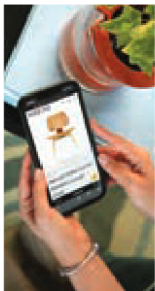


## CHASING GIANTS

Furniture firm wants to make your new sofa a used one **PAGE 3**



**ASKED & ANSWERED** Helping students learn the importance of who you know **PAGE 10**

# CRAIN'S

## NEW YORK BUSINESS

CRAINSNYORK.COM | MAY 30, 2022



DAVID JUNKIN

## FORUM EDUCATION

# PICKING UP THE PIECES

Hobbled by pandemic-related learning loss, city schools seek to avoid a lost generation

BY CARA EISENPRESS

**T**hese days, walking the hallways of the Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem, Principal Colleen McGeehan overhears conversations in classrooms and catches snippets of the routines students use to learn vocabulary.

"It sounds like a school," McGeehan said. "That's what I was missing."

The climate at the public, all-girls Leadership School and at many other learning institutions around the city now feels promising for the most part, educators and parents told *Crain's*. The return of school life from classrooms to extracurriculars has been hard-won in New York City, after many Covid-related rules ended in March, though some linger.

Restoring a sense of normalcy might be the most important action to regain the rigor and community at schools, educators and parents say. The loss for kids during the Covid-19 pandemic has been broad, including lagging social and academic skills as well as a dearth of meaningful and serendipitous experiences.

In response, the city school system is counting on free summer learning, updated curricula and federal emergency funds, among other strategies. But in one of the highest-need districts in the country

**11**  
**STUDENTS IN A CLASS of 30 are falling behind, versus 8 in 30 before the pandemic**

See **PIECES** on page 18

## SMALL BUSINESS

# How the city can give former prisoners an entrepreneurial push

BY CARA EISENPRESS

**B**y the end of the year, entrepreneur Coss Marte plans to be running two New York City-based startups: ConBody, a fitness brand, and ConBud, a marijuana dispensary company.

It's because of the success of the first, a nine-year-old company, that Marte meets the

guidelines to enter the market for the second. The state is reserving its first pot licenses for those with a previous marijuana conviction—or who are closely related to someone who has one—and proof that they have at least a 10% ownership interest in a business that has made a profit for at least two years.

Yet the latter requirement makes it sadly obvious that Marte's success has not been

replicated by many post-prison entrepreneurs—despite a great deal of enthusiasm on their part for business creation—because of the difficulty of starting a business after serving time.

A new report by the Center for an Urban Future details the barriers faced by the roughly 10,000 people who come back to the city annually from prison.

"They consider me a liability," Marte said about potential landlords, insurance representatives and bankers.

Tight rules or biases about working with people with a criminal record, he said, made it difficult for him to find space, afford insurance and raise capital.

See **STARTUPS** on page 26

**GOTHAM GIG**  
**DOCTOR BY DAY, CHEF BY NIGHT**  
**PAGE 27**



**THE LIST**  
**The largest publicly held companies**  
**PAGE 11**

## Schools try to catch up

**E**DUCATION is not a topic *Crain's* takes on regularly. We cover business and the economy in New York City. But these are extraordinary times, in which pandemic-driven school closures have resulted in more students falling behind grade level. Business depends on graduates who are prepared to step into the extraordinary range of jobs and industries this city holds.

So in this week's forum package, we addressed the state of public education. Senior reporter Cara Eisenpress found that schools are working toward a return to normality, even while playing catch-up academically (page 1). Students are less engaged than in normal times, and Covid-era disruptions have been particularly corrosive to extracurricular programs that excite young spirits. Reporter Brian Pascus interviewed a school-community collaboration in Williamsburg, called El Puente, which means "the bridge" (page 17). He discovered dedicated activists who dug in during the dark times and compensated for an utter lack of normality for students and families.

Turning to higher education, Eisenpress reported that enrollment at City University of New York and State University of New York schools has fallen, but creative workforce programs are on the way from institutions such as CUNY's LaGuardia Community College (page 20). Students can learn job-applicable skills in three months.

