

# YOUTH PERSPECTIVES 2024

## Do Young People Feel Prepared for Life After High School?

### Promising Practices in College & Career Advising and Workforce Readiness

Comprehensive Youth Development's Youth Perspectives forum brought young people from our partner schools together with leaders in government, education, and employment to address current issues and best practices in postsecondary preparation.

**Comprehensive Youth Development (CYD)** is a nonprofit that partners with NYC public high schools to prepare young adults, ages 14-24, to secure successful futures for themselves and their families. Through this partnership, our students develop the capability to graduate from high school and make informed decisions on higher education and careers. **We serve young people at three high schools and the CYD Career Academy**, a partnership with the City University of New York Borough of Manhattan Community College's Department of Continuing Education and Workforce Development to provide free healthcare certificate training. **CYD's Youth Perspectives series** gives policymakers, educators, and youth development professionals the chance to hear directly from the young people they serve.

In April 2024, CYD hosted its first Youth Perspectives forum since the pandemic. This event, hosted at Goldman Sachs, brought together **students and alumni from transfer and traditional high schools** to meet with the **Manhattan Borough President and representatives from the Office of the Mayor, the Office of the Governor, CUNY, SUNY, New York City public schools, JobsFirstNYC, and Northwell Health**. **CYD Executive Director Michael Roberts**, who led the event, asked young people to articulate their needs and recount what helped them the most, and invited each responding leader to speak to their area of expertise in postsecondary educational and workforce preparation, addressing the young people directly and updating them on new developments. The event took place in front of an audience of educators, nonprofit leaders, foundations, service providers, and other stakeholders in youth development, and provided an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and insights on one of the most pressing issues facing the city's underserved youth: what preparation is required to help them succeed in higher education and the workforce.

### The City Employment Landscape

**Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**, the keynote speaker, identified growing employment fields for young people and the need for early introduction to career pathways at the high school level. He expressed his commitment to the **NYC Department of Education's Learning to Work program**, which provides paid internships and work exposure to over 2,000 young New Yorkers every year – a transformational training and earning experience for many of the young panelists. Borough President Levine looked at the current economic landscape our recent graduates are navigating, including New York City's **unprecedented affordable housing crisis**, with the average Manhattan rent now the

highest in the U.S. He hopes for young New Yorkers to be able to start careers and families in their own city. In his view, **affordable housing and job opportunities are the most pressing priorities, so it is imperative to prepare young people earlier for career paths leading to family-sustaining wages.**



“It upsets me that with all the talent we have in New York City, we are not giving students a channel into high-paying jobs.” – Mark Levine

The Borough President called upon service providers and policymakers to assist young New Yorkers in gaining **access to the newest wave of job opportunities.** These include jobs in **healthcare**, **“green collar” jobs** through the Climate Innovation Hub, and **tech jobs**, with Google opening a new office and NYC catching up to Silicon Valley as a leader in tech. Most of these openings are not currently going to native New Yorkers, Levine noted. **Training in technology is essential**, and private school students are learning while public school students are falling behind. Educators and service providers need to look ahead to **prepare our young people for STEM opportunities and for radical changes anticipated in the job market**, such as Artificial Intelligence, which Levine believes will impact all employment. “Every citizen needs to understand this technology,” he emphasized. He compared our era to the 1950s, when the U.S. space race with the Soviet Union spurred American schools to strengthen science education. Today, policymakers and educators are in a parallel moment of urgency and must **act now to meet public school students’ need for technology education.**

## STUDENTS AND ALUMNI SPEAK



The goal of this year’s panel was to include alumni who could reflect on and evaluate their high school preparation for college, careers, and employment: what worked well and what we in the field could do better. As Roberts had heard in preliminary roundtables with students, the alumni agreed that **technology, computer science, and financial literacy had been almost non-existent in their high school education** and that although students had learned of opportunities for workforce certifications and civil service employment,

they would have wanted this knowledge earlier and to have spent more time on these pathways rather than college. Young people need **expanded options advising and exposure beginning in the first years of high school.**

## Without College and Career Advising, a Longer Path to Success

Roberts introduced Michelle Maldonado, an alumna of the **CYD Career Academy**, a **partnership for allied healthcare training with CUNY BMCC’s Department of Continuing Education and Workforce Development**. At her public high school, Michelle did not have a college and career office or access to robust social supports. “As a teen mother, I had to just figure it out for myself,” she said. “It was hard.” Facing many barriers, she’d hardly dared to set a goal of finishing high school. When she graduated, **she was at a loss, having completed her high school education without a plan**. She wanted to go to college and knew she needed to work to take care of herself and her child, but did not know where to start; she had few financial resources and limited exposure to the workplace. “I knew how to do math and read. I didn’t know how to write a résumé or speak to a customer.”

