telling young people how they are valued. Schools and programs:

- Keep the space clean and orderly, free of signs of neglect and disrepair.
- Distinguish it from other institutions that may not have served the young people well:
 - Choose comfortable furniture and non-institutional colors.
 - Set up rooms with attention to the kind of interaction and concentration appropriate to the learning activities that will take place in them.
 - If possible, avoid metal detectors and other physical barriers that convey expectations of negative behaviors.
 - Post signs that tell students what they can do rather than can't do.
- Make it their space:
 - Involve young people in the design and decoration.
 - Select art, multimedia, symbols, and expressions that reflect young adults' interests and identities.
 - Showcase students' creative and academic work.

During our orientation we ask the young people to produce a five-page autobiography and we also ask the faculty to do autobiographies which we distribute to the young people. We post them in the cafeteria so everyone can see who they are as people. The fact that we create a school space for them tells them we are more than just lip service; that we care what they are.

CUNY Prep High School

Staff, structure, and consistent messages demonstrate that this is a place where adults care and where other young people are serious and friendly. These:

- Convey to new and potential students from the moment of first meeting that they are entering a culture designed for and with them.
- Let young people know that the environment might be very different from what they have experienced in the past, and that they can count on adults and peers to be there for them.
- Express a positive attitude and a warm reception from all staff including security guards, job developers, secretaries, teachers, and counselors. Support this with training, supervision, and explicit recognition that “this is how we treat each other here.”
- Encourage interaction among adults and young people to greet each other in the halls and common spaces with smiles and interest, and discourage cliques.
- Make it easy for young people to talk to adult staff informally and formally.
- Lay down norms of acceptable behavior and clarify any infractions that will result in being removed from the program.
- Encourage the expectation of civil and tolerant behavior from adults and young people alike.

CONNECT YOUTH WITH CARING ADULTS AND PEERS

Successful programs establish formal systems of support and foster informal connections between adults and youth.² They:

- Link every young person to at least one Primary Person in a structured and personalized way.
- Team the Primary Person with the student to formulate goals, monitor progress, and address academic and personal issues.
- Allocate substantial time into the weekly schedule for these one-on-one relationships.

Young people’s Primary Person helps them communicate with teachers, job developers, and other staff about issues that arise in the classroom or training room, and with the guidance of a trained counselor or case manager, connect young people and their families with needed social, medical, and/or psychological services.

² See the accompanying brief, *The Primary Person Approach*.

Peers can be a powerful influence on young people's behavior, and schools can turn this influence to positive ends. Successful schools and programs:

- Connect youth to peer tutors and mentors.
- Facilitate small-group academic work and advisory sessions.
- Establish formal peer group structures such as student councils, clubs, sports teams, and activity groups.
- Create small teams of young people that guide and support each other throughout their time in the program.
- Identify role models among current students and graduates to reinforce an ethos of achievement and commitment to education.

DRAW IN FAMILIES

Families, in the fullest sense of the word—parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles, family friends, and significant others—can be particularly important to ensuring the emotional and social engagement of young people who have made the decision to return to school or a program. Their “children” are at a decisive moment in their transition to adulthood, and parents and extended relations may have been witness to years of struggle that could now have a chance of resolving positively. They have a stake in making this experience work.

Schools and programs find that student engagement increases when they:

- Identify the relevant family members in young people's lives, connect with them from the initial contact between the young person and the school or program, and stay in communication with them by phone, mail, and in person.
- Make it a point to share good news and indications of progress. Focusing families on their young person's positive potential can counter past experiences with schools in which they may have only been called in to hear negative reports. For non-English speaking families, recruit young people, staff, and community members to serve as translators.
- Invite families to view student work and celebrate accomplishments.
- Keep an open door so families feel free to visit and will keep staff informed about changes and issues with their young person.

ENCOURAGE YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND VOICE

Youth voice is not just about us achieving the desired outcomes for young people. It's about creating a school community that young people want to come to, be involved in, and that they see is relevant towards helping them meet their own educational goals.

CUNY Prep High School

Meaningful roles and the power to make a difference can help young people develop a sense of efficacy and realize the power of their learning for helping others and transforming the world around them. A sense of ownership and control over the experience is especially important for older youth who have made a voluntary decision to return to school or to a program. Given the chance, older youth can make substantial contributions and offer insights that have positive effects on the wider community. They generally know what has and has not worked for them in the past, and they often have creative ideas to offer, but have never been asked.

Make sure that young people (as well as staff and other adults) understand how your program or school operates:

- Share how and when decisions are made. Encourage young people to make themselves heard, and provide forums that make it easy for them to participate.
- Invite their input in decisions that you are willing to share, and let them know what decisions will not be shared. Welcome feedback, discussion, and disagreement about the processes and policies of the program.
- Convey that you want young people to figure out how the system works and to take responsibility for making it work even better.

Create formal venues for youth leadership and input about issues of concern to youth, the school, and the community:

- Establish a youth council or government, clubs, and other youth-led forums.
- Integrate these forums into the overall governance:
 - Place youth representatives on leadership teams with adults.
 - Set up regular meetings of leadership with student leaders in which the young people set the agenda and work with adults to craft action plans.

- Solicit feedback from youth, formally and informally. Do it often so it becomes a habit. Ask their opinions and show them you're interested in what they think.
- Identify areas especially conducive to youth participation, and roles that the organization or school really needs filled. For example, young people could suggest changes in rules and codes of conduct, represent their programs to funders and others in the community, help recruit new participants, or communicate with peers and younger participants about such issues as education, violence prevention, drug use, and safe sex practices.
- Create regular opportunities for input. At one school, young people plan and lead the activities for one entire day every two months.
- Make community action and leadership activities a part of the core curriculum.
- Use these opportunities to build leadership, citizenship, public speaking, and advocacy skills.

Young people who participate in our student leadership week go through 15 training sessions on substance abuse and violence prevention and come up with skits on key issues in each of those areas. They then go out to the school community or elementary schools as peer educators. It's a wonderful experience for young people who, for years, have felt like they have nothing to offer and all they can do is fail. Through those hands-on experiences they begin to see themselves in a whole different framework.

South Brooklyn Community High School

Create advisories or other mechanisms for young people to talk, reflect, and build self-awareness:

- Set up regular meetings of permanent small groups of young people and staff.
- Combine flexible time for young people to talk about issues of concern with structured activities around a theme, such as careers or peer relationships.
- Help young adults learn to express themselves, air concerns, and relate to each other.

The youth in our program had not found their voices before. That's one reason they left school. Some have not had the opportunity to be heard at home, either. We work closely with staff to encourage and not stifle their voices. We also create expectations for civil exchanges within a structure that allows them to develop their voices in a number of ways and navigate different settings. They learn to speak in an emotional way that empowers them; they learn when and where to quiet their voices because, in the world of work, it's not always appropriate to speak loudly. And they learn how to articulate ideas in ways that are not offensive but that are still completely true and authentic.

The Door

GATHER AND CELEBRATE THE COMMUNITY

Being part of a larger whole can be a joyful experience and reinforce the value of engaging in a community of learners:

- Bring everyone together on a regular basis around activities that highlight the shared responsibility for the quality of life in the school or program.
- Conduct community forums in which young people plan events, discuss concerns, and brainstorm together on strategies for improving the program or school.
- Celebrate young people's accomplishments of consistent attendance, skill improvements, theater performances, visual art work, science projects, et cetera. Ceremonies provide visible evidence to young people that they are making progress towards their goals, and that their peers and the wider community care and support them in their efforts.

CLARITY ABOUT THE PRESENT, BELIEF IN THE FUTURE

The more that young people understand where they are going and how to get there, the more likely they are to take the initiative and make the effort. From the initial contact, let young people know that they are expected to give their all. In turn, let them know that if they commit, they can succeed:

- Start the engagement process the moment prospective participants enter the building.
- Use admissions interviews to convey to young people that they will be expected to be serious about their decision to return. Outline what they will get in return for their commitment.
- Involve parents, extended family, and friends in reinforcing the decision. Hold a reception for admitted participants and their parents, and have staff, current students, and graduates make presentations.

Give young people evidence that the program works and that it can work for them:

- If available, share data about program results, progress in achieving its goals, and the continuous effort to improve outcomes for its students.
- Share testimonials from students, graduates, parents, and teachers.

One of our most effective techniques is having current young people speak to incoming students. Their impact can't be overestimated. The new students keep saying, "I heard all the teachers telling us how the program worked, but when the students said it, that's when I believed it."

Bushwick Community High School

Repeat the message again and again that they can do it:

- Affirm the courage it takes for a young person to decide to return to school or to a program.
- Underscore the expectation that they will succeed and go on to college or a good job.
- Ask students what they want and what the school or program can do to make this experience work for them.
- Tell young people in words and actions that you want them there, that you believe in them, and that you will support them to succeed.

Before we discuss program options, we give them lots of opportunities to talk about what obstacles they have faced in prior schools and get them to identify things that they would really appreciate and need in their new school environment.

South Brooklyn Community High School

MAKE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS CLEAR

Young people who know what they have to do in order to graduate can more readily assume their rightful roles as responsible adult learners. Demystify the requirements so students can spend their time engaging with the work at hand rather than figuring out the system:

- Share with students and their families exactly what credits, tests, or attendance are necessary for them to secure their diploma or GED.
- Talk with students about a realistic timeline for accomplishing these requirements, and tell them about any time limits, such as age or length of time they can stay in the program.

Young people often lack important information concerning graduation requirements. We want our young people to understand what the expectations are for graduation, feel a direct connection between our support and their needs, and recognize how the school is set up to help them achieve those requirements.

South Brooklyn Community High School

INSIST ON ATTENDANCE

Engagement goes beyond showing up, but young people need to know that if they attend regularly, they will get what they need to move forward successfully. The school or program in turn needs to provide substantial and excellent preparation.

Establish clear rules and consequences to make attendance non-negotiable:

- Create explicit contracts with students that include standards for attendance.
- Present young people with actual data on their attendance as a reality check.
- Make monitoring and responding to attendance issues a core daily task for staff.
- Call the home of absent youth by mid-day.
- Have staff who make calls home share information with teachers.
- Make home visits early in the morning—7:00 a.m.—to connect with young people and their families before they leave.

Provide incentives, especially to lure young people on high-absence days and times:

- Reward improved attendance even before it reaches the level of good.
- Offer daily and pre-holiday raffles with great prizes—movie or concert tickets, gift certificates to cool stores.
- Give a monthly award to the advisory group or other group with best attendance.
- Schedule the most appealing activities (e.g. gym-weight room) for early periods or times when youth are most likely to be absent.
- Schedule performances for pre-holidays and involve youth in the planning.

Recognize the multiple responsibilities young adults may have:

- Adjust schedules to be more flexible in order to accommodate work and other responsibilities.
- Start later in the morning if possible.

Make attendance a community rather than an individual responsibility:

- Provide opportunities for staff and students to discuss attendance and to identify issues that support services can help address.
- Involve all participants, not just those with attendance problems.
- Emphasize that each person is important to the community, and the level of attendance affects the performance, climate, and success of the school.

HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP AND BELIEVE IN A VISION FOR THEIR FUTURE

Our fundamental battle is not so much the lack of skills; it's the lack of hope. Past school experiences beat most of these young people out of their dreams. They really do not believe they can accomplish anything.

Bushwick Community High School

To invest time and energy in the present, young people need to believe that there is a viable future. If they can envision their lives as satisfying and productive in the years ahead, they have a reason to work backwards and ask what will get them there. Successful programs are able to demonstrate to young people that what they do now can have a direct, powerful, and positive bearing on their educational and career opportunities.³

Let young people know that the school or program is a beginning, not an end. Support them to develop plans that start with the present and take them beyond where they are.

- Develop education and career plans with them. As early as orientation, help young people outline their paths to graduation or completion, and how their current work links to future education and jobs.
- Use autobiographies or other reflective tools that enable young people to appreciate who they are and what they care about.
- Share information with young people from assessments about their capacities and needs. Involve them in designing a course of action that will capitalize on their strengths and build their competencies.

³ See the accompanying brief, *Post-Graduation Planning for College and Careers*.

Our assessments, planning, and all of the conversations we have about how young people are performing create a sense of goals and progress. This all plays a role in how young people begin to see themselves and their future.

South Brooklyn Community High School

Introduce young people to work possibilities:

- Demonstrate the variety of jobs that are available, and use career-development activities that move them beyond stereotypes of entertainers, athletes, and dead-end jobs.
- Encourage young people to talk about what they love to do and the things that interest them, then connect those to real jobs and areas of study.
- Set up career development classes, internship programs, and job shadowing experiences.