Finally, we invited educators and advocates to share their ideas for moving forward from here (pages 21 and 22). We invite you to read on and reach out to *Crain's* to add your thoughts to this vital conversation.

—Anne Michaud,  
assistant managing editor



LUCERNA and students create an immigration-themed mural at Domino Park in Williamsburg.

BUCK ENNIS

## Covid-era shock absorber

How community-based organization El Puente kept a high school and a middle school thriving during the pandemic

BY BRIAN PASCUS

**W**hen the Covid-19 pandemic forced the city's schools to close in March 2020, no element of the education system was spared. Students were deprived of structure; teachers' classrooms turned into Zoom conferences; and school administrators dealt with the overwhelming combination of learning loss, fragmented curricula, burnt-out employees and angry parents.

Some schools handled the upheaval better than others, however.

Two success stories are the public high school and middle school connected by El Puente, a community-based human rights organization headquartered in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

El Puente formed in the early 1980s as a community group dedicated to stopping gun violence, but it has found its greatest success in managing the direction of its two neighborhood schools: the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice high school in Williamsburg and the M.S. 50 Community School in south Williamsburg.

The group helped organize one-on-one tutoring to supplement classroom instruction. It provided remote coaches to take attendance, follow up with missing students and perform other administrative duties for teachers. The organization opened learning labs where students could have access to Wi-Fi,

computers, quiet study time and afterschool programs featuring art, dance and singing.

"What happens from 9 to 3 continues from 3 to 9, 365 days per year," said Frances Lucerna, co-founder and president of El Puente. "This kind of amplified understanding of what a community school and community network can be, as an infrastructure of support for young people, is a model we have developed over the last 40 years."

The result has been growing enrollment.

Keeping students on track is an achievement, particularly in these times. Geoffrey Canada, president of the Harlem Children's Zone, which runs three charter schools, called the pandemic era the "worst set of challenges" he has seen for children and teens in his three-decade career as an educator.

"We don't know how bad it's going to be," Canada said last month during a conference at Columbia University. "And unless we do something different, it will be a generational challenge. We'll be talking about why these kids aren't learning 15 years from now."

"We don't know how bad it's going to be," Canada said last month during a conference at Columbia University. "And unless we do something different, it will be a generational challenge. We'll be talking about why these kids aren't learning 15 years from now."

### Community + education

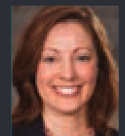
El Puente has done something different by incorporating community into education. "El Puente" means "the bridge" in Spanish. The organization's

**"UNLESS WE DO SOMETHING, IT WILL BE A GENERATIONAL CHALLENGE"**

## INSIDE



PRERNA ARORA



LOREY WHEELER

Needed: wider adoption of practices responsive to newly arrived immigrant students **PAGE 21**

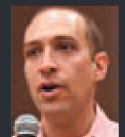


TEQUILLA BROWNIE

Learning acceleration, not remediation, works for those who've fallen behind. **PAGE 21**

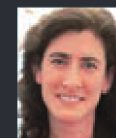


PAGE CHEUNG



ARTHUR SAMUELS

Integrate college-level work in high school so the transition isn't so fraught. **PAGE 22**



KIM SWEET

Many middle and high school kids can't read. Here's a fix. **PAGE 22**

See **BRIDGE** on page 19

# PIECES

FROM PAGE 1

—true even before the pandemic—there are many more children who are absent or struggling than in the past.

Educators told *Crain's* the city Department of Education will need new tools, listening skills and outreach to avoid a lost generation.

"All of our children deserve the best education we have to offer," Mayor Eric Adams said at a recent news conference discussing a new initiative to screen schoolchildren for dyslexia.

The stakes are high for the city too. Working families depend on schools as places their kids can go during the day. Graduates fuel the city's economic engine. Excellent K-12 and postsecondary programs, of which there are many, give locals a shot at a career in the city's high-paying industries.

