



INTEGRATING CAREER PATHWAYS
IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Credit Where Credits Are Due

Aligning Workforce Development
Curriculum to State Standards

LEARNING BRIEF #3



INTRODUCTION

The New York State Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) credential is a certification indicating a student's readiness for entry-level employment.¹ In 2016, all New York State high school students became eligible for this credential, which had previously been available only to students with individualized education plans. The CDOS credential thus became one of six "+1 pathway options"² to graduation and can replace one required Regents examination, which is a state test required for a high school diploma. Over the course of the Transfer to Career Collaborative (T2C) pilot (2018–2021), the CDOS credential was an enticing entry point for engaging school and workforce staff in the creation of schools' career readiness curricula and pathways.

This brief draws on the experience of one T2C partnership—the collaboration between Bronx Arena High School, Bronx Community College, and Phipps Neighborhoods—to explore the advantages and challenges of customizing an existing credential program to align with CDOS standards and requirements.

T2C AT BRONX ARENA HIGH SCHOOL

The partnership between Bronx Arena High School, Bronx Community College, and Phipps Neighborhoods seeks to create college and career readiness programming that is both meaningful for students and aligned to existing school infrastructure. To this end, lead partner staff have collaborated to redesign a course toward the family development credential (FDC) at Bronx Community College. The FDC is an entry-level credential that can lead to employment as a family worker in a Head Start program or as a case manager in a social service setting. The FDC was previously offered only to high school graduates, since a diploma is a prerequisite for the certification program. However, the team decided that the high school students could complete the content and portfolio while in high school and then complete the final steps toward the certification once they had graduated.

Since the course had originally been designed for high school graduates, it required modifications to be delivered during the school day and for high school credit. The partnership's School Design Team³ collaborated to design the course in line with CDOS standards. The course was modified to take place over a twelve-week term, with Bronx Community College staff providing instruction four days per week and Phipps staff teaching a related life skills curriculum on Fridays. In addition to the classwork, the course has three additional CDOS-aligned components. The first is a paid internship experience (where Phipps manages the placement and training), the second is FDC portfolio development, and the third is preparation for the FDC licensing exam.

Importantly, this course counts toward four things:

- high school credit
- CDOS hours (out of the necessary 216 hours needed to earn the credential)⁴
- industry certification (if the student completes the course, portfolio, and exam)
- 9 college credits (should the college agree to the credit transfer)

T2C LEARNING:

CDOS CREDIT FOR SKILLS TRAINING CURRICULUM

WHEN IT WAS REDESIGNING THE FDC COURSE, THE SCHOOL DESIGN TEAM FOUND THAT CDOS GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS COMPLEMENTED BRONX ARENA HIGH SCHOOL'S EXISTING CREDIT-AWARDING SYSTEM, WHERE COURSE CREDITS ARE BROKEN INTO 18-22 TASKS THAT CULMINATE IN A CAPSTONE PROJECT.

In addition, the team saw the CDOS pathway as a bridge between high school and postsecondary opportunities, preparing students for further education and training courses after high school or for employment.

Through early labor market research and student surveys, the T2C team found that students were highly interested in working in early education, social work and counseling, and youth and social services, and that these fields were increasingly welcoming young adults without college degrees. Phipps was able to host interns in this sector and ultimately hire T2C high school graduates. The Bronx Arena High School implemented the course during the part of the school day known as the "Learning Lab," a time dedicated to developing college and career skills.

Both Bronx Community College and Phipps Neighborhoods contributed to customizing Bronx Arena's CDOS-aligned FDC curriculum, adhering to the school's credit breakdown of 18-22 tasks. This collaboration took concerted transparency measures, and Bronx Arena Assistant Principal Ethan Knecht credits the partners' communication, organization, and adaptability for making the transition successful. Bronx Arena uses technology—specifically, a proprietary database and learning management system known as the *Tracker*—to deliver the curriculum as a self-paced educational experience. This project thus required additional alignment to be able to fit into the school's learning system.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned from this effort to align career training curriculum to CDOS standards and a high school audience include the following:



Relationship-building between partners is critical. From Bronx Community College’s perspective, the biggest challenge was “developing the initial partnership with the schools and being adaptive to each school’s needs.” Significant time must be invested in relationship-building to design a credit-bearing career development opportunity such as this one.



Collective curriculum planning at the outset ensures that the lift is lighter on the school in subsequent terms. Bronx Arena Assistant Principal Knecht shared that the CDOS adoption process and subsequent transition to the *Tracker* during school closures will shift how the school approaches new engagements, ensuring ample front-end planning to meet all requirements and produce an effective opportunity for students: *“By breaking down new CDOS curriculum into smaller parts—namely, student tasks—it means that all teachers and advisors are clear on the student requirements for this newly-developed coursework and can guide students to successful completion. It also lessens the work we need to do each trimester to prepare to teach the course to new students.”*



Workforce partners are eager to align their skills training curricula to state standards to be able to partner with more high schools. For many workforce development and community college partners, aligning their respective training curricula to meet CDOS standards is a notable draw, as it allows them to partner with additional schools outside of T2C. JobsFirstNYC has since launched a CDOS Institute for Workforce Practitioners to assist additional workforce providers outside the T2C network with aligning their work-based learning opportunities and skills training curricula to CDOS standards.



