



INTEGRATING CAREER PATHWAYS
IN HIGH SCHOOLS

All on Board

Teacher Buy-In and Engagement

LEARNING BRIEF #5



INTRODUCTION

Teachers who participate in change implementation decisions have greater buy-in and are more motivated to take action—and thus have greater impact. Research shows that teacher buy-in to new programs depends not simply on *whether* teachers help select a school improvement initiative but rather the extent to which they are actively involved and have authority over classroom implementation.¹ This brief examines how one transfer school’s teachers have been central to reaching Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C) goals through developing and aligning course content to New York State’s learning standards for career development and occupational studies (CDOS).² In this school, CDOS is utilized as a framework to improve students’ postsecondary readiness and success.

T2C AT INNOVATION DIPLOMA PLUS HIGH SCHOOL

The partnership between Innovation Diploma Plus High School, Comprehensive Youth Development, and Catholic Charities Alianza seeks to prepare students for a rigorous seven-month healthcare training program at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. Initially, the partnership's School Design Team³ focused on career awareness and exploration, career fairs, tours, guest speaker panels, skill-building workshops, and mock interview sessions. Over time, the team decided to set even larger goals to engage the full school community. Michael Roberts, Comprehensive Youth Development's executive director, understands that school initiatives require that all staff be on board. He said, "It doesn't make any sense if a small School Design Team is making all the decisions and not engaging the rest of the school community. That won't work. It won't stick." He thus advocated for teacher leadership in the partnership's effort to ensure that career awareness and exploration, skill development, and career readiness is integrated both into Innovation Diploma Plus's classrooms and into programming delivered by partners.

The School Design Team set two key goals: (1) secure buy-in from all stakeholders, including students, teachers, district leaders, community partners, and families, and (2) codify career readiness programming by establishing specific strategies and tactics (e.g., staffing plan, curricula).

T2C LEARNING:

TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS PARTNER ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT

IN THE FIRST YEAR OF T2C IMPLEMENTATION—2018, JOBSFIRSTNYC AND NEW VISIONS RECOGNIZED THE POTENTIAL FOR CDOS, WHICH WAS NEWLY BECOMING AVAILABLE TO ALL STUDENTS.

The New York State CDOS credential is a commencement credential of readiness for entry-level employment indicating that a student has met foundational career readiness standards and has developed key professional skills. T2C Learning Communities focused on helping educators define work-based learning and explore how to align their curricula to the state's standards.

Innovation Diploma Plus was already working with authentic assessment- and project-based learning, which made the school particularly ripe for this work. With the advent of CDOS, the school's principal, Daniel Storchan, saw opportunities to emphasize career indicators and forge another pathway to the Regents diploma while also bringing in real-world skill development. At this point, he told teachers about his vision of incorporating CDOS into the school. Sean Turner, a founding Innovation Diploma Plus teacher and theater arts and special education teacher, found that CDOS's language and parameters gave the school fresh eyes to review student skills assessments. Inspired by the potential but wary of the complex CDOS layers, Turner sought the help of New Visions' continuous improvement coach for transfer schools, New Visions' Deputy Director for Career

Readiness, Julia Forman, to explore the best steps forward. Turner then assembled a small pilot teacher group of five volunteers who met weekly to think through incorporating CDOS into coursework. This group included teachers from five different disciplines, none of whom had implemented a CDOS-aligned curriculum.

The School Design Team realized that the CDOS pathway to the Regents diploma already aligned with Innovation Diploma Plus's existing practices of real-world learning and school partnerships. *"We discovered that there was now an opportunity to strengthen what we were doing, be clear to students and parents about what we're measuring, and actually show growth and data,"* Turner said. The school's ultimate goal is to align the entire curriculum to CDOS standards.

In order to secure all Innovation Diploma Plus teachers' support for the idea of aligning the school's curriculum to CDOS standards, the team carefully took the following steps:

- 1) Principal Storchan clearly articulated to teachers the benefits and reasons for adopting CDOS as a pathway, including alignment with current practices and easy integration, and left time for teachers to ask questions and offer feedback. He then took a hands-off approach, naming Turner as the point person for aligning the school's curriculum to CDOS standards. This allowed the teachers to take charge of creating the curriculum and connections to career development that would be used in their classrooms.
- 2) Expert intermediaries were brought in to build teachers' capacity and host one-on-one meetings.
- 3) The school paid teachers for their time at each session, and they were able to receive continuing teacher and leader education, or CTLE, hours to help fulfill professional development requirements for the Department of Education.
- 4) The team did its best to align the school's existing rubric to CDOS standards. A prime example concerns the "cooperation" competency that Innovation Diploma Plus had on its original school rubric, which teachers had struggled to assess uniformly. The team decided to modify this to match a

competency from the CDOS employability skills profile: **"Takes responsibility for learning: Identifies one's strengths and weaknesses. Sets goals for learning. Identifies and pursues opportunities for learning. Monitors one's progress toward achieving these goals."** The focus on skills was critical. The team's thinking was, If you teach a skill to a student, can the student clearly articulate back to you the skill itself and how they are working on it? Can they contextualize this skill as it relates to themselves and future careers? The team created criteria for the new competency on the rubric to ensure that measurement and evaluation would be clearer.

