



INTEGRATING CAREER PATHWAYS
IN HIGH SCHOOLS

When Workforce Development Is Youth Development

LEARNING BRIEF #4



INTRODUCTION

Research shows that a commitment to building trusted, meaningful relationships with young adults, coupled with the provision of interest-driven programming, can create significant student buy-in around an array of school-based activities, including career pathways programming. This brief examines one Transfer to Career Collaborative (T2C) workforce partner—St. Nicks Alliance—that showcases a particular aptitude for using the practices of “positive youth development” and the impact that this work can have on students and schools. St. Nicks Alliance, in its T2C partnerships with Brooklyn Bridge Academy and Olympus Academy, has shown how a workforce partner can employ a youth development approach to build and deepen student engagement in postsecondary pathways in transfer schools.

T2C LEARNING:

THE YOUTH-CENTERED APPROACH AT ST. NICKS ALLIANCE

ST. NICKS OFFERS HIGH-IMPACT PROGRAMS WITH MEASURABLE RESULTS FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS. CENTRAL TO ITS SUCCESS IS ITS RECOGNITION OF THE OVERLAPPING NEEDS OF YOUNG ADULTS ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION'S EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PROGRAMS.

This transferable application is the St. Nicks hallmark and has proven to be the main ingredient in its various T2C partnerships with transfer schools.

Youth development principles are reflected in St. Nicks' T2C partnerships in a number of ways:

- **In-school transformational coach:** St. Nicks employs a social worker, called a transformational coach, in the participating school to forge connections within the school culture. Each transformational coach manages a caseload of 25–30 students per school, facilitates internal and external referrals, and collaborates closely with school staff, using data to drive transformational services. These coaches conduct a number of activities, including:
 - youth needs assessments
 - intensive one-on-one coaching sessions to guide students through social-emotional development and transitions into the workforce
 - crisis interventions
 - “town hall” sessions with students designed to address youth challenges and lead to self-understanding and change
- referrals for services in-house and elsewhere
- relationship-building with families and external institutions (such as social services and mental health providers).
- **Career developer:** St. Nicks also employs a career developer who coordinates with school staff, such as internship coordinators, through the Learning to Work contract. The career developer manages the technical aspects of students' training placements and fit. After placement, the career developer schedules biweekly meetings to gauge whether the student is thriving and progressing at the training placement. This role embodies the youth development tenet of long-term commitment, as the career developer provides ongoing and developmentally appropriate support for young people during career planning.

■ **Program intake procedures:** Through advisory sessions, St. Nicks works with school staff to identify students interested in participating in skills training programs in green construction, financial services, and medical services. After this, the process is as follows:

- St. Nicks staff (consisting of the manager of young adult programs, transformational coach, career developer, and case manager) each conduct a one-on-one ten-minute interview with each student candidate. The interviews serve as a two-way street: interviewers get to assess students, while students get to meet as many St. Nicks staff members as possible, learn about the programs, and make the best decision for themselves regarding their postsecondary plans.
- The team then comes together to debrief on their interviews.
- After this debrief, the team considers the best route for each student candidate. Training-approved students are sent to their chosen trainings. For students not qualified for their training of interest, the team discusses next steps with the school principal or advisor. This gives the school a chance to advocate for the student's chosen workforce training, determine and troubleshoot barriers, and discuss other workforce program options that might be a better fit.

WHAT IS POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

As explained by Act for Youth, "positive youth development is a framework that guides communities in the way they organize services, opportunities, and supports so that young people can develop to their full potential." Organizations that adopt a youth development approach embrace the following principles:

Focus on strengths and positive outcomes:

Rather than taking a deficit-based approach, these organizations intentionally help young people build on their strengths and develop the competencies, values, and connections they need for life and work.

Youth voice and engagement:

Youth are valued partners who have meaningful, decision-making roles in programs and communities.

Strategies that involve all youth:

Support and engage all youth rather than focusing solely on "high-risk" or "gifted" youth. However, recognize the need to identify and respond to specific problems faced by some youth (such as violence or premature parenthood).

Community involvement and collaboration:

Positive youth development includes but reaches beyond programs; it promotes organizational change and collaboration for community change. All sectors have a role to play in making the community a great place to grow up.

Long-term commitment:

Provide the ongoing, developmentally appropriate support young people need over the first 20 years of their lives.

Source: Act for Youth, "Principles of Positive Youth Development," https://actforyouth.net/youth_development/development/.

- **Building community:** *“Relationships are more than about making numbers,”* said Justin Conigliaro, St. Nicks’ former Deputy Director of Skills Training Programs. While St. Nicks upholds high standards for data collection and quality, it prioritizes community building to create lasting ties between partnering organizations and individuals—through and beyond job placement. In addition to skills-building workshops, counseling, and career awareness and exploration opportunities for current students, St. Nicks offers continued coaching for alumni who need further support to identify their interests, find and enroll in training and certification programs, connect to employment, and engage in peer networking.

