OFFICE OF MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION

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Summary Document
Multiple Pathways to Graduation
New York City

I. A Broken Pathway from Education to Employment

For many decades, New York City and most other urban school systems had low expectations for far too many students. High schools sorted students by expectation for the future. The approximately one fifth of students who were college-bound took rigorous academic courses in pursuit of a Regents-endorsed diploma. Students expected to work in manufacturing and service industries took academically less demanding courses that often included some vocational training. Many thousands of students who had been moved through the grades without achieving academically, entered high school each year reading and doing math below the 6th grade level. Thousands dropped out each year and many others graduated without adequate knowledge and skills.

The consequences of this educational neglect are increasingly dire. Economists have documented that 9th grade literacy and 10th grade math skills are the entry criteria for jobs in sectors that a decade ago required 7th grade skills.1 Traditional vocational training programs have proven to be obsolete as the manufacturing sector has declined and technological advances have demanded higher order skills for many service and technical jobs. The increasing academic rigor required for today's high school diploma in New York City and many other districts, and broad structural changes in the labor market are leaving many young people at high risk for neither college nor employment in their future.

These profound changes have demanded a radical shift in the expectations and accountability for public education at the high school level where the critical skills to achieve academic and workforce success intersect. This challenge presents an opportunity for secondary education systems to evolve to address the economic dislocation of young people. For the long-term benefit of our students and our economy we must develop new models of secondary schools that prepare all young people to attain the level of academic competence, especially in literacy and mathematics, to prepare them to succeed in college and/or post-secondary technical education. In the short-term we must meet the above challenge while preventing under-prepared students from dropping out of school and we must prepare these students with academic and employment skills and connect them to real jobs.

II. The New York City Response

At any point in time, there are almost 140,000 young people in New York City between sixteen and twenty-one who have dropped out of high school or have fallen so far behind that they are at high risk for dropping out and disconnecting (overage and under-credited). In September 2005, New York City established The Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation at the Department of Education to develop a comprehensive *Recuperative Education* strategy to drive system innovation to increase the graduation, post-secondary connection and employment readiness rates of disconnected youth. Based on a data-driven approach to understanding differentiated student needs within this high risk population, the Department created The Learning to Work Initiative and The Multiple Pathways to Graduation portfolio. Core components of each model in the portfolio include:

- **Differentiation:** Instruction tailored to meet the individual needs of each student, targeted academic support, on-going assessment.
- **Culture of High Expectations:** Rigor and high expectations for all students.

[1] (Levy and Murname, 2000.)

- **Focus on 21st Century Skills:** Critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and leadership, adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurship, excellent oral and written communication skills, the ability to access and analyze information, imagination and curiosity.
- **Youth Development:** Focus on student engagement, strength-based approach, healthy relationships, personalization, student voice, primary person support for each student, community building and trust.
- **Funded Partnerships** with Community Based Organizations to implement Learning to Work.

The LTW Initiative and the Multiple Pathway portfolio components:

- **The Learning to Work Initiative (LTW):** embedded within the academic settings described below, LTW provides opportunities for disconnected youth to re-engage with school while exploring real world connections between academic work and future career outcomes. Community-based organization partners are integrated in school and program settings to support student academic achievement and social/emotional growth with attendance outreach, individual and group counseling and tutoring. Students are engaged through employability skills training and job development. Students have access to paid internships as long as they remain in school. This opportunity allows students to build relevant skills and social capital.

- **Transfer Schools**: small, academically rigorous diploma-granting high schools for students that have already been enrolled in a NYC high school and have dropped out or fallen at least two years behind in credit accumulation . Transfer schools embed youth development practices throughout academic and student engagement activities. Community-based organization (CBO) partners provide highly personalized learning environments to facilitate student graduation and post-secondary goals. Transfer schools target sixteen to seventeen year olds who have achieved few credits towards graduation and enter well below eighth grade literacy and numeracy proficiency levels.