Help young people see themselves as potential college material:

- Arrange college visits to familiarize students with college campuses.
- Take advantage of programs such as College Now that allow high school students to enroll in selected college courses at City University colleges.
- Invite program alumni who have gone on to college to make presentations, meet with students, and demonstrate, in the flesh, that college is for them.

Give full support to young people who are not currently pursuing the college track:

- Provide alternative routes to good jobs in expanding sectors such as health and information technologies.
- Let them know that college can be a future option if not an immediate next step.
- Provide information about continuing education programs in various colleges, and introduce them to role models who went to college later on.
- Identify businesses that provide support to employees to enroll in college courses while working, and invite them in to talk with students.
- Send the message to them—and to all the students—to keep their options open by getting as good a grounding in math, science, and literacy as they possibly can.

Young adults often have significant financial and family responsibilities. In order to focus on the future, they need both to earn money and to believe that the experience they are gaining will serve them well:

- Connect learning to practical skills, job preparation, and immediate and long-term economic gain.
- Offer paid internships that help students develop skills while supporting themselves and their families.
- Make explicit how particular academic knowledge is applied to courses of study in college and to careers.
- Connect the skills young people use on a daily level—articulating ideas, searching for evidence, working in teams, solving problems—to the skills they will need as workers and citizens.

In the last six months of study we have an advanced training program which exposes kids to professional careers in their intended college major. For example, kids who want to study nursing take a health class where young people get certified in Community CPR, First Aid, and CPR. This gives them credentials to work in summer camps and have an actual job in preparation for working while in college.

CUNY Prep High School

ESSENTIAL AND MEANINGFUL CONTENT

Young people need to know that learning can be exciting and relevant to who they are and what they can become. They need to have positive experiences to counter past failures. They need to be convinced that what they are learning will prepare them to continue their education and get the skills they need for a satisfying job. The curriculum, activities, and teaching must be of high quality and perceived by young people as such.

The goal for all learners is that they acquire not only the essential knowledge but the motivation and tools to take charge of their learning. This is especially true for young adults. The “content of the curriculum” is more than subject matter: it includes strategies that can make them see its application to their lives.

Give young people as much responsibility for their learning program as they can handle:

- Help young people take the lead in planning their schedules, determining their course of study, and assessing their progress.

- Seek youth input on the content and delivery of the educational experience.
- Give youth choices in selecting lesson plans, reading materials, and subjects to study.
- Help students develop portfolios of work and share their accomplishments with the rest of the class on a regular basis.
- Encourage young people to write and use other forms of creative expression to give voice to their thoughts and feelings while learning important academic skills.
- Help them to take a constructive and critical view of their work and their learning. Share the standards by which work is assessed and draw them into the process.

Staff and young people often comment that the actual curricula or activities are not all that different from previous or traditional schools or programs, but that the way in which it is taught and the context in which it is embedded makes it come alive. Successful schools and programs start where young people are and think about what will immediately capture their imagination and hearts. They:

- Use hands-on and project-based learning.
- Incorporate creative arts and popular culture.
- Examine social and cultural trends and events.
- Focus on prominent figures from communities of color.
- Capitalize on young peoples' sense of justice and social activism.

Young immigrant students at Manhattan Comprehensive studied and attended workshops on the quality of local ESL instruction. They used this information to brainstorm how immigrant families and young people could gain greater access to information on available programs and could advocate for higher quality services and supports. They prepared a report and presented their findings to New York City public officials.

Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day School

Our kids are coming to us with a sense that schools have failed them. They are remarkably interested in social justice. We build upon that interest during orientation by looking at the statistics of African Americans and Latino college enrollment. We also look at the earning potential by job title according to the U.S. Department of Labor. We let them know that they have a social responsibility to go to college and help build their communities. And we are clear that we aren't settling for less. We say very directly, "This is a college prep program and this is where you should be heading in the name of uplifting your community."

CUNY Prep High School

In the end, the path to youth engagement starts where young people are and helps them chart a course that will take them where they need to go. On the way, the more they can find and use their voices to express who they are and what they want, the greater the likelihood that they will seek and find what they need.

Engagement is a habit of mind and heart. It is what we want young people to cultivate not just to get their diplomas, but as a lifelong way of being. It is what we want our schools and programs to foster with every aspect of their curriculum, organization, and culture. To engage young people requires of us what we ask of them: full commitment, a belief that it is possible, and a vision of a viable and productive future.

ACADEMICS AND
RETURNING YOUTH

ACADEMICS AND RETURNING YOUTH

“I didn’t go to school for a whole year. I had two or three credits when I started here. Now I have 34.”

Brownsville Academy Student

“I had about 1½ credits. Now I have 30.”

P.U.L.S.E. High School Student

“I used to throw the announcements of parent-teacher conferences in the garbage. But I had to come to this one. I had never before seen my kid do homework. He wants to go to school. He is respectful, excited, and earning credits.”

P.U.L.S.E. High School Parent

Students are graduating from the new Transfer Schools at a rate of 56 percent, compared with 19 percent if they remain in comprehensive high schools.

NYC Department of Education

In any given academic year, approximately 42 percent of CUNY Prep students take the GED exam, and average a 73 percent passing rate. Many of those who do not take the test or pass continue at CUNY Prep. Of the 304 graduates of CUNY Prep to date, 169, fully 55 percent, have entered CUNY colleges.

CUNY Prep High School

How did these schools enable young people to grasp the content that had eluded them in their prior educational experience? How did they help young people demonstrate that achievement?

The quality of academics and approach that programs offer to returning youth can make the difference between success and failure. An effective academic component responds to the range of preparation as well as the varying commitment that young people bring with their renewed interest in education. It joins high expectations with the supports that enable young people to overcome

the barriers that stand in their way. It combines rigorous content with interesting materials and creative teaching strategies that engage young people and awaken them to their potential and talents.

In successful programs, two forces work together to support the academic participation and achievement of young people:

- **Academic Press:** High quality content, high standards, and high expectations build essential skills, knowledge, attitudes, and habits. “Academic press” drives both the school/program and the young person to concentrate effort on intensive learning and achievement.¹
- **Student Supports:** An environment of support provides needed services, personal connections, and continuous encouragement so young people can focus on learning.
- **Opportunities for Participation and Voice:** Providing ways for young people to help shape their education and the program itself strengthens their engagement and builds an understanding of active citizenship in a democracy.

A youth development approach permeates both press and supports. It informs how teaching and learning are designed and conducted, and how services are conceived and delivered. “Youth development is good pedagogy,” says Jean Thomases, former associate executive director of Good Shepherd Services, an organization that has led the integration of youth development into schools. Effective education for adolescents infuses youth development principles throughout the school and integrates core youth development practices into classroom instruction. Strong teachers and principals:

- Provide safe and caring environments.
- Design engaging activities.
- Build caring relationships and a sense of community in the classroom.
- Express high expectations.
- Offer students active and responsible roles in the classroom and school/program as a whole.
- Create continuity, linking students to the next step and ensuring that the resources are there for them to advance.

¹ Valerie Lee, et al. “Social Support, Academic Press, and Student Achievement: A View from the Middle Grades in Chicago. Improving Chicago’s Schools.” (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, October 1999).

In turn, effective preparation for adulthood requires high quality education: mastery of essential skills and knowledge, an attitude of continuous and lifelong learning, and acquisition of credentials. Strong professionals from community-based organizations (CBOs):

- Emphasize to young people the intrinsic rewards of learning and the extrinsic incentives for staying in school.
- Encourage young people to push themselves intellectually and put effort into learning.
- Elicit the critical thinking and analytic skills students use in their planning, reflection, counseling, internship, and extracurricular experiences, and connect those skills to academic success.
- Relate academic content to students' interests and potential careers.
- Encourage young people to find their passions, to pursue their questions, and link that quest to curriculum, content, and credentials.

Academic press, student supports, and opportunities go together. Young people need each, in constant combination, to master in relatively short time the academic work they may have struggled with in the past, and to make a successful transition to the next phase of their adult lives.

P.U.L.S.E. High School Principal: "Are we hard on you?"

Chorus of students: "Yes, but it's worth it."

ACADEMIC PRESS

"Effort may actually increase aptitude,"² proposes researcher Lauren Resnick. Practice at the right kinds of learning tasks can build intellectual capacity.

At first it was hard for me in school, but now I'm trying my best to succeed. I think I'm getting smarter!"

Yadira, 17, CUNY Prep High School³

Within a pervasive atmosphere of high expectations, academic press involves solid content, creative instruction, fair assessment, and mechanisms for young people to take charge of their own learning.

² Lauren Resnick. "From Aptitude to Effort: A New Foundation for Our Schools," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 124, no. 4, Fall 1995.

³ CUNY Prep: CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School, 2004-2006. A Comprehensive School Report & History of the Project, (New York: The City University of New York, 2007), p. 5.

CHALLENGING CURRICULA ENGAGES AND PUSHES YOUNG PEOPLE

Curricula are aligned with state and national standards. The focus is on competencies young people need, and on a process for helping young people to master those competencies. Content in the core areas of math, science, literacy, and humanities is integrated with skills needed for the 21st century—global awareness, financial literacy, technological capacity, civic engagement, and health awareness.⁴

- Literacy development is intensive and includes reading comprehension, writing, and graphic and visual literacy. Literacy training helps students increase the amount of text they can read and absorb, their speed and facility, and their ability to understand increasingly complicated text.⁵
- Humanities, social studies, and government courses connect young people to history—their own, and that of others. Civic engagement is personalized and young people are encouraged to read newspapers, discuss politics, and take action.

The humanities classes combine the study of topics and issues covered in high-school-level social studies and English classes, including the causes and consequences of pivotal events in global and American history, the relationship between the individual and society at different times and in different cultures, and the significance of perspective in interpreting information and arguments. Students are expected to do a great deal of reading and writing inside and outside of the classroom.

CUNY Prep High School⁶

We organized a classroom project that involved research on graffiti. We asked questions that were relevant to their lives such as, “Why are there so many fires in the Bronx?” “Who is responsible?” The CBO staffers were very aware of social history. They worked with the teachers so that the kids could teach kids from other classes or incorporate what they were doing into their history class and other subject areas. The kids got very en-

⁴Partnership for 21st Century Skills. 2002. Learning for the 21st Century. A report and mile guide for 21st Century Learning.

⁵The capacity to manage “complex reading” is a critical factor in college success, according to the recent ACT report. ACT, “Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals About College Readiness in Reading,” (2006).

⁶ CUNY Prep Report, 2007, p. 8.

gaged and argued over their conclusions, for example, that it was insurance companies that burned the Bronx, or graffiti is cool and a form of art, or graffiti was ugly and it made the trains look ugly and is wrong. They were learning academic skills but had fun doing it.

Bronx Alternative High School

- Science skills of observation, exploration, collecting evidence, analysis, and drawing conclusions based on data are applied in projects of importance to young people. Topics might include the environment of their city—air and water quality, green space, habitats for humans and other animals, river and estuary science and economics; health issues of current concern, such as obesity, asthma, and HIV; or the architecture, engineering, and safety of local buildings, bridges, tunnels, and roadways.
- Math skill development fills in basics and highlights practical applications. Math is a “critical filter” for most college majors and most jobs that pay well, so programs need to address attitudes toward mathematics as they demystify its content.

Mathematics instruction is customized to reflect the prior knowledge and skills of entering students. For those who lack proficiency in the essential skills of whole number operations, fractions, decimals and arithmetic-based word problems, instruction is focused on the discovery of misunderstandings and misconceptions as well as extended practice. For those who demonstrate mastery of those skills, the instruction is geared toward a deeper understanding of key topics in the areas of probability, statistics, algebra, and geometry.

CUNY Prep⁷

CUNY Prep and other effective programs take responsibility for ensuring that the curriculum is rigorous:

Our curriculum is Regents level. We do that both for DOE accreditation and also as a college preparatory program. We know that in one year many of our students are going to be in college. We work very, very hard for them to acquire knowledge in key content areas and skills so that they can function in an introductory biology class once in college.

Manhattan Comprehensive High School

⁷ Ibid

FOCUS ON MASTERY OF ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS RATHER THAN “SEAT TIME”

Programs granting a high school diploma are bound by the requirement of 54 hours of course time per credit, but concentrate on what each young person needs to move forward. “Everything is linked to a competency, a requirement for graduation, or a skill for the future,” says Joanne Nabors, principal of Brownsville Academy.