As explained by Larry Rothchild, St. Nicks’ director for workforce development, *“St. Nicks Alliance strongly values the relationship we build with young adults while still in school and when they fall out of school and enroll in our vocational training programs. For this reason, St. Nicks Alliance began offering in person trainings and supportive services in July of 2020 in a safe way to best support our young adults. And our relationship-building continues post graduation with monthly alumni events to help our graduates build a career path to success. This extends funder minimum retention requirements. We also support our young adults by matching them with an industry mentor for a year post graduation.”*

These four practices—in-school coaching, comprehensive career-exploration support, nurturing program intake processes, and long-term relationship-building—embody all of the aforementioned youth development principles. St. Nicks and its school partners focus on student strengths, include their voices and interests when assigning them to programs, create opportunities for all students, and ensure that the school and St. Nicks collaborate until each student achieves a positive outcome.

According to Rothchild, collaboration is critical: *“A key to St. Nicks’ success in our partner schools is the buy-in and support from the principals. On many occasions, I have received calls from our principals on my cell phone, and we worked collaboratively to get these young adults into timely career training in green construction, technology, or healthcare.”*

It is important to note that this approach requires highly trained and skilled staff, hired by the workforce organization, who can dedicate a significant amount of their time to working in school buildings. Significant and long-term funding is needed to implement the model described above, as well as a long-term partnership agreement between the school and workforce organization.

LESSONS LEARNED

St. Nicks and two of its T2C partner schools, Brooklyn Bridge Academy and Olympus Academy, reported the following lessons learned as crucial to student success in career development:



Adhere to youth development principles in all phases of career development, from student interest to completing a workforce program. The workforce partner must take care to center youth assets and contribute to young people's sense of purpose. According to Brooklyn Bridge Academy's assistant principal, Ingrid Robert-Haynes, *"Having a partnership with an organization that understands youth development—the psychology behind students and their families' motivations—is crucial to the school's curriculum design and goals."*



Create an in-school role with a social work background, such as the transformational coach, to bridge all stakeholders' interests and needs. This helps create a more seamless transition for students moving from school onto the career pathway because it provides a dedicated and caring adult who understands career readiness, is prepared to be supportive, and is trained to help students overcome social and emotional obstacles.



Lead with student interest. Ensure that the curricular topics offered to Learning to Work internship seminar students are based on requests from students.



Ensure that the training intake process is aligned with youth development principles. Utilize the intake process as an opportunity to understand more about a student's skills, interests, and motivations to participate, rather than solely looking at their qualifications or perceived fit. Once a partnership learns more about a student, it can help steer them toward other opportunities, whether within or outside the workforce training partner.



Make sure that preparing students for college or a career is not a one-time occurrence. Schools must ensure that career information is consistently and frequently integrated into the rest of school programming. *“Students will see career pathways as a viable option if they have multiple opportunities to be exposed to the information and/or experiences with the related trades,”* said Olympus Academy Principal Bruce Gonzales.



A NOTE ON COVID-19

During school closures early in the pandemic, many students in St. Nicks’ T2C partnerships became more entrepreneurial—including by creating dog walking, baking, childcare, and other personal businesses—as a result of necessity and innovation. As a result, St. Nicks is currently considering working with its

school partners to include new programming topics, such as business plan creation, entrepreneurship, and marketing. The T2C partnerships continue to ask students, “What new skills did you hone by being home?”

ABOUT T2C PARTNERS



BROOKLYN BRIDGE ACADEMY, located in the Canarsie neighborhood of Brooklyn, is a transfer school that serves older students who are at risk of dropping out. It operates on a trimester schedule, which allows students to accumulate credits faster than they would on a traditional schedule of two semesters a year. Admission requires that students be at least sixteen years old and have received at least one year of high school education elsewhere.



OLYMPUS ACADEMY is a transfer school, also located in Canarsie, that specializes in working with students aged sixteen to twenty who are under-credited for their age. Olympus offers accelerated credit accumulation, paid internship and job shadowing opportunities, and individualized advisory programs in a personalized school setting with small class sizes.



ST. NICKS ALLIANCE is a nonprofit community development organization serving low- to moderate-income North Brooklyn residents. It offers skills training and industry credentials to community members, and partners with major North Brooklyn employers to provide hands-on experience and workforce connections.

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 nearly 1,600 public schools plan for the success of nearly a million 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

JobsFirstNYC wants to recognize the leaders of the Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C) partner schools, workforce organizations and institutions, and CBOs for their vision, willingness to take risks, and commitment to excellence.

This case study was authored by Jen Sciaca Curry and Therese Workman of Change Impact, Inc, and Amanda B. Rosenblum, JobsFirstNYC, with input from Marjorie Parker, JobsFirstNYC, and New Visions for Public Schools staff, including Julia Forman, Monique Lawrence, Lucinda Mendez, Jefferson Pestronk, Jessica Sasko, Jennie Soler-McIntosh, and Emily Task.

The publication was designed by Tracey Maurer and copy edited by Morgan Stoffregen.

Transfer 2 Career Collaborative has been generously supported by the following foundations: Achelis and Bodman Foundation, The Altman Foundation, Jeffrey H. and Shari L. Aronson Family Foundation, Booth Ferris Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Carl C. Conway Scholarship Foundation, Frances L. and Edwin L. Cummings Memorial Fund, James and Judith K. Dimon Foundation/HERE to HERE, MizuhoUSA Foundation, New York Community Trust, and Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation.

Additional general support for JobsFirstNYC has been provided by the following foundations: Ira W. Decamp Foundation and MUFG Union Bank Foundation. The support of these funders does not imply or express their endorsement of the contents of this publication.

