



INTEGRATING CAREER PATHWAYS
IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Partner Integration

LEARNING BRIEF #7



INTRODUCTION

The Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C) initiative is underpinned by the concept of integration—the process that aims to weave together different, often disparate, subparts so that each becomes part of a larger, more comprehensive whole. And while all stakeholders may have the greatest intentions to move toward a common goal, this process is often riddled with barriers and pain points, requiring extra work for all involved to persevere even though immediate returns might be distant. This brief describes a T2C partnership that encountered early obstacles but has found ways to puzzle together various organizations and programs, thereby enduring and deepening its collaboration while creating a cohesive student experience.

T2C AT AIM CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL II

The partnership between New Visions AIM Charter High School II (AIM II), The Knowledge House, and the HOPE Program is somewhat unique in the T2C initiative in that there are two workforce development organizations currently matched with the school and there is no Learning to Work partner. There is also no Learning to Work (LTW) partner since AIM II is a charter transfer school and the LTW contract is not available for charter schools. Good Shepherd Services was a CBO partner of the school in Year 1 and played a similar role to an LTW CBO, however funding was not renewed and they were not able to partner with AIM II beyond the 2018-2019 school year. In year 2 of the T2C pilot, this partnership implemented a bootcamp embedded in students' third-trimester career and financial management (CFM) class. The partnership's School Design Team¹ determined that a dedicated time within the academic schedule was necessary to offer a range of content, including industry overviews, worksite visits, resume-writing workshops, and career planning using Xello—a T2C-provided college and career readiness software that offers students personalized assessments and planning tools. Integrating the bootcamp into the CFM course was a way for the school to “test drive” the workforce curriculum with a set group of students.

Today, the partnership's vision has become more concrete, focusing on career awareness and exploration and advanced career development. The School Design Team is pursuing diploma pathways via the career development and occupational studies (CDOS) credential² and providing career exploration workshops as part of the HOPE Program's specialized training for the construction and green energy sectors and The Knowledge House's digital skills programming. The team is also making plans to expand the implementation of Xello.

Given this multifaceted partnership, the School Design Team faced a core challenge: **How can various partners align goals and integrate them into a school's design without duplicating work and creating inefficiencies?**

T2C LEARNING:

PARTNER ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

THE KNOWLEDGE HOUSE AND THE HOPE PROGRAM FUNCTION IN A COMPLEMENTARY MANNER, WORKING TOGETHER TO INCREASE EACH OTHER'S PROGRAMMING CAPACITY IN SERVICE OF AIM II'S GOALS.

The HOPE Program's focus at AIM II is students' general career readiness through core-skills building and career exploration programming, while The Knowledge House contributes expertise in youth development and sector-specific training in technology—all with the overarching goal of creating better postsecondary pathways for AIM II's students.

By aligning their strengths during check-in meetings and T2C Learning Community sessions before commencing their engagement with the school, The Knowledge House and the HOPE Program positioned themselves to avoid duplicating efforts or creating competition with each other's programs. This cohesion also made them better prepared to withstand some of the inherent challenges of being among a group of CBOs with varying levels of embeddedness in the school, as described below.

In the first year of the partnership, relationship-building was the top and nearly singular priority, as there was a need for understanding and alignment among many stakeholders—the school, its CBO partner Good Shepherd Services, and two T2C workforce partners (instead of just one, as is the case with most other T2C partnerships). With time, the School Design Team became more streamlined, and direct lines of communication between the principal and the partner organizations were

solidified. Instead of the previous game of “telephone” created by logistical challenges resulting from so many stakeholders, the School Design Team—comprising AIM II's principal, AIM II's director of counseling and student engagement, AIM II's career and technical education instructors, the Good Shepherd Services program director, and representatives from the HOPE Program and The Knowledge House—began meeting regularly to assess the partnership's needs and vision. The team committed to biweekly meetings and collaboratively developed an implementation plan and memorandum of understanding, ensuring that each partner had clear roles, goals, and expectations. Cris Mercado, lead career instructor at The Knowledge House, shared, *“The meetings helped to build relationships between leaders at AIM II, HOPE, The Knowledge House, and JobsFirstNYC—leading to the sharing of actionable insights we might not otherwise have learned.”*


LESSONS LEARNED

The partnership's School Design Team outlined the following lessons learned to inform future planning:



Understand who the stakeholders are and ask what's in it for each of them.