By the 2021-2022 year, New York City's public school system had lost 9% of its students in kindergarten through 12th grade compared with the 2019-2020 year. During the winter, chronic absenteeism rose to 40% daily, according to a *New York Post* report from early April, though on some recent days it has been back around 85%, according to figures released daily by the DOE.

Early indications of what happens after high school also point to a backward shift. Enrollment is down by 30% at LaGuardia Community College, a jumping-off point for thousands of New Yorkers who then go on to a career or further education. State University of New York enrollment, already falling, has sped up its decline, dropping 10% between the fall of 2019 and the fall of last year. (More on page 20.)

The fate of the three classes whose final

high school students who graduated," he said, counting the population of the three classes, "but we're not seeing them."

The city's new schools chancellor, David Banks, seems to understand he must make public elementary, middle and high schools appealing again.

"For our schools to deliver on their original promise of serving as the engine of the American dream, we will need to do things very differently in ways that build trust one big step at a time," Banks told the City Council in March.

## Taking stock

It remains to be seen how the pandemic years will play out for students. In general, lower rates of education translate to poorer life outcomes. One-third of incarcerated people struggle to read simple texts, according to a 2014 Department of Education study.

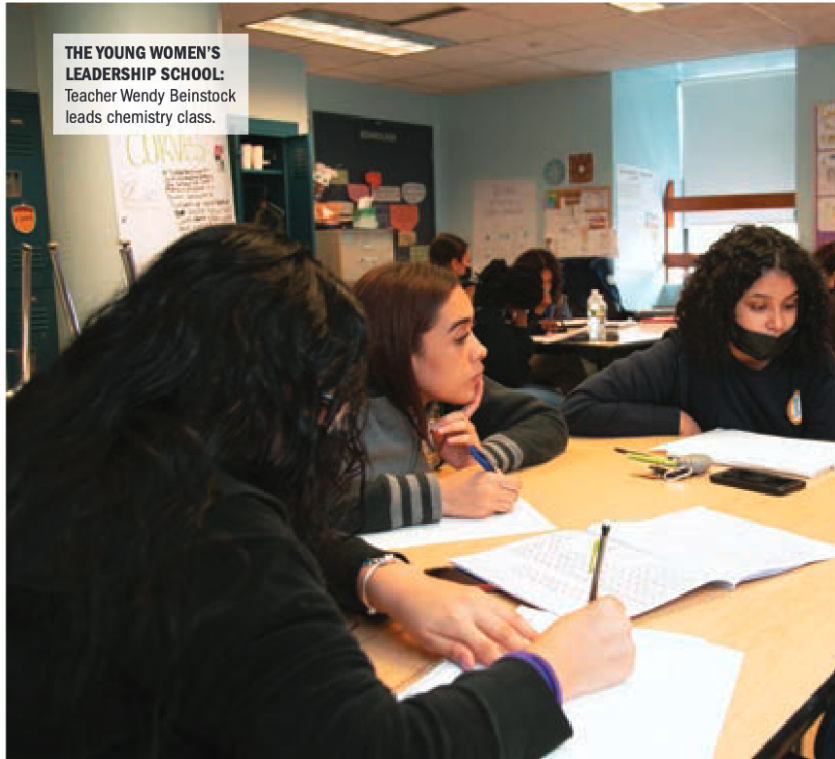
City schools entered the Covid-19 era with some ground to cover. Before the pandemic, only half of Black and Hispanic public high school graduates met the City University of New York's standards for college readiness; three-quarters of white and Asian students met the CUNY standards. Nonwhite students make up 85% of the public school system.

The city's reaction to the pandemic made the inequities worse. A new Harvard study on the pandemic era revealed that the longer the school disruption, the worse the learning loss. Researchers gathered testing data from 2.1 million students in 10,000 schools across the country and found that remote instruction drove widening achievement gaps that were worse in higher-poverty districts. Learning loss left students on average four months behind in math and three

in reading by the start of the current school year, according to a report by McKinsey, with worse setbacks for nonwhite students, urban students and kids from lower-income families.