- Individualized approaches move young people forward at their own pace. Programs offer choices for how students can study and master a subject by recognizing multiple intelligences and ways of learning—visual, auditory, sensory, kinesthetic.⁸
- There are opportunities for young people to catch up and fill in missing knowledge. These are not cast as remediation and students are not blamed for what they haven’t yet learned.
- Students who are moving ahead faster do not have to wait. They can accelerate both their learning and acquisition of credentials.

Teaching is Active and Hands-On. Instructional strategies are student-centered—they build on young people’s interests, involve students in designing the learning experience, and create opportunities for individual, small group, and large community learning.

The work is the same [as my old high school] but people teach differently. They understand how you learn. They listen. It’s hands-on. They tell you to ask questions.

P.U.L.S.E. High School Student

While teachers may still lecture and use direct teaching to communicate certain kinds of information, the emphasis is on building critical thinking and higher order skills. As the CUNY Prep student handbook notes:

Rather than teaching you just sets of facts, dates, and formulas, teachers have designed their classes to engage you in activities that help you to think scientifically, mathematically, and historically about phenomena that surround you every day as well as events that may occur in distant lands or times. We developed this method of instruction by reflecting on our students, their ways of learning, and our own beliefs about good teaching and successful schools.

CUNY Prep⁹

⁸ See for example, Gardner, H. (1983) *Multiple Intelligences*, and Sternberg, R., (1985) *Intelligence Applied*.

⁹ CUNY Prep Report, 2007, p. 4.

Programs use instructional models that engage students fully, such as:

- Cooperative learning, situations where young people work together to complete the task or find the answer.
- Integrated technologies, including computers and other technologies, to search, collect, and organize information; write and communicate; create art and music and gain facility in the tools of the 21st century.
- Project- and problem-based learning, in which young people identify a question or problem, design a project, implement it over a period of time, and produce a final product.

Manhattan Comprehensive students took a class on documentary film-making which included watching films and learning to use video cameras to conduct practice interviews. They complemented this educational experience with part-time internships with the Manhattan Neighborhood Network to get skills training in using video equipment, and broader instruction in shaping a narrative for film and how to produce high-quality videos. They were assigned a specific project—to create a film on New York City’s public health clinics for immigrants—that challenged them to combine their academic learning, internship, and personal experience.

INSTRUCTION HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE BECOME “SKILLFUL STUDENTS”¹⁰

- Students are encouraged and supported to take charge of their own learning. They know what they have to do to graduate.
- Students learn how they learn. They reflect in journals, autobiographies, and conversations how they approached learning in the past, and the insights they are gaining about what works best for them. Meta-cognitive processes are made explicit and young people learn to name their own learning processes and strategies.
- Young people mentor and support each other’s learning through study groups, peer tutoring, and informal contact.
- Messages about becoming disciplined and independent learners are ubiquitous—posted on the walls, expressed constantly by staff, and reiterated by students.

¹⁰The term comes from an interview with John Garvey, Dean of the Teacher Academy & Collaborative Programs at CUNY, who was centrally involved in the establishment of CUNY Prep High School.

- There is intentional effort to create a safe classroom atmosphere in which it is cool to be smart, where young people and staff can express their ideas freely, disagree and debate, and support each other to guess, wonder, ask, take intellectual risks; and not worry about losing respect if they make a mistake.

Study Skills Provide Practical Strategies. Students may not have acquired these in their earlier educational experience. Students learn to:

- Take good notes, write papers and reports, review material, prepare for tests, and participate in class.
- Use the Internet and the library to conduct research and locate information.
- Credit their sources, compile bibliographies, and use correct styles for references and footnotes.
- Use organizers to keep track of homework and other responsibilities.
- Work independently with adult supervision, decreasing as they become more proficient and confident.

Homework is carefully constructed to add depth and breadth to classroom instruction. Assignments are scaffolded, beginning with basic components, to allow for progressive mastery of skills.

We had the issue of homework. The students want homework and their parents are always asking us about the homework. But the teachers weren't assigning homework. Teachers were not giving homework because the students wouldn't do the homework. So why give the homework if they are never going to hand it in and it's going to be a battle? So we started once a week with homework, and as they get more proficient we assign more. We still don't give up on the expectation, we just build up to it slowly while increasing the supports.

Community Prep High School

Test Preparation Is Efficient and Integrated. All programs prepare students for GED exams, standardized tests required for high school graduation, SATS/ACTs, or other college entrance exams, but test preparation does not drive the educational process. Programs embed test preparation within content areas and concentrate on transferable skills. They:

- Highlight how the core concepts and content are likely to appear on tests.

- Make certain that students understand the value and limits of test preparation.
- Use test preparation as a jumping off point for hands-on activities, deeper investigations, and to generate more questions about the topic at hand.
- Offer discrete, intensive sessions as exams approach, with Friday, Saturday, or after-school sessions leading up to the test.
- Organize targeted classes for students who already have their credits in that subject area but still need to pass high school qualifying exams, such as Regents.
- Provide tutoring and peer study groups.

We don't teach to the test, and our Regents scores are really high. We focus on skills and knowledge—how to analyze, synthesize, evaluate—so no exam will stop them.

Principal, P.U.L.S.E. High School

ASSESSMENTS ARE FAIR, CONSTRUCTIVE, AND REPRESENTATIVE OF STUDENTS' WORK AND EFFORT

For young people who may have received little positive prior feedback about their academic capacities, assessments are especially sensitive. Done well, they summarize and showcase students' best work, identify areas where they need help, and motivate continued effort and “academic press.” Good assessment involves informed students, clear learning goals, and multiple ways of demonstrating progress:

- Learning goals are clear. The goals and content of the curriculum are shared with the students. Big ideas and core concepts are made explicit. Specific content knowledge for which students are responsible is identified.
- Assessments test students on material that was covered. There are no trick questions, guesswork, or surprises.
- Students are fully informed about what is required of them and take ownership of what they must do. They know where they are in their accumulation of credits and exams, their scores on predictors for GED exams, the areas they need to work on, and how well they grasp a particular topic or idea.

At the beginning of the school year we look at the Regents and GED requirements, laying out the standards for each area, and we create a matrix. We actually map it out and we require every teacher to show us an example of how they are using GED-level assessments during the school year to assure that kids grow familiar with what is expected of them whether they go on to a regular high school or take the GED with us.

CUNY Prep High School

Staff creates a safe atmosphere in which students can be honest about whether they really understand and feel mastery, and what areas need attention:

- Individual assessment of students is criterion-referenced and measures how well a student is doing in relation to what he or she needs to know and be able to do.
- Students are not compared one to the other, either formally or informally. Progress is measured against where a student started, and incremental advances are recognized.

Expectations of students are consistent and progress is communicated on a regular basis:

- Staff work together to set uniform expectations across the program or school such as for amount of homework, number of books to be read, research paper rubrics, and grading criteria. Students are part of this conversation.
- Teachers perform frequent assessments of student performance in core academic areas and share with students where they are, what things they are doing well, and where they need more work.

A variety of methods is used to understand student learning and progress:

- Presentations, conversations, group discussions, papers, drawings, constructions, projects, and journals provide multiple formats for students to show what they know.
- Work is compiled into portfolios and other organizing media to present a full and nuanced picture. Student work and its connections to standards and requirements is prominently displayed both to celebrate accomplishment and to communicate to the school community, parents, and the public what students are learning and how they are putting it all together.

Students had to choose two pieces of work from their portfolios that had some significance to them and write a reflective piece. They had to write something about who they are now and their plans for the future and then present it. The pieces have been beautiful. They've given a sense of closure while also challenging student to really think beyond graduation.

Bushwick Community High School

STUDENT SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND VOICE

Youth who have disconnected from their education need a range of supports and opportunities to ensure their consistent academic participation and achievement, including:

- Intensive attention to engagement and attendance, and a clear understanding of how these relate to academic success.
- Consistent clarification of goals, clear benchmarks for progress, and opportunities to make choices about activities, assignments, books and other learning activities.
- A Primary Person that a student can count on for help, encouragement, and advocacy to keep them on track to graduation.
- Counseling to support the development of positive attitudes and healthy behaviors that free young people to concentrate on learning, and social services to address family, legal, or economic issues that get in the way of performance.
- Continuity and connections to the next phase of a young person's life. Programs make it clear to young people how their academic participation relates to future opportunities and help young people to plan and prepare for them.
- Both individual and collective (with other students) channels for reflecting on the effectiveness of the school or program and providing input to strengthen it. In connection with this, students may need training in decision-making, and clear structures to help them make themselves heard. Not only verbal input, but opportunities to take action are important—caring for the school, helping other students, organizing events or activities. When staff invites student input, it is critically important that they intend to make use of it. If they are not sure, they should not invite it.

These supports and opportunities are discussed also in-depth in companion briefs in this document. The critical element is how they combine to support the whole of a young person's intellectual, emotional, and social development, all of which are essential for success in the academic realm.

Expectations are high and clear and established from the start. The system for success is transparent:

- Each person, student and staff, knows what is required for graduation.
- Standards for participation and performance are clear and related to what students will really need to be successful.
- Standards are achievable and appropriately sequenced given where students are in the process. They are accompanied by strong encouragement, repeated expressions of belief in students' potential, and the concrete supports that someone will be there to help them every step of the way.

Attendance is a non-negotiable and schools convince students to come because:

- Teachers and CBO staff are true to their promise to give young people the knowledge and skills they need to get their diplomas and move on to post-secondary education and careers.
- Being present physically, socially, and intellectually matters to the student and to the whole school community.
- There is a system in place for monitoring attendance, and programs follow-up when a student is absent. Students know that someone will notice if they are not there, find out why, and make sure they come back.
- School is a place where students are comfortable and look forward to learning.

I wake up and I want to come to school.

P.U.L.S.E. High School student

Every student is connected to a network of caring adults:

- A primary person is assigned to every student, and is responsible for monitoring progress and advocating on that student's behalf.
- All staff are on the lookout for signs of positive academic progress as well as potential problems. They communicate constantly and share relevant information with each other and with the student.
- No student is lost from view. Staff check in with students formally, through regularly scheduled advisories and meetings, and informally, as they pass in the hall, stand at the entrance in as students arrive and leave, or as students drop by their offices or classrooms, for example.
- Staff is committed to helping students succeed.

I had one student who came to us having failed Regents exams several times already. I worked with her one-on-one and she passed all five in one year, and then enrolled in community college.

Assistant Principal, Christopher Columbus YABC

Students' needs and strengths are assessed at the outset and constantly reviewed:

- A thorough analysis of what students need to graduate begins with an intake process that asks young people to talk about their prior educational experience, what didn't work, and what they need to be successful this time around. Intake sets the expectation that young people will reflect on their own learning and that they will get what they need from the school to support their achievement.
- Students and staff develop a clear and flexible plan that outlines their individual academic program, time estimates for how long it will take, and accompanying counseling, tutoring, test preparation, and college and career activities.
- If a student shows signs of falling behind or having academic trouble, staff immediately responds. They uncover the factors that are impeding progress, and ramp up such services as academic tutoring or counseling, health and social services, and family intervention.

Counseling, case management, and a full array of social supports are available on site and integrated into students' programs:

- The program provides experienced professionals to support young people and their families.
- Counseling is based on intake assessments and continuous review, provided as needed and without bureaucratic delays.
- Conditions influencing participation and achievement are addressed, including family dysfunction, legal problems, homelessness, and hunger.
- A safe space staffed by youth development professionals within the larger nurturing environment of the school gives students a place where they know they can get help right away, or just cool off, regroup, and relax.

Planning for life after high school links current academic participation to future options. Programs help students to:

- Envision a realistic path beyond high school that raises students' sights about what is possible for them, with clear academic and achievement

benchmarks that are related to what they will need for college and careers.

- Gain insights into career opportunities through internships, jobs, and reflective seminars—such as Learning to Work—that connect work experience, academics, and a vision for a productive future.

Schools that successfully reengage young people in the content of their education reflect frequently and deeply about how to meld academic press and student supports. They constantly challenge themselves to make sure that their academic program is consistent with their mission of youth development.

In our summer institute, we talked about what we believed in practice and developed a draft document. We asked many questions: "What has happened to these young people in the past?" "What were the things that we really valued and found important to weave into the fabric of our practice?" "What exactly did we mean by including the student's voice?" "How do we make a place for that voice in our school community, in the classroom, and outside the classroom?" These questions speak to high standards and issues of consistency, within the school and across the school community. What should this look like? If you were to break down a day in the life of our school, what are the structures, what are the things to be consistent about? What practices do we implement across the board? From there we moved on to literacy and numeracy. We began to map out curricula and lesson plans. We all work together developing curricula, performance targets, and assessment tools.