- 5) Additional staff and partners were brought in so that the conversation could transcend the classroom. Catholic Charities Alianza staff joined work group sessions to offer insights on how this rubric could be used outside of classrooms as well. They contributed language throughout so that the rubric could be used to assess both students' in-classroom skills and their out-of-classroom skills, particularly in work-based learning opportunities through Learning to Work, such as paid internships. T2C workforce partner Comprehensive Youth Development joined the effort to co-create programming to build students' employability skills—including by running workshops on resume writing, mock interviews, digital skills, and time management.


The teacher working group is now moving into a second phase, which involves going into each teacher's curriculum to add work-based learning and career exploration content that will revamp the courses as CDOS courses. Where applicable, the courses will end with the awarding of an industry-recognized credential.

T2C has helped the school understand both what work-based learning is and how career readiness and development are connected to its core subject areas. Teachers have also learned to see the connection to postsecondary decisions more clearly. Principal Storchan explained, *"Because of the CDOS alignment, students and teachers are able to see the tangible outcomes that are possible. This is how a shift in school and community culture can occur—by making more entry points that are meaningful for young adults."*




LESSONS LEARNED


Key lessons learned by the School Design Team and teacher working group include the following:




Develop distributive leadership models. Principal Storchan recognizes the challenges of distributive leadership but also its potential as a strategy for school change. He advises that *“forming, norming, storming, and conflict are part of the decision-making process.”* As a result of this approach, Innovation Diploma Plus’s teachers were able to reach consensus, and work for both students and school staff alike has been accelerated.



Use early, clear, and consistent messaging from the principal to all school staff, and connect postsecondary readiness goals to the school’s mission. Principal Storchan led several town halls focused on postsecondary choices and programming. The most meaningful move he made was to suggest that the team not only integrate the CDOS employability skills profile into the school’s rubric but also connect it to the schools’ core values of resilience, teamwork, and innovation. Teachers bought into that because it showed how CDOS wasn’t just a new shiny thing the school was doing but a way to achieve the school’s values around student learning and development.



Ensure that teachers have time with school partners. Comprehensive Youth Development led many student-facing information sessions on pathways, which teachers were invited to join. Some teachers found new connections to the classroom in these sessions, helping make CDOS less theoretical and more practical.



Create smaller teacher working groups to keep program design, implementation, and decision-making efficient and effective while ensuring teacher buy-in and approval.



Provide dedicated peer observation opportunities for teachers interested in customizing their course curriculum to align with CDOS to build teachers' skills in supporting the career development continuum.



In the early-adoption stage, choose a preexisting curriculum that aligns to CDOS so that changes can be implemented and outcomes measured more easily. Then, once the school is more familiar with the CDOS standards, it can move on to creating and developing new courses.



Ensure that students understand how the skills they develop through CDOS coursework and work-based learning are transferable to the workplace. Contextualizing skill development with students is a critical part of connecting classroom learnings to the future workplace. Workforce partners can explain to students how each skill will be needed in postsecondary training, education, and in employment in the student's sector of interest.



ABOUT T2C PARTNERS



INNOVATION DIPLOMA PLUS HIGH SCHOOL

implements three core values—innovation, resilience, and teamwork—and has a commitment to authentic assessment. All students work toward a capstone, or culminating presentation, upon graduation. This portfolio of work contains evidence of mastery of core subjects as well as listening and presentation skills—all with a focus on the student’s postsecondary pathway.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES ALIANZA

operates high-quality, youth-focused programming in public schools. It effectively engages parents and other school and community stakeholders to improve students’ educational outcomes and increase access to much-needed resources.



COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

partners with New York City public high schools to prepare young adults aged 14 to 24 to secure a successful future for themselves and their families. Through these partnerships, students develop the capability to graduate from high school and make informed decisions on higher education and careers.

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.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Barbara Turnbull, "Teacher Participation and Buy-In: Implications for School Reform Initiatives," *Learning Environments Research* 5(2002): 235-252
- 2 The New York State CDOS credential is a certification showing that a student meets foundational career readiness standards. 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. Earning a CDOS credential results in a diploma endorsement for all students. It can also replace a Regents exam, which provides students an alternative pathway to graduation.
- 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.