In New York City, fewer than one-third of enrolled students were in hybrid or full-

**THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL:** Teacher Wendy Beinstock leads chemistry class.



## "WE WILL NEED TO DO THINGS IN WAYS THAT BUILD TRUST ONE BIG STEP AT A TIME"

year of high school occurred during the pandemic—2020, 2021 and 2022—hints at what the city has lost.

"Where are they?" Kenneth Adams, president of LaGuardia Community College, asked about that group of teens. "You're looking at 160,000 New York City

time in-person schooling by April 2021.

Education Department spokesman Nathaniel Styer dismissed the idea that the continuation of some Covid-era rules at schools was a major issue. He referred questions about the coronavirus to the Department of Health.

"The mayor and commissioner are in regular communication about how to keep New Yorkers healthy," said Patrick Gallahue, a spokesman there.

## Chancellor's plans

The Department of Education declined to make Banks available for an interview, but so far he has said he will grow the gifted and talented program that Mayor Bill de Blasio had planned to end. He also said the department will reprise de Blasio's free summer-learning program, which will be extended to charter school students thanks to funding from former Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

In addition, the chancellor will update

the elementary curriculum for students learning to read, to use phonics rather than a disproven—yet prominent—method known as balanced literacy.

Banks is aided in those goals by the fact that federal pandemic emergency funding will continue to plug budget gaps left by falling enrollment.

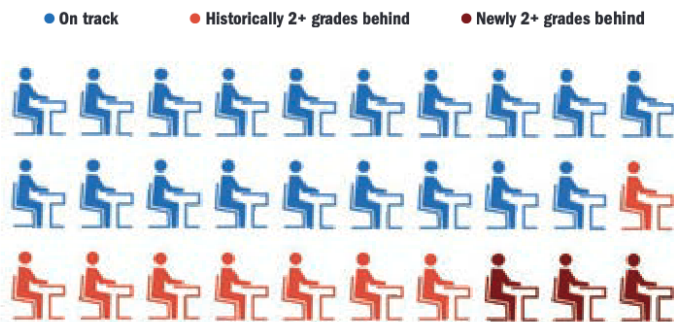
The Harvard study estimates that high-poverty, remote districts will need to spend all their federal aid money on academic recovery.

New York City's funding formula is progressive, meaning that students with disabilities, lower incomes or immigrant parents or who live in gang-heavy areas carry more weight in the equation.

The other hope is that successful programs set up before the pandemic might restore momentum to the school system. For one, there is de Blasio's crowning achievement, free education for 3- and 4-year-olds—which is continuing under Banks. Enrollment in pre-K and 3-K fell by

### IN THE AVERAGE CLASS OF 30 STUDENTS, THERE ARE AN ADDITIONAL THREE WHO ARE FALLING BEHIND SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

Breakdown of students' levels in a classroom, nationwide



SOURCE: Curriculum Associates Fall 2021 Report



**ABOUT U** Coach McCoy Scott puts students through movement preparation and calisthenics.

BUCK ENNIS



BUCK ENNIS

**Filling the enthusiasm deficit**

In the middle of a spring Tuesday afternoon on the Lower East Side, two high school boys were walking down the street wearing overstuffed backpacks as if they had left school with a heavy load of assignments.

A man behind them called their names. "When will I see you back?" he asked. "Tomorrow? The next day?" The man, a teacher named Richard, said they were his students but had not been in school in weeks.

"They don't care," said Richard, who declined to give his last name. "They just spent the last two years unaccounted for, playing video games, and you can't get them back."

His interaction and assessment echo what teachers and guidance counselors say they have seen: an incremental lack of engagement. In a typical classroom of 30 students, three can be expected to be two or more grades behind the class, according to the McKinsey report.

Similar to what Wilson noticed, students don't always go to school for English or math. They arrive for the things that light them up: to write songs and choreograph dance moves for a student-run concert, to win at a mock trial, to go to prom, to participate in a school play, to prepare for a classroom party or to try out for the football team.