South Brooklyn Community High School

OUTCOMES FOR SUCCESSFUL ADULTHOOD

Young people who are over-age and under-credited all have reasons why they fell behind. Some of those reasons can be addressed with a simple combination of attention and love, while others require more complex responses and longer and repeated efforts.

Academic achievement and youth development are inseparable. The immediate goal of schools and programs for returning youth is graduation and successful completion. The substance of what young people learn—the academic content, the skills and habits of mind—will transform who they are, where they go, and what they do. The means for success—a network of support—applies beyond students' experience in high school: healthy relationships with peers and family, professional connections, and personal networks are essential to positive transitions to adulthood.

When young people are expected to achieve academically, given high quality learning opportunities and the supports they need to overcome obstacles, they can and will make it. Thousands of young people stand to benefit directly from this approach, in New York City and beyond. If we invest in them, they will return the investment to their communities, the workforce, and to a democratic society that depends on informed and educated participation by all its citizens.

POST-GRADUATION PLANNING FOR
COLLEGE AND CAREERS

POST-GRADUATION PLANNING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS

When young people make the decision to get their diplomas, they are demonstrating a commitment to their future. It is important to help them understand that a diploma, GED, or significant advances in skills is a beginning, a foundation for more learning and more opportunities. How do you help them raise their expectations to include post-secondary education and training? What is necessary to ensure that young people have a plan for the future and a network of support to help them now, as they make the transition, and into the next phase of their lives?

This brief suggests practices that enable young people to enter college or to secure a job upon receiving their diploma. These paths are not intended to separate students into tracks, but rather to make sure that whatever their readiness level, they will be on their way to employment that offers decent pay and advancement as well as to further education that can heighten their prospects for a satisfying career and fulfilling life.¹

To put college and productive jobs within young people's grasp, effective schools and programs:

- Craft a plan from the outset.
- Raise awareness of careers and college.
- Guide young people through the process of getting a job and/or getting into college.
- Provide continuing support to young people after they leave the program.

Our goal is to have young people submit their college applications and receive responses or develop a set of skills for the workplace by the time they graduate. We offer a class called College & Careers where students learn the differences between private and public colleges and the college application process and work with guidance counselors on application essays and financial aid packages.

South Brooklyn Community High School

¹ Many of the skills and knowledge required for college and for employment are the same, according to a report on a study by ACT, Inc., "Skills for Work, College Readiness Are Found Comparable," *Education Week* (May 2006).

PLAN FROM THE START

Start talking with young people about their future as soon as they walk in the door. Give them a dual charge:

- Accumulate the skills and credits you need to graduate or complete the GED.
- Envision what you will do after you graduate and make it happen.

Raise the issue of college and post-graduation planning during the admissions and orientation process:

- Ask young people what they hope to do. Seed the idea that completing their secondary education is a critical first step.
- Administer short intake questionnaires to inform planning and provide insight into where a young person is starting. Use the data as a baseline against which to compare changes in aspirations, plans, and attitudes.
- Talk about post-secondary education as a viable choice and let them know that even if they don't yet have the credentials to get in, the school/program is there to help prepare them.
- Describe the program activities that will support their transition planning and connections to next steps.

IDENTIFY INTERESTS

Young people often don't realize that the things they like to do can translate into jobs or courses of study. Further, they may have had limited opportunities to explore what they do like.

Programs use multiple methods to encourage young people to reflect on who they are, who they want to be, and where they want to go. Some of the things they do include:

- Filling out interest inventories. These provide clues and starting points, not limits.
- Engaging in conversations about their interests and what they are good at.
- Writing about experiences they have enjoyed in the past and keeping journals of what they like and don't like during their current experiences.
- Talking with their peers, Primary Persons, and counselors about aspirations, hopes, and concerns. This can be an opportunity to examine equity in education and employment, confront gender and race stereotypes about who can do what kind of job, and identify and plan ways to surmount personal barriers to success.

RAISE EXPECTATIONS

Shifting young people's perspectives of themselves and their futures takes constant encouragement, solid evidence, and concrete strategies. Programs that help them to take the long view:

- Lay out a variety of options that young people can consider and feel comfortable with—vocational and technical schools, jobs that include training, community colleges, local senior colleges, colleges and universities outside the city and state.
- Help young people balance the desire for an immediate job and income with longer term financial gain. Young people need to know the economic case for continuing their education, about work-study programs and part-time arrangements they can make to earn money if they pursue college or other training, and that some businesses and organizations help employees attend and pay for college.
- Introduce the idea of a career ladder. Make young people aware of opportunities where they can advance from entry to higher level positions as they build skills and experience. Plant the idea that building a career is a process of continuing exploration (most people change jobs multiple times in their lives), accumulating expertise, creating a deliberate path, and taking advantage of serendipitous opportunities.
- Use the “vocabulary of college,”² speaking of college as a realistic expectation.

We place a huge emphasis on college starting from the very first day of orientation, even while recognizing that many students might not see college as a goal. We ask, “Why don’t you think college is for you?” “Why do kids who live in certain areas believe they should go to college and you don’t?”

Bushwick Community High School

DEVELOP A PLAN

Programs that enable young people to create a comprehensive plan:

- Provide structured information about colleges and careers in advisory sessions, workshops, and classes.
- Work one-on-one to craft individualized plans.
- Schedule periodic meetings to review and revise, on the assumption that a young person's plans may change as they make progress toward graduation.

² The phrase comes from CUNY Prep High School, which bills itself as “a GED program with college as the goal.”

Involve young people fully in developing the plan:

- Interviews with Primary Persons elicit interests and issues, map out the forces in their lives that support or impede success, and identify areas for additional services.
- Formal meetings and informal conversations with peers create a community of support.
- A “Futures” or “College and Career Portfolio” gathers essential documents, information about future opportunities, and evidence of accomplishments.

These Futures Portfolios are personal catalogues of a young person’s life and experiences. They are useful for planning, monitoring progress, and showing evidence of achievement and creativity to potential employers and colleges. The folders include:

- Career, educational and personal goals, and the training and/or higher education they’ll need to achieve those goals.
- A summary plan and timeline with benchmarks to track progress.
- Interest and skill inventories, results, notes about what they like to do, things that get them engaged and excited.
- Information about jobs and careers.
- Information about college and the college process.
- Work, art, writing, certificates, and other evidence of positive accomplishments.

RAISE AWARENESS OF CAREERS AND COLLEGE

To make informed choices, young people need a sense of the universe of possibilities. They also need a sense of what is expected in these environments in order to be able to imagine themselves as workers and college students. As their knowledge expands, so does their sense of control over their future.

EXPOSE YOUNG PEOPLE TO CAREERS AND JOBS

Most young people, (like most people, in fact) have limited awareness of the enormous variety of jobs that are available. The process of discovery can be motivating and stimulate young people to consider possibilities that had never occurred to them.

³Published by the U.S. Department of Labor.

- Conduct Internet searches, look through the U.S. Dictionary of Occupational Titles,³ and use computer tools such as CareerZone and CareerCruising. These and other programs allow young people to profile their interests and skills, search for the kinds of jobs that match up with their interests, identify the qualifications and necessary training, and construct plans.
- Launch research projects to identify where the jobs are and where they are likely to be in the next decade, for example in information technology or health careers, and the level of education and training required.
- Organize career conferences and panels. Invite workers and professionals to talk about their work, demonstrate what they do, and meet with young people.
- Visit workplaces across sectors—retail, corporate, manufacturing, government, public, non-profit (including community and public service organizations), and cultural and educational institutions.

CREATE A WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Within the school, set up a culture that treats young people as adults and prospective workers.

- Share information about the organizational structure of the school and how decisions are made.
- Help young people understand reporting structures, and how information flows in a work organization.
- Put rules and policies in the context of what is required for efficient and safe operation.
- Treat young people with the same respect you want them to show fellow workers and supervisors.

In turn, expect young people to:

- Attend regularly and be on time.
- Call if they will be late or absent.
- Work hard.

PROMOTE COLLEGE AS A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN FEEL COMFORTABLE

Young people who had not expected to graduate from high school have likely given little thought to what college is like, or even that it can be a place for them. Programs need to introduce young people to the college environment, to college level work, and to others who have attended college and been successful.

- Organize visits to a variety of colleges and post-secondary programs.
- Invite representatives of colleges and training programs to make presentations, conduct discussions and conversations, and meet with and interview young people.
- Invite former students, now in college, to make presentations.
- Participate in programs like CUNY's College Now program that links the New York City Department of Education with the City University system and allows high school students to enroll in certain credit and non-credit-bearing college courses.
- Set up a regular schedule for young people to spend time at a nearby college.

Students from P.U.L.S.E. High School in the Bronx attend courses at Bronx Community College and spend a full day each week at the college through Campus Fridays, a special program designed by the principal with the vice president of the college. Students are on their own and allowed to use all the college facilities. "There's a different kind of freedom," says the principal. "They come alive."

- Set up overnight retreats and multi-day trips with participation in classes, social events, and discussions with college students. These experiences expose young people to the full range of benefits that college can offer and can provide the kind of real-world learning experiences that young people need to believe that college is a worthwhile and achievable ambition.

We take both junior and senior-level students on day trips to local CUNY and SUNY campuses and organize a weekend trip to an upstate SUNY campus. In partnership with a service club at Baruch College, college-student mentors meet and discuss college choices with our students and take them on campus tours and sit in on classes.

Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day School

- Provide "social proof" of success in college. Bring back graduates who have gone on to post-secondary education to speak, set up visits and tours of their colleges, and serve as mentors through the college process.

We found that students would put in the extra time to prepare once they had heard from their peers about the added benefits of going to college. So, we bring back former students. It took persistence from our counselors to keep them involved, but it paid off. The college staff told us that our students seemed especially together and well prepared.

Comprehensive Development, Inc.

GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE THE TOOLS TO CROSS SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

Fitting into a college or work environment can be challenging. Norms of behavior may be different from what young people are used to in their own neighborhoods or schools. While some institutions and settings have fairly diverse populations, others may be primarily white and middle class with only small populations of people from minority backgrounds or low-income communities. Inequity in education and unequal access to employment are enduring and systemic problems. Fortify young people while they are still in high school with strategies to ease the transition:

- Create space where young people can talk about both the larger political situation and their own concerns. Establish classes, forums, and dialogues that address issues of race, class, gender, and culture.
- Make them aware of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges, and Hispanic-serving institutions as viable options to consider in higher education.
- Highlight companies that are strong on diversity policy, and identify organizations in the non-profit and government communities that are representative of a diverse population.
- Introduce young people to college offices for student life and student associations that serve and advocate for students from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Take them to plays, dinners, concerts, and art and science museums to expose them to experiences and etiquette that will make them feel comfortable with fellow students and workers.

GUIDE YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH THE PROCESS

Activities to prepare young people for their future take place throughout their time in the program and intensify as the transition gets closer. Programs offer classes and seminars, organized work experience and internships, individualized support for the college and job application process, connections to employers and college admissions directors, and information and help for families.

Career Development Classes and Seminars. Programs such as the New York City Department of Education’s Learning to Work include a weekly seminar that builds workplace skills and readiness. They help young people to:

- Prepare a resume that capitalizes on their talents and assets, including their struggles to turn their lives around and reconnect to their education.
- Hone their communication and interview skills, and promote themselves and what they have been able to accomplish.
- Ask for clarification when they don’t understand a directive, and ask for help when they don’t know how to do something.
- Take time to reflect and debrief about their job search, internship experience, or college application process.

Internship and Other Work Experiences. Good internships give young people a real taste of what a particular job or field can be like. When youth perform well, the internship may turn into full-time paid employment.

- Schools offer paid internship opportunities through DOE’s Learning to Work program, which provides young people with 80 hours of internship experience.
- Partnerships with health and higher education institutions and art and science museums, along with participation in other organizations’ mentoring and employment programs expand the range of options.
- Programs tap into resources such as the Career Internship Network⁴ that has more than 20 members in New York City and promotes high quality internship experiences.

Connections to Training Opportunities. There are numerous training programs in New York State, with many that require a GED or high school diploma but not necessarily college.

- Identify certified vocational programs in the city and state⁵ and vet them to make sure they are high quality and match up with the student’s interests and capacities.
- Connect young people to youth employment networks and job programs, and with organizations such as VESID for persons with disabilities (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities).

⁴ <http://www.careerintern.org>

⁵ Proprietary trade schools are licensed and overseen by the New York State Education Department and listed at http://www.highered.nysed.gov/bpss/directory_main_page.htm.