As she searched for some kind of training in healthcare, she came upon a flyer for the **CYD Career Academy**. She had started some other programs but stopped due to finances or childcare. But the CYD program was different: she saw that it had a **Bridge program** to prepare students before going into Medical Assistant training and dedicated **staff to help with barriers to completion**. She enrolled in the Career Academy and thrived, and the support she found at CYD opened many new channels. Michelle completed **the Medical Assistant program**, was hired from her internship, and went back to college. Five years after arriving at the Career Academy, she has her RN degree. Based on her experience, Michelle regards **early postsecondary planning and support services for high school students** as a necessity. Her plan wasn’t one-size-fits-all, but tailored to her, allowing her to move forward and achieve her goals while accommodating her parental responsibilities. She asked the City and service providers **to work with students early in high school**, help them develop individualized plans that meet them where they are, and teach **employment skills and financial literacy** so they are better prepared for opportunities. Most young people must work while they go to school, so students can **lattice through higher education**, supporting themselves along the way.

## Youth Panel

Executive Director Michael Roberts moderated the panel of student and alumni from CYD’s three partner schools: **Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day High School** and **City-As-School**, both transfer schools for undercredited youth up to age 21; and **The High School for Health Professions and Human Services**, a traditional high school. The young people talked about the impact of CYD’s services on their ability to graduate and activate postsecondary plans.



“We need internships and job opportunities to further our education.”

– Fatoumata

- **On-site College and Career Advisement.** The panelists expressed their appreciation for the college and career services CYD provides and were vocal in their advocacy for **greater access** across the city to college and career advisors. They conveyed their experiences as immigrants who are the **first members of their families to finish high school or attend college**. Without the possibility of parental guidance in postsecondary planning, and under pressure to earn salaries, college and career advisors are critical to student success. Several mentioned that their friends at other high schools don't have access to a college and career office. The young people felt that most school guidance counselors are overwhelmed, with caseloads too big to provide individualized attention. That's why **it's essential for a school to have a CBO partner** like CYD.
- **Financial aid advising.** Students received help from their advisors in **applying for financial aid and scholarships**. Several students noted that they would not have known about these opportunities if not for their advisors, who helped them identify resources and scholarships and supported them through the process. Several of the young people described the difficulty of planning for college when personal financial resources are scarce.
- **Paid internships.** The panelists reflected on the **pressure to choose work over school to support themselves and their families**. The urgent need for wages, they agreed, can cause a student to drop out of high school. For the panelists, paid internships, such as those through **Learning to Work**, were invaluable. Advocating for the continuation of the Learning to Work program, the panelists remarked that paid internships are fundamentally different from traditional employment. **Internship schedules can be more flexible**, letting students accommodate a demanding routine that includes both work and study.
- **Support services.** Several panelists talked about the impact of support services in helping them manage barriers to graduation and long-term success. CYD's support services include **counseling, connection to benefits, referrals to physical and mental health providers**, and our on-site **Legal Information Clinic**, which helps students secure free legal representation for immigration cases.

“A lot of my friends that I went to high school with ended up dropping out of school. They didn't have any support.”

– Jamie

“I'm from a big family of immigrants. In New York City, it's hard to support yourself financially. My Learning to Work internship let me attend school and work at the same time, gain experience and gain skills.”

– Mamadou



## RESPONDERS: INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD



CYD asked youth development experts and government leaders to respond to what they had heard from the young people. The responders represented the **Offices of the Mayor and Governor, CUNY LaGuardia, SUNY Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center, JobsFirst NYC, Northwell Health, and the New York City public schools.**

**Deirdre Duke**, *Senior Advisor, Labor Relations, Northwell Health*, spoke about entry-level opportunities that are available for young people in the healthcare field. She supports **developing career exploration in partnership with community-based organizations**. Northwell is raising awareness of the **wide range of jobs opening up in healthcare, such as in IT**, and a variety of **specializations and certificate training opportunities**. **Exposure to these opportunities during high school** is essential so that students can begin to plan, explore, and prepare early on.

**Sunil Gupta**, *Vice President for the Division of Adult Continuing Education and Workforce Development, LaGuardia Community College*, discussed opportunities to receive **college credit for work experience** and LaGuardia's commitment to **opening higher education access to workers of all backgrounds**. Responding to students' embrace of professional certifications and a scaffolded career model, he reported that LaGuardia offers an **array of training programs**. CYD's student panelist Valeria, an MCNDHS graduate, is currently pursuing Medical Assistant certification at LaGuardia.