Like classroom activities, school sports in New York City took months to restart after they were shut down. That left 20,000 kids with no outlet, according to George Lanese, who runs About U, a citywide sports enrichment program based in Long Island City.

It also means that current juniors, for example, have scant experience on sports teams, certainly not enough to shine for college recruitment, Lanese said. Last fall 90% of all junior varsity and half of varsity football games were canceled because teams could not field enough players, he said. One-third of the players in the football program did not return, he said.

"By canceling JV [during the first comeback season], you lost the feeder system to bring kids back," Lanese said. Worse, "we lost the main carrot to motivate kids to do academics."

The past two years were disappointing to Lisa, a senior at a public school who asked that her full name not be used out of concern for her college applications. After joining the marching band her freshman year, she missed out on travel and performances in 2020 and 2021. She was irked by the Covid-19 vaccine mandate to participate this year.

Her mother, Angela, said she worries about Lisa's future: "This is hurting their opportunity to compete with kids outside of New York City on college acceptances," she said of the marching band members.

But Lisa said she feels prepared to move forward.

"We are in school," she said. "I get to see my friends, be in person and hang out."

As the school year concludes, families are drawing their own lines, picking out the scenarios when life in New York will no longer provide opportunities for their kids.

New York state has lost 2% of its public school student body—the most of any state.

The crisis of faith appears to have reached Banks, who cannot predict whether his ideas will translate into higher enrollment in the fall.

"How many more will come back?" Banks asked during testimony before the City Council at a recent budget hearing. "We don't know." ■

**BRIDGE**

FROM PAGE 17

approach bridges education with community organizing and youth development.

The El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice opened in 1993. The organization began its partnership with M.S. 50 in 2015. It not only ingrained itself into the fabric of the Bushwick and Williamsburg neighborhoods during that time; it also developed relationships with community-services providers and nonprofits.

Those partnerships became more important once El Puente learned the extent of the problems facing their students' families in the spring of 2020.

During the initial weeks of the pandemic, El Puente staff held daily conversations with parents to learn what was needed. Lucerna and her team recognized that Covid-19 threatened students and their parents in unforeseen ways.

"Inequities have existed for a very long time, but the pandemic really made this very evident in that the physical spaces of the schools were not open, and parents couldn't just run to the school and ask, 'How do I do this?' and 'How do I support my child?'" said Asenhat Gomez, El Puente's deputy director of programs.

"For many families, it was: 'We don't have a safe space to quarantine' or 'We can't get out and access groceries' or 'We had a loss and had someone in the hospital, and we don't know anything about what to do,'" Gomez continued.

Many El Puente students are the children of immigrants, undocumented workers and first responders. Many of their parents or caretakers lacked English skills to navigate the confusing emergency segment of the pandemic, according to the organization.

Throughout 2020, Lucerna enlisted staff members to organize food drives and visit 50 to 80 homes per week to make deliveries and check in with families.

"Out of those phone calls, we either referred folks to services or created a food pantry," said Rosa Scott, director of El Puente Beacon, one of the organization's afterschool programs. "For those folks who were in need of food, packages of food were delivered."

A fundraiser organized by the organization collected \$400,000 to help families with funeral arrangements and funded a bilingual workshop for young students to address healing, trauma and depression associated with the pandemic.

"Many of our staff, like myself, are born and raised in the community, and we have relationships with other community-based organizations," Lucerna said. "We approach our work in the schools from that perspective."

El Puente's nontraditional approach emphasizes supporting students holistically—which includes helping their home life when possible.

"Unfortunately, rather than look at it in terms of what's required of young people, [the city Department of Education] has them taking standardized tests," Lucerna said.

**Supplemental teaching**

During the first weeks of the pandemic, there was no technical assistance for families or students, and the school buildings were completely shut down. A scramble ensued to ensure students had the necessary computer equipment provided by the Department of Education and that

Google Chat and Zoom accounts had been set up.

With the technology in place, remote coaches were put in every classroom in both the high school and middle school. Parents, school aides and El Puente's 30-member community school team served as remote coaches, performing duties teachers didn't have the time or the expertise to handle.