Support for Test Preparation for College Entrance and Training Exams. Most high school students who are on a college track now take some kind of test preparation course, and recently, test prep companies have begun to work with urban and poor schools to make sure that low-income students have the same access to these test-taking strategies as their more advantaged peers. As much as possible, involve all young people in this preparation and encourage them to take college entrance exams, even if college is not an immediate next step:

- Offer tutoring with adult coaches and peer tutoring by fellow students.
- Organize study groups so students can help each other. For programs such as NYC's Young Adult Borough Centers, where students are at school for an abbreviated schedule, set up virtual support systems with phone and email and use the common time they do have—dinner, official class periods—for short meetings and time to compare notes.
- Set up mentoring and advisory relationships, and encourage attendance at weekly academic counseling sessions.
- Make SAT and ACT test preparation available. Offer courses in-house or develop relationships with test prep companies to provide subsidized courses convenient to students' homes, schools/programs, and schedules.

We provide college workshops beginning in the spring of junior year. These range from rigorous academic preparation to more focused test prep. Students must attend to be eligible for certain scholarships. Seniors may choose either a year-long, advanced placement English class, or a condensed SAT review class conducted by Princeton Review.

Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day School

Help Young People with Admissions and Financial Aid. The college admissions process is difficult for anyone, and doubly so for young people who have followed unconventional paths to complete high school. Transcripts that show a low GPA can mask recent improvements and fail to convey the perseverance young people have displayed to overcome personal and institutional obstacles to success. Effective college guidance directs young people to appropriate colleges and helps them to tell the story of their academic and personal development in a compelling fashion.

Cultivate Relationships with College Admissions, HEOP,⁶ and Student Life Offices. As college officers come to understand the nature of the program and trust the judgment of a school's college advisors, they read applications with more insight which increases the chances of admission. Solicit feedback on applications, interviews, and performance, and use this to improve your process and preparation.

Help Young People Prepare College Applications. Young people who didn't expect to go on beyond high school are likely to need close support through the college application process. Simplify the process into steps that enable students to take control:

- Familiarize young people with websites, downloading applications, filling out forms, writing essays, getting fee waivers, and securing recommendations.
- Help them compile a list of colleges they can apply to.
- Have sample application forms available for them to practice on before they have to submit. The Common Application is now accepted by nearly 300 institutions (<http://www.commonapp.org/>) and is a good place to start.

Some programs require all their participants to fill out a college application as a graduation requirement. The application is a learning tool to:

- Elicit young people's ideas about what they are interested in and might want to do, emphasizing again that they have a future and need to plan for it.
- Build literacy, writing and employability skills, especially if teachers, counselors, and primary persons give them feedback on their content, style, and grammar.

Encourage Young People to Tell Their Stories. Whether young people are applying for college or making a case for themselves with potential employers, encourage them to tell their stories from their hearts. Involve adults who know them well to highlight their strengths.

- Review with young people their transcripts, portfolios, and talents and skills, and make a list of their assets, progress, and achievements, as well as how to present the less than positive aspects of their prior records.
- Place special emphasis on the development of essays. Topics often include questions that these young people can really rise to: how they overcame adversity or faced a challenge; describe someone who influenced them, or a life-changing event; highlight how diversity enriches a college campus; reveal something about themselves that an admissions office wouldn't see in a dry transcript or an employer would miss in a formal resume.

⁶The Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) offices on campuses of private universities. The New York State HEOP is specifically designed to support students from low-income backgrounds with "high potential for collegiate success" but who have not attained Regents diplomas and generally rank low on traditional measures of college admission. HEOP provides pre-freshman workshops; remedial and developmental courses; tutoring; academic, personal, and career counseling; and financial aid.

- Provide recommendations. Heartfelt references are a powerful means of presenting young people's journeys. Students may need one or two recommendations for their college applications, and employers who call for a reference will welcome a written analysis as well.

Each student needs to be individually packaged to tell his or her story in a way that is comprehensible to the colleges.

Comprehensive Development, Inc.

Monitor the college submission or job application process, and help young people deal with acceptances or rejections:

- Follow the process along with each young person.
- Work with staff to design a process that can celebrate successful applications, support young people who are not admitted to the program of their choice, and continue working with young people to find a job.

Organize transitional experiences as young people make progress toward completion:

- Increase the amount of independence in study habits and assignments expected of students. Give students multiple opportunities for independent study, project-based learning, and setting up their own schedules.
- For those who will be going on to college, connect them with college bridge and prep programs, summer art and academic residencies at colleges, and academic internships that introduce young people to the academic expectations and behavioral norms of college life before they officially begin.
- Meet with young people who have lined up jobs and help them figure out what they will need to be prepared, whether it is additional skills, different clothes, getting used to a new schedule, or navigating through the city on unfamiliar transportation. Keep higher education and continued training on the agenda.
- For young people who are still looking for jobs, help them intensify their search and come up with contingency plans for spending productive time—short term courses, continued internships, trial periods—with potential employers.

During the three months the kids wait for the results of their GED they have a career-related program. During that time we change their schedule, very closely mimicking college. For example, they move from having classes from 8:30-2:30 to actually having three days a week of intensive half-day classes and one SAT prep class. They have Fridays off for intern-

ships or to take supervised trips to colleges. We structure the entire second year—after a student earns a GED—to support the transition to college or employment.

CUNY Prep High School

We organize a college summit for those approaching graduation: an intensive four-day experience at a college campus where they write personal essays and really talk about their dreams and fears and what they're hoping to accomplish. This is a very powerful experience.

South Brooklyn Community High School

INVOLVE FAMILIES

Parents who did not attend college, who dropped out of high school, or who have struggled to find good jobs may need the same kind of information and case building that you are providing to their children. Even for those who had more success in their educational careers, the college process has changed significantly in the past couple of decades and the job market has also shifted—from a manufacturing to a service and information economy—with very different jobs and job requirements.

To help parents, programs:

- Conduct college information nights and career fairs.
- Arrange regular meetings with family members to ensure that they understand the post-graduation planning process and the options available for their child.
- Educate parents about vocational training programs, and the college application and financial aid process. This helps make it clear that if their child wants to go to college, it will be financially affordable.
- Report academic progress and positive achievements to parents through phone calls, letters, and informal contact, and connect those achievements to potential for success in college: “Your son has real talent with computers and might consider a career in Information Technology.” “Your daughter is earning credits at an accelerated rate, and is moving at a pace that’s more like college than high school.”

Help Young People and Their Families Identify and Apply for Scholarships and Other Grant and Loan Opportunities. There are excellent sources of free information on scholarships available on line, (e.g., <http://www.finaid.org>) and numerous scholarships available to support any young person who makes the

commitment to continue his or her education. For access to federal student aid—including Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, Stafford Loans, and work-study programs—young people must submit the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA). It comes in electronic and print formats, can be filled out on-line and requires parents (or independent children) to submit information based on their current year tax forms.

The process itself is not that difficult, but it can take time. Provide families as much help as you can:

- Prepare written and in-person overviews of financial aid and the process.
- Hold a meeting and distribute forms, information, and websites.
- Set up individual meetings with families, and give them in-person help with the forms if they need it.

Students are assigned to guidance counselors who are responsible for their financial aid forms being completed as well as their college enrollment. Students complete the financial forms at home and then bring them to school where we go over them online. We found that our first cohort of kids would show up to register at college, encounter a line around the corner at the bursar's office and say, "I'm outta here." So we also manage their enrollment so that that process doesn't intimidate them.

CUNY Prep High School

CONTINUE THE SUPPORT

College and training programs can be terrific environments that treat students like the adults they are. But they are also not set up to provide the kind of close attention that students have been used to in their current programs. Neither are most workplaces. To increase the chances of retention in college or on the job, programs:

- Organize small groups of classmates to meet regularly even after they have left the program. Some programs encourage their students to go to the same college, and then work with these colleges to create academic, social, and support networks that these young people can participate in together.
- Offer quiet spaces where returning students can study and use computers.
- Provide ongoing phone and in-person counseling and support sessions for program alumni whenever necessary.
- Maintain small discretionary funds that are made available to young people to purchase books, and, in some cases, to buy clothes so that they are more comfortable in a college or work setting.

- Help young people find part-time employment, connect them to paid internships, and pay them to return during summers and vacations to tutor younger students or take other program-related jobs.
- Involve alumni as mentors and guides for current students.

It helps to get students involved in college activities. We worked with them to identify clubs and other activities that would enable them to build a social group, and we stayed close to them to help address issues as they emerged.

Young Adult Learning Academy

Following young people after graduation is demanding and can extend over several years. It is a critical support that demonstrates to young people that they are worthy of sustained interest, and it can mean the difference between dropping out and successful completion.

Our experience was that our students did not take advantage of the special supports at first. We had to stick very close to them and provide mentors from our staff: people that they already knew. We also celebrated their successes, bringing them back to school periodically for a meal or other event, or to speak to currently matriculating students at the program. It is an ongoing process and you have to stay on them.

South Brooklyn Community High School

REALIZING THE FUTURE

Step by step, with care and support, young people can discover new beginnings where a short time before they had faced only dead ends. The message is the same for the young people, the programs, and their schools, and the larger society: a high school diploma is the first step, and providing the necessary supports to make a successful transition to college and employment is a wise, indeed essential, investment in our collective future.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

ORGANIZATION PARTNERSHIPS

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PARTNERSHIPS

WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS

We work very hard to see each other in interchangeable roles—teachers as counselors, counselors as teachers—and to communicate in the language of the whole person. There is no way you can be a teacher and not look at the whole person. What you are teaching in the classroom certainly affects what goes on in the student’s outside life. The relationship between a CBO and a school really does have to create a paradigm shift in terms of learning to work together by blending perspectives, expertise, and resources. Do the schools of education teach that perspective? How about the schools of social work? I don’t know. But I do know we have to think and act differently in the way we approach our work.

CUNY Prep High School

Recent years have witnessed a new movement in educational reform, joining youth development with academic learning. Schools and community organizations have formed partnerships to carry out this approach to preparing young people. These go far beyond co-location of services and aim to be full collaborations, with planned sharing of roles and responsibilities in order to get everyone “pushing in the same direction,” including the young people themselves. Young adults can and often do assume active roles in these schools and programs.

The effort to combine the resources of schools with those of community organizations—and their respective expertise in academics and youth development—is designed to increase academic achievement and positive developmental outcomes. “Youth development is good pedagogy,” says Jean Thomases, former associate executive director of Good Shepherd Services and co-author of CBO Schools. In fact, often the best instructors employ youth development strategies, even though they may call them by other names.

Strong principals and teachers:

- Provide safe and caring environments.
- Design engaging activities.
- Build caring relationships and a sense of community in the classroom and school.
- Express high expectations.
- Offer students active and responsible roles.

- Create continuity, linking students to the next step and ensuring that the resources are there for them to advance.

Preparation for adulthood requires high quality education: mastery of essential skills and knowledge, an attitude of continuous and lifelong learning, and acquisition of credentials. Strong CBO¹ professionals:

- Emphasize to young people the intrinsic rewards of learning and the extrinsic incentives for staying in school.
- Press young people to push themselves intellectually and put effort into learning.
- Elicit the critical thinking and analytical skills students are using in their planning, reflection, counseling, internship, and extracurricular experiences, and connect those skills to academic success.
- Relate academic content to students' interests and potential careers.

The full partnership model that is developing among many of the organizations participating in this work² brings together two often separate professional cultures. Working together requires patience, thought, and attention to organization and structure, as well as norms and values. Creating partnership is a process. It takes time and persistence, and clarity about the outcomes.

Practitioners identify the following as key to successful relationships:

- Mutual accountability for the same goals and joint decision making.
- Leadership that supports collaboration.
- Collaborative action, clear roles, and moveable boundaries.
- Cross-cultural understanding.
- Open communication and free flow of information.
- A community of practice, respect, and trust.

¹ Stephanie Smith and Jean G. Thomases, *CBO Schools: Profiles of Transformational Education*, (Washington, DC: The Academy for Educational Development, 2001).

² One of the challenges of describing new practices is that there may not be an agreed upon vocabulary for those practices. Such is the case here. For example, in this paper, we use the term school to refer to those who are employed by the education system, as separate from CBOs. But, in fact, all those who are discussed in this paper are members of the school staff even if they are also CBO employees.