Existing school practices that prepare students for postsecondary success are critical. Bronx Arena’s Learning Labs are intentionally designed to mimic the college learning environment, encouraging students to take initiative and leadership in their own learning. In this regard, the effort benefited from an environment that facilitated its success. However, other school environments that do not have this same structure might face additional difficulties in customizing their curriculum.



A NOTE ON COVID-19

Bronx Arena High School was able to adapt to remote learning quickly because of its existing technology and partnership infrastructure. At the start of school closures during the pandemic, the school quickly assessed which programming would need to be discontinued and which programming could be transitioned to a virtual environment. At this point, both Bronx Community College and Phipps moved

swiftly to acclimate to the *Tracker*, with the college breaking the CDOS-aligned FDC course into the required 18–22 tasks to be managed and completed virtually. In addition to this transition, Phipps innovated a way to scan and send gift cards to participating students so that they could continue to receive their stipends.

ABOUT T2C PARTNERS



BRONX ARENA HIGH SCHOOL serves over-age, under-credited students and leverages technology to create self-paced educational experiences for its students. Its unique matriculation model allows students to graduate on a rolling basis. As soon as the required credits are accumulated, a student can receive their diploma.



BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE is a public community college that is part of the City of University of New York system. It partners with T2C through its Office of Workforce Development and Continuing Education, which offers continuing education courses and career-focused training programs in building trades and home improvement, healthcare, security management, computer technology, culinary arts and hospitality, nonprofit professions, and business entrepreneurship.



PHIPPS NEIGHBORHOODS provides academic support, financial counseling, resume café sessions, referrals to additional Phipps Neighborhoods services, career navigation support, and confidence-building opportunities related to postsecondary readiness. Its classes meet twice a week to help students build better academic habits and prepare their college application portfolio through civic engagement, regional campus tours, and more.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

JobsFirstNYC and New Visions for Public Schools are spearheading the Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C), an innovative career development strategy for New York City transfer high schools aimed at improving the postsecondary and workforce outcomes of students most at risk of becoming part of the out-of-school, out-of-work population. Working across twelve transfer schools in the New Visions network, T2C integrates sectoral workforce development partners and postsecondary programs to provide sector-specific career pathways for over-age, under-credited students. This learning brief is part of a series describing emergent practices in the T2C initiative that support progress toward student, partnership, institution, and system-level goals.



ABOUT JOBSFIRSTNYC

JobsFirstNYC creates and advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Our innovative approach to developing new partnership models has helped shape public policy, private philanthropic investments, and the best practices of employers, colleges, service providers, high schools, and others. Over the last 14 years, JobsFirstNYC has worked with more than 150 organizations in communities across New York City to build innovative solutions that connect young adults to economic opportunities.



ABOUT NEW VISIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

New Visions for Public Schools is a nonprofit organization that has worked to strengthen New York City public schools for more than 30 years. Since 1989, New Visions has designed, created, and sustained great public schools for all New Yorkers, driven by the belief that all of New York City's students deserve public schools that make successful futures possible. It has empowered and equipped everyday visionaries—New York City's educators, students, and families—with the tools and support needed to achieve the future they imagine for themselves. Today, New Visions helps more than 1,000 public schools plan for the success of more than 600,000 students citywide.

DEDICATION

We dedicate this report to Julia Forman, Principal Dez-Ann Romain, and all the educators we lost too young and too early in 2020. They dedicated their energy, creativity, and intelligence to building a more equitable, more supportive public school system for all students, but particularly students who have too often been excluded from educational opportunity. We honor their memory by building on their lives' work.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 To earn the credential, a student must have successfully completed a minimum of 216 hours of coursework that meets CDOS standards, including at least 54 hours of work-based learning activities.
- 2 As explained by the New York State Education Department, “Multiple pathways recognize the importance of engaging students in rigorous and relevant academic programs. Under the ‘4+1’ pathway assessment option, students must take and pass four required Regents Exams and complete a comparably rigorous pathway to meet the fifth assessment requirement for graduation.” New York State Education Department, “Multiple Pathways,” <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/multiple-pathways>
- 3 School Design Teams are multi-stakeholder groups that drive T2C’s strategy, decision-making, and implementation at the school level. Their members consist of transfer high school leaders, representatives of community-based organizations, representatives of workforce development organizations, and administrators from community colleges.
- 4 The policy has recently changed, and students can use the hours for high school credit or CDOS work-based learning hours, but no longer both simultaneously. Advisors can support students in determining whether to count the class toward high school credits, CDOS, or half and half.