"We took the pressure off teachers to really just focus on teaching and doing that job and not worry about the technology," said Anelin Flete, director of El Puente's community school partnership with M.S. 50.

Remote coaches handled Zoom breakout rooms, took attendance, mentored the chronically absent and made afternoon phone calls to ensure students returned after logging off for lunch.

Online classes added entertainment to increase attendance, including remote DJ battles. Humorous clips, educational videos and music were played as teachers waited for students to log on each morning and afternoon.

"We looked at it as: How can we support the school to make it feel like the students are part of the community or school culture, even though they're learning from home?" Flete said.

El Puente realized that it had to go beyond the classroom to serve its students.

**Leadership and wellness**

During the school closures, El Puente opened physical spaces for young people outside of school buildings.

The organization partnered with the city's Department of Youth and Community Development to open learning labs and wellness hubs to facilitate afterschool education and mentorship for the high school and middle school students, and even a number of K-5 students from 10 nearby elementary schools.

The learning labs provided high-speed internet, one-on-one tutoring, quiet study areas, social hangout space and leadership training.

Three learning labs were in New York City Housing Authority buildings and provided full-day programs for the youngest students, who were typically the children of essential workers who worked unpredictable hours.

"Whether it's leadership, education, arts or culture, we try to supplement what [public] schools don't have time to do," Scott said.

El Puente's arts programming became so popular with students and their families during the early months of the pandemic that it has become a mainstay of the organization's wellness schedule.

"We're big on dance. We have ballet, jazz, hip-hop," Scott said. "We have a Saturday arts program for elementary students. And for afterschool, we have theater, jazz, media arts classes, vocal classes and a pretty intense sports program."

Flete said she believes El Puente's community-based engagement methods, especially the teaching and program innovations implemented during the pandemic, can be models for other public schools.

"There's a growing interest in people who want to join our school," she said, "because we've shown through community engagement and the nurturing of youth leadership that this is a place where kids can thrive. It's attracted attention from elementary schools and from families who want to send their kids here." ■

10,000 for the 2020–2021 school year from the one previous. Although there were plans to promote 3-K, which is now available to all neighborhoods after a few years of ramping up, the Department of Education would not comment on the extent of outreach now being done to bring in new families.

There are also wholesale initiatives to bolster tech education, including the STEAM Center at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the P-Tech program and the Computer Science for All initiative, a public-private partnership that has trained 3,000 teachers to instruct students in computer science during the past 10 years. The Adams administration has indicated it will continue to put money and talent into teaching tech, perhaps expanding the successful programs.

In particular, an initiative to equip instructors to teach computer science has been a steady, if quiet, success. In 2015 venture capitalist Fred Wilson raised \$20 million to get it started. With \$60 million from the city, de Blasio announced that all public schools would teach computer science by 2025. Giving all young people access to computer science education is an equity issue, Wilson said.

Since the computer science program began, the number of students in New York City who took one of two advanced placement tests in computer science grew from 1,000 to 7,000, many of them girls and Black and Hispanic kids.

The anecdotes can be as illuminating as the data. Wilson said he was observing a class at a middle school in 2019 when he noticed a talented student and cheered him on. The student let slip to Wilson that he came to school only on computer science days. Wilson said that shocked him.

"Go to school every day," he advised the boy. But the tale also was encouraging, in a way, he said.

"It was causing him to get out of bed and go to school," Wilson said. If anything, he thought at the time, the boy needed more engineering instruction.



ADAMS LCC is covering the cost of short employment-focused programs that students usually pay for

BUCK ENNIS

# CUNY experiments with nondegree programs

An initiative at LaGuardia college aims to provide students with training to land a job in health care

BY CARA EISENPRESS

The idea that students no longer need a degree to get a good job in the city has found important validation in a new program that could turn out more qualified, but not necessarily degreed, candidates in the health care field.