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND JOINT DECISION MAKING

Both parties share a commitment to achieving positive outcomes for and with young people. Successful collaborations have high expectations of each member of the educational community:

- Every person is accountable. All staff assume responsibility for the academic and social development of each student. Students take charge of their learning and progress.
- Reciprocal allegiance. Every CBO member takes ownership of academic readiness and preparation, and every school staff member acknowledges the bedrock of caring and sustained relationships, high expectations, opportunities for contribution, and engaging activities.
- Explicit goals and pathways. Each student has a clear understanding of the requirements for graduation, post-secondary education, productive work, and responsible adulthood. Young people know where they are on that path and what they need to do to succeed.

In tandem with this mutual accountability, decision making is shared:

- The principal and CBO director make strategic and program-wide decisions together.
- Decision making is transparent. Everyone, including students, understands how decisions are made and which decisions are the province of one partner or the other.
- There are structured opportunities for staff and students to play a role in key decisions, as well as to raise issues that need to be addressed.

Despite this distributed approach, tensions will surface about who is accountable and for what. When there are competing priorities, what matters most? Who decides? Who is responsible for what outcomes and by what measures are they judged? These are not easy questions and implementing a common approach may be complicated by the presence of different accountability systems for the two partners. Raising them, however, and looking at accountability from the perspective of different stakeholders can help everyone sort out what action to take.

Within the education system, the most important measure is that a student graduates or obtains a GED. The principal is formally accountable for what happens in the school and for the measures on which the school is assessed: graduation, attendance, dropout and Regents passing rates, length of time to completion, and the percentage of students who go on to post-secondary education.

In turn, the CBO director is typically accountable for components critical to each of these measures—attendance outreach, career development and internships, and post-graduation planning, as well as a full array of counseling and social service supports.

The schools are a public institution, accountable to the larger society. Taxpayers expect schools to prepare the next generation for the workforce, maintain the nation's global competitiveness, advance discovery, and sustain a civil and democratic society. The public uses such measures as the percentage ready for college and the job market or involved with the criminal justice system, reduction of the achievement gap between demographic groups, relative standing to other schools in the city, state, and nation, and the level of citizen participation in civic and community life.

These measures solidly join academic and youth development outcomes. Viewed through this perspective, the director of the CBO partner and the principal are equally accountable.

Every staff person has a responsibility to maintain high quality practice and add to the knowledge of best practice in his or her field. Making these standards explicit can help shape the building of a community of practice that raises the quality beyond what each partner could do alone.

LEADERSHIP THAT SUPPORTS COLLABORATION

Strong partnerships require leaders who represent the venture as a coherent whole. Effective leaders:

- Model and promote collaboration and positive relationships among staff members.
- Meet early and often with key staff from both partners and with students to secure their buy-in and commitment to making the partnership work.
- Acknowledge that tensions are inevitable and that changing from old ways to new is not easy.
- Recognize and reward staff who supports the partnership.
- Identify and celebrate the progress of the collaboration: What is changing? What is different? Is this showing up in students' work, attitudes, achievements, and how does it evidence itself? Is the school or program culture becoming more responsive, more humane? If that is so, in what ways?

Leaders seek to ensure there are adequate resources and attention dedicated to the collaboration by:

- Conducting ongoing discussions about basic values and assumptions.
- Reflecting with staff on how practices might change to respond to the demands of the collaborative work.
- Allocating sufficient time for joint staff planning and reflection.
- Encouraging informal gatherings and social events to promote relationships between faculty and CBO staff.
- Working to assure that there are adequate budgetary supports for the collaboration.

COLLABORATIVE ACTION, CLEAR ROLES, AND MOVEABLE BOUNDARIES

Effective collaborations maintain clarity about respective areas of concentration and responsibility. There are clear guidelines about roles and sharing of information about students so that every important task is attended to, and essential insights about individual students are communicated to the right people.

How roles are actually divided up varies from site to site. Usually, academic roles are apportioned in this way:

- School staff—principals and teachers—are responsible for the curricula, pedagogy, credits, and exams. But each of these can be supported by youth development practices articulated and implemented by the CBO or school staff.
- Academic schedules and demands are constructed by school staff on a foundation of student supports that is informed by CBO staff with the participation of students.
- CBOs may co-teach with instructors and highlight youth development issues for both teachers and students.
- CBO staff link academic content and skills to students' lives beyond school, into the workplace.

Student attendance and performance is a joint responsibility:

- CBO and school staff work together on all aspects, both stating and enforcing expectations and creating environments that students will want to be part of.
- Data on attendance and performance of students is generally maintained by school staff. They, in turn, are responsible for sharing that information

with CBO staff, who, in many sites, follow up with students to determine if there are issues or obstacles in the way of regular attendance or strong performance, and develop strategies to support students.

Counseling and other social services are often conducted by CBO staff:

- Teachers and other school staff watch for signs of social, emotional, or family problems and strengths, and communicate that information to CBO staff.
- Teaching staff share support responsibilities and work with counselors to handle social issues and crisis intervention.

Planning a student's program in school and for post-graduation is a cooperative venture and organizations may take on different roles depending on their strengths in different areas. Here is a typical configuration:

- The intake interview may be conducted by the CBO, school, or both, but a formal understanding and structure is essential so that all are clear about their responsibilities. The school staff works with students on making clear what they need to do to graduate.
- CBO staff take responsibility for identifying and providing the support services the student needs to succeed academically.
- CBO staff takes charge of internships and career development planning. Principals and school staff may review the assignment of young people to outside placements in order to ensure that students can balance the academic workload with job responsibilities.
- College planning is a joint effort. School guidance counselors may play their traditional role of helping young people with the college process, and the principal and teachers may identify opportunities to participate in college courses through College Now or other initiatives. CBO staff help young people with the actual planning and goal setting process, as well as build their confidence that college is a place where they can be comfortable and successful.

All come together in support of individual students. At schools like Bushwick High School and South Brooklyn Community High School, staff gathers on a regular basis to share information about individual students and to provide feedback and guidance directly to students about their academic and social progress:

- Meetings take place weekly, at the end of the day, for one to two hours each time.
- Agendas are created to assure that students are discussed, though this may have to occur over a full month. While time is usually limited, schools and programs have developed ways to focus on sharing knowledge on a “need to know” basis in order to make these meetings efficient. The goal is to prompt exchanges among teachers and CBO staff on how to develop joint approaches to address students' needs and strengths.
- Procedures are established for how school and CBO staff are going to follow-up and hold each other and their students accountable for seeing that new or revised strategies are implemented and student improvement actually takes place.

Setting up an organizational structure with both clarity and flexibility takes time. It requires a combination of thoughtful co-leadership, written approaches, and establishing comfortable working routines among colleagues. Effective leaders move the organization toward a vision of full collaboration and shared roles in a deliberate manner so that students' needs are fully addressed at every stage of the process.

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL CULTURES

Bringing together two distinct professional cultures requires attention to elements of social organization: How do people do things together and make choices and decisions? What is valued and why? What are the norms and expectations for behaviors and beliefs? What are the sanctions, rewards, and mechanisms for social control? To develop ways of working together, partners need to learn about each other and build a common language.

EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE

Providing basic information about each partner to the other can accelerate the introduction of one culture to another. Including students in this exchange helps maintain the transparency of how the school operates and makes it easier for them to take on responsibility and meaningful roles.

Useful information for the school about the CBO includes:

- The overarching mission and purpose of the CBO, where this initiative fits in, and why the CBO decided to become involved in schools.
- The roles and responsibilities the CBO sees for itself in the initiative.
- How the CBO typically assesses need, develops its programs, delivers services, and measures quality.

- Principles of youth development, pedagogy, and philosophy of student support.
- The CBO's world: the community it serves, the range of its services, how it does its work, and the role it plays in the field. (Site visits are very useful ways of sharing this information.)

Useful information about the school and its staff includes:

- Identification of key staff.
- Rules, regulations, and standard operating procedures for the site and for general operations.
- Areas of flexibility and choice by the individual school/program.
- Requirements for graduation.
- Principles of academic achievement, philosophy of education, and pedagogy.

Both partners benefit if they identify and catalogue:

- The roles and responsibilities of all staff.
- The resources each brings to the venture.
- The expertise of each partner and each staff person, including areas of specialization specific to one side or the other, and those that cross over into the other's "territory."
- Their hopes for the collaboration and how they plan to support each other.
- Annual calendars—daily and weekly work schedules.

This information can be used as a resource by current staff, to orient new staff, and to reflect on and renew the partnership. Put it in a form that can be easily revised as people, processes, and conditions change.

COMMON LANGUAGE

The two cultures have a vocabulary of words, phrases, and meanings that represent strongly felt beliefs and practices. Often the words are shortcuts for expressing deep and complex concepts. The process of learning a new language takes time, and the process of imbuing the language with the same meaning takes even longer:

- Introduce the "key vocabularies" of each partner to the other—the words and phrases that have particular power and import. Overall, how educators

and youth workers view the characteristics of effective environments for adolescents are quite consistent. The challenge is to make sure each understands the others way of describing these common characteristics. As an example, in the education field, “personalization” is a term used to describe the effort to make a school setting one in which students and staff know and trust one another; in youth development, the term may be “caring and trusting relationships” – a factor that contributes to student resiliency. The term, “high expectations,” is shared by educators and youth workers, but other terms may require some time to translate.

- Share the language with young people and give them the tools to participate in the conversations about how youth development and high quality educational preparation come together to support them.
- Connect one partner’s language to the other’s practice. The English teacher who is convinced that everyone has something to express and supports students’ creative writing talents may not realize she is using an “assets-based approach.” CBO staff that engages students in advisory sessions or life skills workshops activities and make the connection to cognitive and social development can then reinforce the analytical skills that students are learning in class.

It's important to name our practices with youth. Then we can begin to have the context to build collaboration. Educators I have worked with often have a complete, formal template of their curriculum. And as a community person, I think, oh my god, what I do is like breathing. I just do it. Instead, it's imperative that we identify the premises of our work; the things that drive us. Otherwise, we are at a risk of not being an equal partner. If people aren't naming their practice and their intended outcomes, they can't be reflective together: they're working in isolation.

Youth Development Institute

- Share readings and discuss examples. What do “meaningful roles” look like for young people in this programmatic context? How is “critical thinking” fostered in global history as well as in post-graduation planning?
- Use each other’s terms, and check in to see if you are using them appropriately. Develop ways that you can question each other’s usage constructively and without offense.
- Create a glossary of acronyms.
- Conduct meetings and reflection sessions. Pose questions to each other. Reveal from your own side what you don’t fully understand about how to put a particular principle into practice. Share dilemmas and play out sce-

narios where you anticipate disagreements. How are high expectations for students supported by each partner, and what sanctions and rewards are acceptable from each perspective? Are there times when a student's life situation excuses or relaxes those expectations?

RECIPROCITY

Cultures establish connections through exchange and reciprocity. What does one partner have that the other needs and can use? How can you make each others' jobs easier? To build a viable partnership requires the buy-in of staff, and that happens when the added value of the partner becomes clear:

- Review the list of skills and resources each brings to the table. Agree about areas of intersection and how each partner and each staff member can contribute.
- Pair up or create small teams around small tasks that lend themselves to immediate cooperation. Reflect on how it's working. Expand to larger school-wide initiatives.
- Consciously try to look at your work through your partner's eyes: What would she or he be concerned about? How is it different from your concerns? Where is the common cause?

Acknowledge that this process takes time, and that there will be situations when you feel that "they just don't get it." Have confidence that with attention, reflection, and the constant reminder that this is all about the young people "they" will become "we."

OPEN COMMUNICATION AND FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

To make sure that each student is on track and stays on track requires constant formal and informal communication. It is all too easy for a young person who is on the edge to give up again. While programs for returning youth have multiple strategies to prevent students from falling through the cracks, they nevertheless require that everyone pools insights and critical information:

- The partners establish a structure of regular meetings of appropriate staff to review specific students or school needs. Data about student attendance and growth is used to inform decisions and practice.
- Staff avoids gossiping about students or sharing extraneous information.
- Confidentiality and sensitivity of information are respected. Each organization clarifies under what conditions they expect to share information. Both partners are fully informed about reporting policies with respect to crisis situations—potential suicides, abuse, threats of violence—and have a clear process for involving all appropriate staff from each partner.

- Everyone—CBO staff, teachers, administrators, and support staff—is always watching and listening, intent upon making sure that no young person disappears from sight or becomes silent.
- Talk to young people and check in all the time: How are you doing? What’s up? Where were you the other day?
- Talk to each other. Create mechanisms for frequent contact that don’t take a lot of time—a five-minute break in the teachers lounge, a ten-minute standup meeting at the start of each day to alert each other to concerns or to recognize progress and success.
- Create space that is shared by both partners for problem-solving, communication, and conversation.