**Kristen Harris**, *Executive Director of College and Career Planning Team, Office of Student Pathways, NYC Public Schools*, conveyed the Chancellor's message of **expanded options in both college and career development**. Once regarded by educators as separate categories, **college and career are now viewed as entwined** and are at the forefront of local educational policy and programming. She expressed support for the **positive changes taking place in the schools** as a result. One of her goals

is to **equip all professionals in each school to inform students about resources** that are currently available, such as **trained counselors to assist public school students with the FAFSA** (Federal Application for Student Aid).

**Marjorie Parker**, *President and CEO, JobsFirstNYC*, explained that **at least some postsecondary education is a prerequisite for most 21<sup>st</sup> century employment**, and highlighted **growth in the green economy sector**. **New York City**, she said, **has become a leader in the integration of education and workplace learning**. She urged young people to **advocate for greater access to internships and career exposure** across the board so that career preparation increasingly becomes a part of the learning process. She advised students to **start their planning as early as possible** and to educate themselves on future opportunities, such as the **expected growth in high-paying blue-collar jobs** that is on the horizon. In addition, she cautioned against leaping into high-cost education until one has a **strong career strategy** in place, to assure stability and avoid debt.

**Abby Jo Sigal**, *Executive Director, Mayor's Office of Workforce and Talent Development*, shared the news that **the city is committed to developing apprenticeships** for young people. She reviewed the distinction between internships and apprenticeships: apprenticeships last longer, are focused on preparation for an employment field, and are always **required to pay a salary**. She praised the administration for its commitment to youth career success and said that **SUNY, CUNY, and the public schools are in alignment**. **Career success is to be embedded in the curriculum and classroom experience as early as middle school**.

**Angel Vasquez**, *Governor's Deputy Secretary for Downstate Intergovernmental Affairs*, affirmed Governor Hochul's commitment to young people **developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for work**, and announced a new initiative: **CUNY will send a welcome letter to every NYC high school senior** on track to graduate informing them that they are **guaranteed admission into the CUNY public college system**. The Governor's Office is working to assure that every student receives **equitable access to education**.

**Anthony Watson**, *Executive Director, SUNY Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center (MEOC)*, praised the courage of the students who spoke, and discussed the many **postsecondary educational opportunities at SUNY MEOC** for the city's graduating high school students. The state-run EOCs have been in existence for 50 years. They were founded during the Civil Rights Movement in order to **open access to postsecondary education** and give college opportunities to more people. All programs are free and are designed to **support adult learners ages 18 and above**, with services in place to help individuals move to the next level. They are currently exploring preparation for jobs and partnerships with employers in healthcare and manufacturing as well as pipelines into college. **CYD and SUNY MEOC will be collaborating on postsecondary Allied Health training in 2025**.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Both students and responders at the session agreed on the need to support young people by amplifying the services that work best and getting the word out to inform students of all the resources that are there for them. CYD's observations and recommendations for the youth development community, combined with insights from our responders and speakers, are:

- **Individualized advisement with trained, dedicated counselors helps students design postsecondary plans that match their life circumstances.** This ensures connectivity and retention and prevents young people from entering a situation they aren't yet prepared for. College and career advisors **working onsite in high schools** play an essential role.
- **Students need to develop employment skills earlier.** Along with college and career advising, young people want and need to develop **skills for the job market, such as tech and early certifications**, that prepare them better for entry-level employment.
- **Internships and apprenticeships are crucial.** Students found the **Learning to Work** program invaluable. It helped them stay engaged so they didn't have to choose work over school, allowing them to stabilize and complete their high school diplomas.
- **Most young people need to combine higher education with work.** Completing an undergraduate degree in four years right after high school was once seen as the norm; today, even for many upper-middle-class families, it is becoming a luxury. As **first-generation and immigrant students**, the challenges our young people navigate are especially intense. Making higher education affordable by **latticing through certification programs, employment, college, and other professional advancement opportunities** was the solution for several of our panelists.

## Promising Practices

- Place dedicated **College and Career Offices** inside schools to provide individualized planning for life after high school, including assistance with college and job applications, résumé preparation, college essays, and financial aid support.
- Facilitate **skill-building** for employment through internships, tech training for the workplace, and early certifications.
- Build **stronger collaborations** between CUNY, SUNY, DOE schools, and city workforce programs.
- Expand and protect **federal, state, and city funding for postsecondary readiness** so that young people can engage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.
- Engage more **private foundations in supporting innovative work** in the college and career preparation and readiness field.

## THANK YOU

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Sunil Gupta  
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Angel Vasquez  
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### ...and CYD's student and alumni panelists:

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