Both the City University of New York and New York state are coming up with ways for New Yorkers to get that training and pay for it. This is thanks to a pilot program just created at CUNY's LaGuardia Community College and funding in the state budget that could help the pilot endure.

Enrollment has declined at New York's public universities during the pandemic as more students choose paid work over continuing their education. Policymakers worry that if the trend continues, the workforce won't meet the needs of local employers. Emphasizing skills-based, employment-focused programs is expected to give students marketable skills in the short term and a path back to education.

The new CUNY program at LaGuardia is called Jobs Direct. LaGuardia already educates more than 5,000 students in workforce training programs annually. The difference now is that the program will provide students with scholarships that cover from 80% to 100% of the tuition, which ranges from \$1,500 to \$3,500 depending on the program. It will offer paid internships, job-placement services, mentorship and hands-on advising with industry professionals, and a close relationship with employer partners.

## New sources of scholarships and grants

In the next year, Jobs Direct instructors and mentors will train roughly 100 students in one of two nondegree workforce development programs, to become a certified clinical medical assistant (average salary: \$42,560) or a central service technician (average salary: \$65,780).

LaGuardia chose the two health care fields for training

because they are well-paid lines of work where more employees are needed, said Kenneth Adams, president of LaGuardia.

"The students that need the training from the workforce development programs are often low-wage workers," Adams said. "They're unemployed or people in entry-level jobs who want to make more money, but they don't have the resources to pay for the training themselves."

Several outside funders have put their money into a \$650,000 investment in the infrastructure of Jobs Direct, and LaGuardia's foundation will pay the full or partial scholarships.

That only goes so far, however, which is where the state budget item comes in.

For fiscal 2022-23, which began April 1, New York state has added \$150 million to its Tuition Assistance Program for low-income students. TAP can now be used by those in approved workforce training programs.

**"STUDENTS THAT NEED THE TRAINING ARE OFTEN LOW-WAGE WORKERS"**

During the 2020-21 school year, the state spent \$700 million on TAP, so this is a sizable increase. Until now a student who wanted to take a three-month course that could lead to a phlebotomy position had to pay for the full cost of the training, while a classmate studying history could access financial aid.

New York City's total employment is down 5.5% from its record February 2020 level, according to the latest seasonally adjusted data from the state's Department of Labor. In health care, the labor shortage has reduced hospitals' teams of clinical laboratory technologists and medical assistants, the Center for Health Workforce

Studies found.

Enrollment is down 10% since 2019 at State University of New York campuses and down 22% at City University of New York community colleges. Based on her experience with 3,000 high school students in a mentoring program, a greater number now want to enter the workforce without going to college, said Heather Wathington, CEO of iMentor (see Asked & Answered, page 10).

## In-demand skills

About half of the full-time students who start at CUNY do not end up with a degree within six years, according to the school's data. Programs such as Jobs Direct could leave such students with in-demand skills and give them a springboard to additional education should they find they need a degree to progress in their job.

"These students are neglected," said Alan Divack, program director at the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, one of the funders. Divack said the new approach would make the workforce programs at school "part of a pathway" where students could "accumulate credentials" that potentially lead to a degree.

For Drielle Valeretto, a longtime fashion model and now the parent of a toddler, going into the medical assistant program will be, she hopes, a way to find a job that will support her as she pursues her longer-term goal of becoming a nurse.

Valeretto hopes to become certified by the fall. After that, with a salary, she said, "I will be able to return to nursing school in the fall semester, either at Borough of Manhattan Community College or LaGuardia, and get back on track to becoming a nurse."

LaGuardia's Adams said he hoped to expand the Jobs Direct framework of financial aid and support to other nondegree programs, especially given the new dollars from the state.

"That is also good news for our funders," he said. "They can help us get off the ground while we advocate for long-term programs." ■



ISTOCK

OP-ED

## HOW THE SCHOOL SYSTEM CAN SUPPORT IMMIGRANT CHILDREN



PERNA ARORA

**AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE STUDENTS** in New York City public schools are newly arrived immigrants. Newcomer students make up roughly half of New York City public school English language learners, or ELLs, who themselves make up roughly 15% of the city's public school students.