Effective schools and programs put strategies in place to work out the tensions and breakdowns in communication that are bound to occur. They:

- Commit to resolving conflicts. Agree to disagree, if necessary, but not if it means that a young person will not get the guidance or support he or she needs.
- Codify what each partner values and try to respect or at least acknowledge those priorities.
- Review contractual and program requirements.
- Decide how they will address competing demands and needs.
- Clarify priorities and discuss how to operate within those priorities.

At South Brooklyn Community High School, counselors wanted to hold students who showed up late to school for ten minutes to discuss the reasons for their tardiness, while teachers wanted students in class so they didn’t miss even more academic instruction. To address this issue, instructors and CBO staff organized a community discussion on how to engage students around issues of attendance and tardiness without disrupting their academic progress. The result was not only the development of a series of agreed-upon practices and procedures for dealing with tardy students, but also a shift in school culture in which teachers began to experiment in their classrooms with how to connect the need for student engagement with their educational practices, while CBO counselors learned to incorporate academic counseling into their case-management and parental-outreach practices.

A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A successful partnership capitalizes on the joining of knowledge from the respective fields. Each of the partners has an enormous amount to offer the other:

- Assume staff will want to discover and learn from another field, and bring in resources, intellectually demanding ideas, and research.
- Provide relevant staff development in support of those discussions.

Assess the partnership. Start with levels of cooperation and collaboration:

- How much do the partners work together?
- How well are they sharing information?
- How comfortable are people with their colleagues? Do they ask each other for help and guidance, share a critique or suggestion, or co-author a product?
- How satisfied is staff with the level of interaction, participation in decision making, and support for the collaboration?
- Is the program drawing on each partner's full complement of skills? What needs to happen to make better use of these resources?

Then examine the partnership based on how well it is supporting the young people it is serving:

- Carry out a systematic assessment of the program's progress at regular points. Examine the quantitative data as well as case records. Interview and survey students about their perceptions of the program, services, and their own progress.
- Reflect together about changes that might benefit student outcomes.

In the end, each partner and every staff member is there for the same reason: to give young people the chance they need to develop their minds, discover their talents, construct their ambitions, and pursue their dreams. Neither the challenge nor the process is easy. But the odds of success are infinitely better when partners combine their considerable expertise and unwavering commitment so that the young people of today can become the responsible, educated, and contributing citizens of tomorrow.

ENSURING PROGRAM QUALITY

ENSURING PROGRAM QUALITY

Reconnecting young people who have left school or are at risk of doing so is a complex challenge. Staff need to be experts in everything and programs need to provide the highest quality services—education, youth development, career preparation, social services, college access, and family and community engagement. Building a strong staff and deep capacity are high priorities in order for these organizations to be effective in changing lives and paths of disconnected youth.

This brief outlines steps that can strengthen programs and the commitment to continuous improvement. The following sections are grounded in practice by experienced staff who suggest that the keys to success are to:

- Hire the right staff and provide them with accurate job descriptions.
- Orient and embrace new staff.
- Provide targeted professional development for all staff.
- Support collaborative planning.
- Create an environment that is open to critique of existing practice and open to new ideas that are grounded in strong theory and program data.
- Conduct ongoing program assessment.

HIRE THE RIGHT STAFF

High energy, the ability to engage young people, and an unshakeable belief that these young people can succeed are prerequisites for staff in programs for returning youth. Older youth are particularly sensitive to the level of commitment of teachers and other staff. Much of their reason for disconnecting in the past was that no adult seemed to know who they were, care if they did well, or help them when they needed it.

Given the challenge of what these programs set out to do, assembling a full complement of staff requires identifying people with a wide range of talent and expertise—master teachers, insightful counselors, creative program developers, resourceful career coordinators, connected college advisors, accomplished artists. Experience underscores how important it is that prospective staff have experience working with young adults and tough populations; that they are resilient and have no illusions that the work, though ultimately satisfying, is easy.

Clear strategies for recruitment, interviewing, and selection that simultaneously introduce the essence of the program to the candidate can make the hiring process an integral part of building a cohesive community:

- Identify the competencies and areas of expertise the program needs. List the sensibilities, attitudes, and non-negotiable beliefs that are required.
- Use multiple, job-related assessments to ensure that candidates share the organization’s commitment to youth development principles. Provide opportunities for them to showcase these values and related skills in practice with struggling learners. Use interviews, writing samples, and evidence of past work. Have candidates teach a sample lessons or conduct program activities. Hire them for a short trial period.
- Ask questions that will reveal underlying pedagogy, attitudes, and scholarship: situational questions (“What would you do if...”), behavioral questions (“What did you do when...”), background questions (“What experiences have you had related to...”), and knowledge questions (“What do you know about...”).

Most of the programs and schools serving this population have flexible hiring practices, and extend their search beyond the usual sources. They recruit from industry, the arts, the community, on-line, in print, and through word-of-mouth. They look for credentialed teachers and professionals with non-traditional backgrounds.

We have wide latitude in hiring our teachers. We are not bound by UFT contracts nor do they have to have NYS teacher certification, although many of our teachers do. We generally advertise our positions on Idealist, NY Times, CraigsList, and other venues. We ask that candidates have a Bachelor’s degree in the subject area, and we prefer a Master’s degree. Teaching experience in traditional or non-traditional settings is desirable.

CUNY Prep High School

Introducing applicants to the mission and culture is an essential element in the process. Most strong schools and programs report that they:

- Interview on site.
- Immerse candidates in the atmosphere of the program.
- Build in interactions with young people so that candidates are exposed to the challenges of the working environment.

The questions they ask signal a significant departure from traditional approaches:

In my interview at Bushwick, I was asked, “Do you believe, as a teacher, you can change a student’s life?” At other schools I’d interviewed at they would laugh at that. In an interview at a big school, they said, “Your job

isn't to change lives, your job is to help young people pass the Regents." But Bushwick had a different sense of mission and purpose.

Bushwick Community High School

Interview questions probe deeply to reveal candidates' attitudes about young people. Applicants are asked to:

- Respond to hypothetical youth development scenarios, and interviewers look for answers that reflect a strength-based perspective.
- Prepare and teach a sample lesson or manage a group of young people. Assessors look for the ease with which the candidates relate to the young people, the depth of their content knowledge, and the interactivity of their methods.

The process begins with a telephone interview with the assistant director. Then candidates are invited to the school to interview with selected teachers. Following that, candidates are asked to prepare a lesson plan for our review. We then ask candidates to come back to the school to conduct a demo lesson with real young people, then on to an interview with the program director. We have also asked candidates to produce a writing sample when they are invited to submit the lesson plan.

CUNY Prep High School

In the hiring process we ask potential teachers to produce a statement of their teaching philosophy and examples of good as well poor student work. In the interview we ask, "Why did you choose these examples and not those? How does this reflect your teaching philosophy?" What we are looking for is what this teacher's practice will look like on the ground as they implement a lesson. How will they engage young people in the classroom?

South Brooklyn Community High School

Programs involve multiple interviewers and reviewers:

- Those who will manage and be managed by the prospective candidate.
- Other teachers and program staff who are asked to observe and comment, "Does this person feel like someone who can become a member of the team?"
- Young people.

Student participation in the interviewing and assessment process underscores the importance of student voice to potential hires. Young people's opinions are then strongly considered as an important factor in the final hiring decision.

ORIENT AND EMBRACE NEW STAFF

Once hired, new staff is acculturated through a variety of formal and informal mechanisms. Orientation of new staff emphasizes existing partnerships, such as those between the Department of Education and community-based organizations in New York City. The youth development philosophy is infused and repeated in all organizational material and trainings.

Given the pressing demands and emotional investment that accompanies this work, a thoughtful orientation can ease the transition and minimize staff turnover. Effective strategies to introduce new staff involve:

PEOPLE

Receptive colleagues can make all the difference in making new staff feel like they belong. This might include:

- A buddy system that pairs new hires with experienced staff. Mentors can choose a topic around which to focus their guidance—service approaches, youth development principles, interactive teaching methods, or critical academic content.
- Formal introductions to make staff feel welcome. Leaders and key staff need to take responsibility for making sure that new arrivals are personally introduced to all staff including teachers, counselors, security, administrative and maintenance staff, and young people.
- Food, camaraderie, and regular updates create informal connections. Monthly briefing breakfasts orient new staff. Existing staff can be reimbursed for taking new colleagues out for lunch.

DOCUMENTS

Written materials give new hires a lens into how the program or school represents itself to outside audiences, and what frameworks and ideas are important to the organization. These might include:

- Policy and procedure manuals that outline organizational goals, rules, and expectations.
- Grant proposals that fund employees' work and program descriptions that provide a full picture of how a new employee's particular responsibilities fit within the larger organizational mission.
- Reports and write-ups of the program and services can help staff get up to speed.

- Literature and research that the program or school finds particularly helpful in describing practices and issues in youth development, education, and social service delivery introduce the language and values of the culture.

TIME

When possible, give new hires a period of adjustment before they assume their full teaching schedule, caseload, and job responsibilities. Have new staff:

- Review case files, observe colleagues' teaching and behavior management strategies, and plan how they will integrate this information into their own work.
- Reflect with their peers about promising practices and managing the demands and stress of this work.
- Set up a regular time in the early weeks to check-in with leaders and colleagues.

Practitioners say that this gradual immersion prepares new employees for their new environment, improves staff retention, and fosters an organizational culture in which all staff feel supported by each other and the larger organization to succeed at their demanding jobs.

PROVIDE TARGETED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff in these programs and schools have to be masters of many trades. They need ways to stay up to date in their own field and to acquire a working knowledge of the areas that intersect with their own. The partnership between youth development and education requires that all staff add new language, skills, and information to their repertoire.

Internal training in mission and philosophy is the foundation for other development. It helps to:

- Make core values explicit.
- Repeat the principles of youth development that should be reflected in all actions.
- Underscore the goals and outcomes for young people that drive the work.

Workshops, conferences, institutes, on-line seminars, and participation in networks to share promising practices are among the available forums for professional development. Continuous internal support is essential:

- Much of the training takes place through formal weekly supervision.
- Peer training, visiting and observing colleagues, and exchanging advice build respect for each other's expertise.

Yet time and resources are limited. Professional development opportunities need to be efficient, effective, and seen as adding real value. To be judicious in selecting and making the best use of professional development, experienced staff recommend the following steps:

- Identify the areas of interest and need. Collect suggestions and survey staff about what they most want to learn.
- Pare the list down to essentials.
- Locate highly respected trainers and training opportunities. Check out the quality in advance through reviews and other colleagues in the field.
- Make attendance easy. Set up incentives for people to cover for the attendee. If possible, send two people—one manager, one frontline staff—to increase the chance the practices will be shared and implemented.
- Share. Some programs require that staff give back—filling out a “trip template” to codify and disseminate what they have learned, make brief presentations, conduct meetings and mini-trainings to discuss how to implement new practices, and bring extra copies of handouts, activities, research briefs, and reports.
- Try out new ideas. Set as an expectation that staff use something they learned immediately, and report back on how well it worked. Involve young people in assessing how something new worked, or in evaluating a new idea or framework.
- Support experimentation. When staff are trained in a new technique or encouraged to change their teaching and service strategies, make sure they have the time, resources, and moral support to continue the process.
- Practice, practice, practice. When staff are introduced to something fundamental but complex—such as putting youth development principles into action, they need to know that quality implementation takes time.

You don't just pick up and “get” the youth development approach. You have to grapple with it, recalibrate to get better, and really learn from those around you. The redundancy of the message that you get from line staff all the way up to directors of the program enables us to better work with staff that aren't necessarily inclined to or as familiar with the youth development approach.... Because the message is consistent across the agency, you get more comfortable in your own skin and can articulate that approach to other people who aren't as comfortable or familiar with it.

Good Shepherd Services

- Don't waste the investment. If you take the time and resources for professional development, use it. Create a brief action plan that outlines concrete follow-up activities, designates responsibilities to specific staff members, and holds staff accountable.

SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Schools and programs that engage in a continuous process of improvement embed collaboration in the organizational culture and daily life of the program.

Teachers and youth development staff can:

- Plan lessons and other activities together, link their content, make explicit the critical thinking and life skills that carry over from one area to another, and implement consistent behavioral and academic expectations.
- Gather on a regular basis to discuss their practices.
- Review the progress of specific young people and discuss school-wide issues of concern.

Leaders can:

- Conduct semi-annual retreats for the whole staff to reflect, discuss, and plan.
- Encourage an “open door” policy in which classrooms and offices are open for peer visitations and observations.
- Create an environment of transparency and positive feedback.