- **Young Adult Borough Centers (YABC)**: highly customized learning environments that allow students to concentrate only on the credits they need to graduate with flexibility in scheduling classes. Embedded youth development supports provided by a CBO facilitate student re-engagement, attainment of high school diploma and a post-secondary plan. The YABC operates on an afternoon and evening schedule to accommodate students with adult responsibilities. YABC eligible students are at least seventeen and half years old and have already been in high school for 4 years. They have demonstrated some credit accumulation and skill/content development traction before falling off track to graduation.

- **Access GED:** a full-time GED program that supports the principle that a GED student must do more than simply pass the GED exam to succeed in life. A central goal of the program is for students to take ownership of their learning. Engaging coursework integrates content area knowledge, foundation skills, workplace competencies, and contemporary themes. Academic and youth development support is provided by a LTW CBO partner. Students who choose to attend Access are eighteen to twenty-one years old and are far from completing graduation requirements before aging out of the system at age twenty one.

III. NYC Expansion and Outcomes

Since the beginning of the initiative, NYC has aggressively expanded its Multiple Pathways to Graduation portfolio to implement the largest recuperative education strategy in the country:

- 3,810 new seats at 19 new Transfer Schools, 37 transfer schools citywide
- 5,250 new seats at 21 Young Adult Borough Centers, 22 YABCs citywide
- 950 new seats at 10 Learning to Work GED sites
- 4,685 internship slots currently funded

Citywide, the Recuperative Education Strategy has the capacity to serve twelve thousand students. In its first two years, 6,886 students have graduated from LTW Initiative schools and programs (6,207 diplomas, 679 GEDs). The LTW Initiative graduates proportionally more males and more African-American and Hispanic students than the system at large. These early outcomes represent tremendous promise for re-engaging segments of the population that are traditionally most economically disenfranchised.

IV. NYC Investment in Support of Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Successful expansion has required new targeted public and private investment:

- **Infrastructure to Drive Innovation**: NYC created a designated Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation within the Department of Education to perform strategic planning and system analytics, new design and model innovation, stakeholder capacity building, partnership development, contract management, and city, state and federal policy formation in support of recuperative education.

- **Per Pupil Allocation**: Based on demonstrated model effectiveness, overage and under-credited students in transfer schools are funded at approximately 1.4x the base high school per pupil allocation.

- **LTW Partnerships**: NYC has invested almost $40 million tax levy dollars to support LTW partnerships, including $12 million in student internship stipends.

- **Model Development and System Capacity Building**: Private partners have funded OMPG to engage in model development and codification, leadership and teacher development, and model-specific site-based instructional and youth development training in support of instructional excellence across the portfolio.

- **Technology and Tools**: In support of a differentiated learning environment, NYC has begun to invest in technology solutions targeting accelerated literacy acquisition for older adolescents.

V. Conclusion

Recuperative education involves reinvention of traditional secondary schools, systems and structures of support. Research and best practice-driven innovation that exploits the intersection of academic standards and workforce readiness provides the platform for the creation of new models that reconnect older students to school, work and economic viability. Effective implementation requires direct public investment in infrastructure and capacity building across public and private stakeholders. New York City's Multiple Pathways to Graduation Portfolio and the Learning to Work Initiative can serve as the innovation standard to bring to scale nationally.

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Resource Page

Please visit http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/Resources to view the following Multiple Pathways resources:

- Access GED Program Model: Learning for Life Beyond the Test
- The Learning to Work Initiative Year 3: Annual Report
- Multiple Pathways Research and Development: Summary Findings and Strategic Solutions for Overage, Under-Credited Youth
- NYC DOE Learning to Work Request for Proposals 2008-09: Young Adult Borough Centers, Young Adult Learning-to-Work Centers, Learning-to-Work for Transfer Schools, and Learning-to-Work for GED
- A Professional Learning Path to Rigorous and Relevant Instruction: Key Lessons from the Transfer School Institute
- Summary Document: Multiple Pathways to Graduation New York City
- Young Adult Borough Center Model: Reconnecting to School and the Future