All stakeholders, including school staff, workforce partners, other CBO partners, students, and families, should know what success looks like for themselves and others. This will ensure that goals are aligned and work is not duplicated. AIM II Principal Tameka Jackson said, *"I believe the first step [in a successful T2C collaboration] is that the organizations' and school's mission and vision are aligned, which is the first step in making any type of partnership work."* In the case of this partnership, this required three months of thoughtful planning to establish SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based) goals and a shared action plan.



At schools working with multiple CBOs, it is important for a new workforce partner to identify early on how to be present in the school as often as possible.

Kelly LoBianco, former chief program officer at the HOPE Program, shared that she initially hoped that relationship-building would come organically but soon discovered that a consistent, intentional presence in the school could expedite the process. In-person meetings also ensured that partners could communicate their needs and assets more effectively than via phone or Zoom, as fewer interruptions occurred and individuals were more focused and prepared. Stephany Garcia, former director of programs at The Knowledge House and current community solutions manager at JobsFirstNYC, added that *"there is something to be said about being in the school building, directly or indirectly interacting with students and staff, and capturing the true essence of the school's environment."* She wished the group had hosted meetings in the school building earlier.



Hold regular meetings and check-ins with designated outcomes. These components are crucial to maintaining alignment and making progress toward shared goals. Transparency and information sharing between all partners is key for clear communication and holding one another accountable for results. In this particular partnership, the School Design Team took advantage of being together at T2C Learning Communities and met afterward in person to grow as a team and identify ways to integrate best practices into their programming. Holding regular meetings at the school also ensured that workforce partners could be kept in the loop regarding students' progress toward graduation, allowing for better curriculum planning and goals alignment.



Identify assets and needs early on. The School Design Team reviewed school and partner curricula, staff charts, and other guiding documents to learn what was in place in each institution and where the gaps were. They took the time to collectively build an implementation plan. Armed with an inventory of strengths and weaknesses for each stakeholder, including the school, the team was able to more quickly align on a vision and implementation plan. Roles and responsibilities were assigned based on each partner's strengths. Garcia added, *"Having more concrete information about what the school's needs, student performance goals, and current resources are from the beginning can help speed up the process of designing a program that is student-focused and mission-aligned."*



Prioritize building relationships with students. Garcia said, *"Keep it simple, and build relationships first! As a workforce development program provider, it's very easy to get in the mindset of wanting to pack as much career content as possible in a short amount of time. Doing that will not get you as far as if you have invested time in the students and let them know who you are and where you're coming from—and have school staff that have bought into what you're bringing to the table because you included them in the planning conversations."*



Now that this T2C partnership is off the ground, the team will turn its attention to aligning the partnership's offerings with New York State CDOS standards. HOPE and The Knowledge House will teach bootcamp workforce training coursework, aligned to New York State work-based learning requirements, as part of AIM II's CDOS financial management course. This will be a pilot with a long-term goal of aligning a semester-long career readiness curriculum to CDOS standards.

Ana Chapman, HOPE's chief program officer said, *"It would be amazing if the HOPE Program's core work readiness training was provided as a credited, CDOS-aligned course, and every AIM II senior left with not only CDOS credentials but also a real skillset to bring to work. The Regents exams are a major barrier for many and the CDOS guidelines can reduce burden. It presents a great opportunity for workforce partners to expand facilitation to students earning a high school degree."* To this end, The Knowledge House and HOPE joined JobsFirstNYC's CDOS Institute for Workforce Practitioners, launched in March 2022.



ABOUT T2C PARTNERS



NEW VISIONS AIM CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL II is located in the Longwood neighborhood in the Bronx and describes itself as a family-oriented community for young people who face great obstacles toward earning a high school diploma. Admission to the school is by lottery, and enrollees must be at least fifteen years old, have completed 7th grade, and be at least one grade behind. Admission preference is given to students who are experiencing involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system, homelessness or transitional housing, or involvement in foster care or child protective services.



THE HOPE PROGRAM provides comprehensive job training, adult basic education, industry certifications, work wellness services, and internships and job placement with long-term support to communities throughout New York City. It explicitly works with a population that is often left out of employment opportunities and may have had criminal justice involvement.



THE KNOWLEDGE HOUSE builds an education-to-employment pipeline in underserved neighborhoods by empowering young people with the 21st-century skills needed to launch tech industry careers or ventures that will have an uplifting impact on their communities. It believes that young people should be given the opportunity to succeed regardless of their financial circumstances or ethnic background. Headquartered in the South Bronx, The Knowledge House has expanded its digital skills training programs to Los Angeles and Atlanta.

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 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.
- 2 The 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.

