

Summary Findings of Research and Development Work on Overage Under-Credited Youth in New York City

**Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation
New York City Department of Education
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INTRODUCTION:

In October 2005, Schools Chancellor Joel Klein established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) to analyze the situation and needs of the overage and under-credited (OA/UC) high school student population — those most at risk for dropping out — and to develop a differentiated portfolio of educational models designed to bring these students to New York State graduation standards and prepare them for meaningful post-secondary opportunities. This work is an outgrowth of the Department of Education's commitment to bring all public school students to graduation, as first articulated in the 2002 *Children First* Reform agenda. The Multiple Pathways strategy leverages school reform momentum generated by the DOE's aggressive New Small Schools initiative, Small Learning Communities Demonstration Project, Charter School Initiative, as well as instructional and professional development innovations.

The Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation developed a comprehensive strategic plan with financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and analytic support from the Boston-based Parthenon Group. The resulting dataset, representing an unprecedented examination of student experience within a school system, has been critical to system transformation grounded in student population needs. Insights gained through this first strategic planning engagement have led to internal and foundation support for continued analysis to inform comprehensive secondary planning.

The Multiple Pathways portfolio of school and program models designed to serve overage, under-credited youth include Transfer High Schools Young Adult Borough Centers, full- and part-time GED programs, and Learning to Work, each of which is described below. In the New York City Department of Education there are currently 25 Transfer High Schools that serve OA/UC students, 20 Young Adult Borough Centers, and over 100 GED programs. Learning to Work is integrated across the Multiple Pathways portfolio and is located at 22 sites. These schools and programs are located throughout the Department as Alternative Schools and Programs, Regional Schools, Empowerment Schools, or Charter Schools.

CONTEXT:

New York City's public school system is the largest district in the United States, serving 1.1 million students. Our schools serve a diverse and disadvantaged population. Historically, student outcomes have been challenged.

Through its Children First reforms, the New York City Department of Education has initiated a series of aggressive reforms to address the needs of all students, including a core curriculum and

academic interventions, support for New Small Schools and Small Learning Communities, an accountability initiative, and the creation of Empowerment Schools.

There is significant momentum behind current reform initiatives, and the DOE seeks to continue to effect real change to drive improved student outcomes across NYC high schools. The Department of Education recognizes a need to increase focus and investment in some of the District's neediest students, those who are overage and under-credited.

SUMMARY FINDINGS:

The information below is a summary of data presented to the New York State Board of Regents on October 23, 2006. This dataset is based on an intensive ten-month analysis spearheaded by the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, conducted by The Parthenon Group of Boston, and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Sizing the Challenge

- An overage, under-credited student is at least two years off-track relative to expected age and credit accumulation toward earning a diploma. **Nearly all high school dropouts in New York City have a history of being overage and under-credited.**
- In New York City, **138,000 youth between the ages of 16 and 21 are overage and under-credited.** 70,000 of them are in school, while 68,000 have already dropped out.
- New York City's estimated 70,000 in-school overage and under-credited youth represent a population of students that is smaller than only five other US high school districts. When all in- and out-of-school overage, under-credited youth are included, **this population would rank as the second-largest high school district in the US.**
- **The dropout population is the overage and under-credited population, just at different points in time.** Of the 37,000 students who graduated in the class of 2003 cohort studied by the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, only 19% of them were overage and under-credited. By contrast, the 93% of the dropouts in that cohort were overage and under-credited.

Profiling the Target Population

- Compared with total NYC high school enrollment, there are 11% more **males** and 14% more **African Americans and Hispanics** in the overage, under-credited population.
- **The majority of overage, under-credited students have completed less than one-quarter of credits required for graduation.** 57% of overage, under-credited students have fewer than eleven credits (toward the 44 credits needed to graduate in New York State). Nearly 7,000 enrolled students are at least 18 years old with fewer than eleven credits (11% of all overage, under-credited students).

- **Approximately half (48%) of all entering freshmen become overage and under-credited during high school** -- meaning that one in two freshmen who enter NYC high schools becomes overage and under-credited.
- **A significant number of students become overage and under-credited regardless of incoming proficiency levels:** 25% of students who enter high school on-age with at least a high Level 2 score on their English Language test become overage and under-credited during high school.
- **Even well-prepared students graduate at lower rates once becoming overage and under-credited.** Those with at least a high Level 2 ELA score graduate at a 37% rate once becoming overage, under-credited, compared with 82% for the general population.
- **Overage and under-credited students fall behind early, and once they become off-track, they leave the system rapidly.** 84% of students who are 16 years old with fewer than eight credits end up leaving the system.
- **Only 19% of overage and under-credited students ultimately receive a high school diploma or GED if they stay in articulated high schools.** 6% of these graduates receive a Regents diploma, while 20% receive a GED.