ONGOING PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

There is an excitement and energy created when staff and students know that they can propose ideas for working more effectively. Programs that promote a culture of continuous improvement draw deep commitment from their staff and students. However, these efforts must be structured to assure that the ongoing work is not disrupted and that the process encourages thoughtfulness. Leaders should develop and disseminate a clear process for reviewing new ideas. This should draw upon the data about key program goals such as attendance and student performance, and the observations of program participants. Changes can both address weaknesses and build on strengths.

In discussions, program managers cited the internal process for initiating and testing changes, indicating that this is more important for innovation than the source or format for the new ideas. In one school, at the end of each term a very extensive process takes place in which all staff discuss the school with their students, review information about student progress and attendance, and then develop ideas for improvement. This has led to the creation of several

innovations. Another program has monthly “Cafés” where food is provided at lunch, and staff and students in mixed groups discuss what is working and what is not.

Processes like these are time-consuming and also can negatively affect some people. Thus careful thought must be given to the process to make it efficient, clear, structured while acknowledging the concerns of different individuals and groups.

LOOKING AT THE DATA

Continuous analysis of outcomes for young people, the program as a whole, as well as sub-units, provide a base of evidence on which to make informed decisions. While passion and commitment are essential, a dispassionate review of the data provides the ability to gauge the degree to which the intended outcomes are being achieved, and where improvements must be made.

This process takes time and effort. Consider what will best inform your practice. If possible, involve outside evaluators to help collect, analyze, and report back. Draw on representatives from peer programs or schools and experts in the field of youth development, youth employment, and education for advice and feedback.

Ensure staff buy into using data and a continuous improvement approach. It can be difficult to look at data and to accept it. Work actively to build a commitment among staff by stressing that this is part of a community endeavor, demonstrating the value of this approach, showing that data will be used fairly, that there will be opportunities to get support in order to improve individual and program results. Be sure also to share your commitment to continuous improvement with young people and family members, and to involve them in understanding how to interpret such information. Leaders must use data to assess their performance if they are going to ask staff to do so.

Start with Data. From the outset, collect data about the young people you serve, the programs and interventions you design to support them, and the progress they are making. Data helps you understand how your program or school is working and what you might need to change. Formal constructed evaluations can give you an idea of what works for whom, which segments of your population are doing well with the current services, and which are not responding. These tools guide decisions about what young people need and what the program or school needs.

Data comes in a variety of forms. Quantitative data—attendance figures, graduation rates, the credits and Regents each student comes in with and

accumulates, length of time from entry to completion, as well as demographic data—provide measures of reference and comparison against which to assess progress. Qualitative data—interviews, focus groups, observations, narratives, journals, case records, student work, photographs, drawings, and artifacts—provide insight into what is happening and how it happens. Analysis enables you to see patterns, trends, themes, and results.

Two types of evaluation are relevant to improvement:

- **Formative evaluation catalogues your work in progress, tells you how the school or program is working, and provides the base on which to revise activities and approaches.**
- **Outcome evaluation helps to determine whether you are achieving the goals for the young people and the program or school: Are young people graduating/completing/being placed, and in what time frame? Are they prepared for the next step and what are their next steps? Have they formed the networks of support that are indications of positive development and readiness for adulthood? Interim indicators of progress might include the rate at which young people are accumulating credits toward graduation; increasing skills and demonstrating commitment; attendance rates that reflect whether they are actually re-engaging; or the development of new relationships with adults and peers.**

Be aware that the most difficult part of assessment is discovering whether it is your program or school that is making the difference, or one of a myriad of other factors in young people's experience. Combine formative data with interim measures from the outcomes to inform decisions. Although certainty is hard to achieve, the process of critical reflection based on data is a responsible approach to refining the program or school.

Schools and programs vary in their allocation of staff time and resources to data collection, analysis, and reporting:

- **Collection of attendance data is high priority, usually with weekly review. Other data may be examined monthly or by semester.**
- **Schools vary in how they manage their statistical reporting, with some using internally constructed databases and others recommending commercial information management systems. The advantage of the latter is that while they tend to be more expensive, they can provide more detailed factor analysis, isolate young people's progress over time, and identify school-wide trends.**

Collect Baseline Data. It will tell you where the young people are when they start and where the program is when they enter it. Much of the quantitative information is available to you and probably already part of what you gather. But enter it into a central repository so you have a full record that can track each young person as well as organize data according to each variable, such as:

- Previous school or program experience.
- Employment experience.
- Number of credits and Regents exams upon entry in the program.
- Previous schools attended.
- Attendance records.
- Standardized test scores.
- Demographic data.

Also, collect qualitative data from the first contact. Again, this will likely be information you gather during the intake process, from interviews with young people and their families, and informal conversations. Document these interactions and note dates and locations. Document:

- Reasons for applying.
- Goals and aspirations.
- Perspectives on young people's past educational and employment experiences.
- Attitudes and plans for the future.
- Needs and concerns.

This will provide a preliminary idea of what each young person needs from the program, and an overall picture of students as a cohort. It will also allow you to map where they are in relation to one another. Finally, you can use this as a reference point to track young people's trajectories, progress, and outcomes.

Add to the database with quantitative and qualitative documentation of young people's experiences as they move through the program:

- Collect examples of work.
- Include interviews and observations by a range of adults to accumulate evidence of growth, change, or need.
- Look at attendance and other quantitative data in the context of a student's work.

Document the Elements of the School or Program:

- Describe the content and activities.
- Note how it is staffed.
- Track participation by young people.
- Capture comments and questions from young people and adults.
- Take pictures and save student work and products.

Conduct regular focus groups and interviews with young people and staff about the content and process of the program components, and set up quick feedback mechanisms to measure satisfaction, level of participation, and what young people and staff are learning.

Use Rubrics to Assess How Fully Youth Development Principles Are Integrated into the School:

- What are observable indicators of “caring adults” and “welcoming environments?”
- What mechanisms do primary persons and other caring adults put in place to make sure they know how their student charges are doing?
- What roles do young people play? What decisions do they participate in?
- Track examples of high or low expectations for young people.

Involve Young People in Evaluating Their Experiences with:

- Quick feedback questionnaires after activities or classes that ask what they liked, didn't like, and one or two things they learned.
- Surveys that ask about their levels of satisfaction with various elements of the program and what they would like to see changed.
- Interviews that ask them to reflect on how they are doing, changing, see the world and their future, and ask for their views on key elements of the program, such as the environment, student supports, academics, activities, peer relationships, future planning, and career development.

Make clear what you will do with this information. When you involve young people—or adults—in evaluation, they need to know how their advice or suggestions may or may not be used.

Make Sense and Apply. Ultimately, it is the process of reflection on the data that will make the difference in building a strong program:

- Examine building-wide data in staff meetings that involve both teachers and CBO staff.
- Conduct periodic retreats for staff to discuss what programs and services are working well and why, and what needs improvement.
- Look for common trends across subjects, and avoid public focus on individual teachers or classrooms.

Looking at the grade distribution in humanities, we found that the same kids that were failing humanities were also failing math and science. I used that as a tool to say, "Look guys, this is a good thing." Not a good thing that young people were failing, but a good thing in that it was clear that the young people's lack of success wasn't a result of the shortcomings of an individual teacher. We zeroed in either from a case management or from an educational standpoint to help each young person move to a better way. In this sense, the data revealed a picture and led to a different level of conversation than would have taken place without access to that information.

CUNY Prep High School

- Involve CBO staff in discussions about academic assessment, and teaching staff in discussions about measuring youth development outcomes.
- Create an atmosphere of constructive self-questioning: How are we doing? What could we be doing better? Where would we like to be a month, a year, two years from now?
- Be explicit on how data has led to change. Recognize positive progress.

TOWARD RENEWAL

Efforts to strengthen staff, reflect on practice, and assess with a critical eye are all aimed at one result: to create the conditions for young people to succeed. Program improvement and organizational renewal are constants in a dynamic process dedicated to making profound change. Schools and programs that are proactive in their quest for high quality are never satisfied. They know that their work is not done until every young person is back on track to a healthy and productive future.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS FOR PROGRAMS SERVING
YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS

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OVERVIEW

This research summary includes an examination of evaluations of the following initiatives, programs, and reform strategies targeted at improving the outcomes of young adults, both in-school and at-risk of dropping out, and those who have dropped out:

- [Advancing Via Individual Determination](#)
- [Career Academies](#)
- [The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program](#)
- [Community Education Pathways to Success](#)
- [Dare To Dream](#)
- [First Things First](#)
- [High Schools That Work](#)
- [I Have A Dream](#)
- [The Quantum Opportunities Program](#)
- [Project Grad](#)
- [Sponsor-A-Scholar](#)
- [Talent Development High Schools](#)
- [Upward Bound](#)

RESEARCH SUMMARY OF PROMISING FEATURES/PRACTICES

Programs for youth who have dropped out or are on the margins of school focus on the whole person, much as the best work in early childhood does. They address all aspects of the participants' transition into adulthood: physical and psychological safety, clear boundaries and appropriate structures, supportive and positive relationships, opportunities for skill building, integration of family, school and community. They seek to have young people take responsibility for their own growth and development.

Key Programmatic Features¹

- Youth development with a focus on personalization, connections to caring adults, engaging students, continuity of adult relationships, and opportunities for young people to make a difference to others through service or work. These programs seek to increase the engaging qualities of school and program settings by creating meaningful personal bonds between both young adults and teachers, as well as amongst young people themselves.²
 - Strategies include small class and school sizes; mentoring and tutoring; intensive, personalized academic and social counseling and case management; an emphasis on small-group work, peer tutoring, and other peer-based strategies.
 - Strong programs intentionally build a sense of community among all students, working to help them support each other, while taking responsibility for one's own progress, attendance and behavior.
- Rigorous and individualized academic curriculum, career development, and personal supports.
 - Strategies include an emphasis on literacy and mathematics, focusing intensively on individual young people's academic deficiencies and learning needs, and actively working to address the sources of these challenges; and providing an array of academic supports such as tutoring and academic counseling.
- A focus on life after school, particularly college and careers, and helping young adults to both envision their future and to develop a plan for how to realize their vision.
 - Strategies include providing young adults with work experiences, experiences on a college campus to make college seem more real and attainable, presentations from and discussions with working alumni and college students and career professionals and providing counseling to help young adults prepare for college and occupations.
- Recognizing young people's capabilities, talents, and achievements by way of celebrations, incentives, and conferring status.
 - Strategies include counseling that identifies their strengths (for example, knowing a second language, experience with taking care of young siblings, etc.), financial incentives and rewards, community service, and public celebrations of academic milestones.

¹ See especially, *Promising Practices in Working with Young Adults*, The Youth Development Institute, NY, 2008. (ydinstitute.org)

² Aron, Laudan, and Janine Zweig. 2003. *Educational Alternatives for Vulnerable Youth: Student Needs, Program Types, and Research Directions*, 20. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute

Organizational/Initiative Features

- Reasonable funding levels that recognize the need for high quality staff, staff development, intensive services, and student stipends.
- Quality implementation (whatever the program model or particular strategies being implemented). More effective academic interventions for at-risk youth are characterized by:
 - Careful hiring with high quality staff, including reasonable salaries to attract and hold them;
 - Thorough implementation of all components of the program model;
 - Buy-in of all front-line staff and administrators;
 - Job descriptions that are realistic and designed to advance the work of the program;
 - Providing the training, professional development, planning time, and resources necessary to implement the model in a consistent, high-quality way throughout the program and for all young adults;
 - Allowing the time, usually several years, needed for changes to occur and for the model to reap its intended benefits;
 - Rigorous collection, analysis, and use of data to create a culture and practice of continuous improvement; and,
 - External assistance and training if warranted from an intermediary or training organization utilizing research-based practices.
- Space and time for teachers and other staff to plan together, share best practices, and to discuss challenges that arise during the program as well as the progress and needs of individual young people.
- Formal, structured programmatic components and supports in which all young adults must participate. Thorough and spirited orientations, careful intake procedures that assure that youth who join the program are those that it can serve well, and a clearly and highly structured programmatic experience for young people so that they understand from day to day what is expected.
- Extended days and scheduling that allows for an intensive, sustained focus on academic and career content.
- Teachers, counselors and support staff have a voice in and control over their professional development experiences.

TEACHING PRACTICES

- Project-based education, including service learning.
- Direct teaching and highly structured classroom.
- Frequent assessments to shape further work.
- Opportunities to use learning in active ways, such as through tutoring.
- Computer-assisted education.
- Cooperative learning strategies.
- Tutoring and mentoring.

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