Identifying Effective Options

- 78% of overage and under-credited students are enrolled in articulated high schools, and 16% are enrolled in Multiple Pathways programs, including Transfer Schools, Young Adult Borough Centers, GED programs, and Learning to Work.
- **The Transfer School model shows tremendous recuperative power for overage, under-credited students, who graduate from Transfer High Schools at an average rate of 56% — compared with 19% if they remain in comprehensive high schools.**
 - The graduation rate for overage, under-credited students at the highest performing Transfer School is 69%.
 - Transfer Schools effectively re-engage students, nearly doubling attendance rates and credit accumulation. OMPG's analysis found that Transfer Schools effectively re-engage students, nearly doubling attendance rates and credit accumulation. (The attendance rate for students enrolled in Transfer Schools as of June 2005 was 78%, compared with a rate of 40% prior to Transfer School enrollment. Credits earned per year increased from 4.9 before Transfer School enrollment to 8.9 at Transfer Schools.)
 - Transfer Schools also produce differentiated outcomes for students of all entering reading levels, with the greatest relative improvement in performance for the most challenged students. For students with a Level 1 ELA score in 8th grade, the graduation rate increased from 10% to 36% in Transfer Schools; for high Level 2 readers, from 25% to 51%.

- **OMPG's new Young Adult Borough Center Model converts 44% of eligible students to graduates within one year.**

STRATEGIC SOLUTION: A DIFFERENTIATED PORTFOLIO OF OPTIONS FOR OVERAGE AND UNDER-CREDITED YOUTH:

The OA-UC population is diverse, requiring a portfolio of programmatic options matched to their individual age / credit accumulation and incoming academic proficiencies. The Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation performs research and development that supports and initiates a differentiated portfolio of program models integrated with secondary school reform that will provide systemic opportunities to improve high school graduation rates and the long-term plans for Overage and Under-Credited youth.

Programmatic Options:

- **YOUNG ADULT BOROUGH CENTERS (YABCs):**

Housed in host high schools, Young Adult Borough Centers are small learning environments that support students in earning a diploma and developing post-secondary plans. These full-time evening academic programs are designed for students who have been in high school for at least four years and have attained a minimum of 17 credits. The instructional model of the YABC personalizes course offerings and programming so that students can concentrate only on the credit portfolio they need for graduation through a non-traditional block schedule. Each YABC site is operated through a collaborative partnership between the DOE and a community-based organization (CBO), creating a positive environment for students. The CBO partner at each program site provides services to students, including youth development support, career and college counseling, and assistance with job placement. Students attend YABCs through a shared instructional model and receive a diploma from their high school of origin upon completion of their credits and Regents exams

- **TRANSFER SCHOOLS:**

Transfer High Schools are small, academically rigorous high schools designed to re-engage students who are overage and under-credited or have dropped out of high school. Eligible students must have been enrolled in a NYC public high school for at least one year and are far from promoting on grade level in their current high school. Most Transfer High School students enter at age 16 to 17 and have earned fewer than 9th grade credits. The essential elements of Transfer High Schools include a personalized learning environment, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and a focus on connections to college.

Transfer High Schools opened under the Multiple Pathways initiative work solely with students who are overage and under-credited. As part of a differentiated portfolio of options for overage, under-credited youth, these Transfer High Schools provide deep

supports and opportunities for lower-credited students with below-level reading scores to recuperate the credits and skills they need to move toward high school completion. The Transfer High School model shows tremendous recuperative power for overage, under-credited students, who graduate from Transfer High Schools at an average rate of 56% — compared with 19% if they remain in comprehensive high schools.

→ **GED PROGRAMS:**

After extensive research and development work, the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation has developed new models for GED programs which include full- and part-time programs for overage, under-credited youth. All of these models incorporate Learning to Work.

In September 2006, OMPG collaborated with the Alternative High Schools and Programs to launch the Access GED model - a full-time GED program for overage, under-credited youth. The essential elements of the Access model include a youth development approach, integrated thematic units, developmental portfolios, innovative systems for student engagement, assessment, and progression, connections to post-secondary training, and in-depth career exploration.

The Learning to Work part-time GED program model uses research-based instructional practices, such as a workshop model coupled with high-quality curriculum materials. Throughout the school year, the part-time staff have access to instructional coaches who provide technical assistance in research-based instructional strategies.

→ **LEARNING TO WORK (LTW):**

Central to the mission of the Office of Multiple Pathways, Learning to Work (LTW) is designed to help overage, under-credited students stay engaged in school by developing the skills they need to complete high school, gain employment, and succeed in post-secondary education. LTW services are provided by Community Based Organization partners and are integrated across Multiple Pathways schools and programs, including Transfer Schools, GED programs, and YABCs. LTW students have the opportunity to participate in intensive employability skills development workshops, subsidized internships, college and career counseling, and job placement. The program also includes attendance outreach, individual and group counseling, academic tutoring, and youth development supports.