The students often live in poverty as their parents work to find a footing in their new country. It is challenging to acclimate to a new language and culture, but it is particularly hard for those who are adolescents. Imagine, then, what these children experienced when schools shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, newcomer immigrant youths were at high risk of dropping out of high school, and the risks have only become more acute. Data suggest that immigrant and ELL students have left school at higher rates than other groups during the pandemic—an estimated 1.2 million students nationwide.

According to testimony this year by Advocates for Children of New York, almost 1 in 4 New York City ELLs dropped out of high school in 2020, and only 46% graduated high school in four years. In January 2021 attendance among ELL 10th graders was 10 percentage points lower than it was in 2019.

Newcomer youth were also particularly vulnerable to the stresses of the pandemic—which accelerated a mental health crisis among all young people. Concentrated in New York neighborhoods hardest hit by the pandemic and often experiencing extreme economic insecurity, stripped of supportive networks in their home country and with inadequate technology and sometimes only fragile connections to peers and teachers, the students were set adrift when schools shut down.

To address the heightened challenges newcomer youths face, New York City needs to invest in a thoughtful, education-based infrastructure. There are 15 Internationals Network high schools in the city, focused on the needs of adolescent, immigrant ELLs. The schools have a relatively successful track record of serving and graduating their multilingual students. There also are five ELL transfer schools designed to meet the needs of newly arrived immigrants ages 16 to 21.

Of the more than 500 New York City high schools, 83% enroll ELLs. And at most of the schools, particularly at those where ELLs make up a small share of the student body, ELL graduation rates are distressingly low.

Practices that are responsive to newcomer students' needs must be more widely adopted. Schools serving large numbers of newcomer immigrants, for example, should become "trauma-informed" to ensure students feel safe, supported and prepared to learn. Providing a social-emotional learning curriculum that is culturally appropriate for newcomer children is key.

Finally, we need an educator workforce that is both culturally competent and linguistically diverse. We also need to adopt technologies that enable educators to communicate with families in their home language.

Fortunately, many educators, administrators, politicians and community advocates in the New York area are actively engaged in such efforts, advocating for appropriate attention to be dedicated to the newcomer population. And the city recently communicated an intention to invest in expanded services.

At Columbia University's Teachers College, we are conducting research to identify key practices that support the mental health and academic success of newcomer students so that schools can more effectively serve them.

The energy and success of New York City—and our nation—have always relied on the contributions of new Americans. We owe them schooling experiences that empower their youth to succeed and thrive. ■

*Perna Arora is an assistant professor of school psychology at Columbia University's Teachers College. Lorey Wheeler is an associate research professor with the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.*

OP-ED

## LEARNING ACCELERATION, NOT REMEDIATION, IS ESSENTIAL FOR STUDENTS TO MOVE FORWARD



TEQUILLA BROWNIE

**TWO YEARS AFTER COVID-19** forced nationwide school closures, the academic toll of the pandemic is coming into focus—and it's a sobering picture.

Even before the pandemic, my organization, TNTP, sounded the alarm that many students—particularly Black and brown ones from low-income families—weren't getting the educational opportunities they needed to graduate ready for college or a career. But during the past two years, significantly more students have fallen behind their grade level, exacerbating the already dire situation.

The current unprecedented amount of unfinished learning could deny millions of students a sustainable path to social and economic mobility—keeping far too many locked in a cycle of intergenerational poverty. It's also one of the biggest long-term threats to our economic viability that nobody's talking about. After all, the success of businesses in every industry depends on a steady flow of graduates with the skills to take on 21st-century jobs.

School systems can take immediate steps to reverse the slide by adopting learning acceleration.

When students fall behind, teachers typically go back and reteach material from earlier grades before moving on. Although the remediation strategy makes sense on the surface, we've found that denying students access to grade-level work—even with good intentions—causes them to fall even further behind. With learning acceleration, teachers give grade-level material to every student, bringing in key concepts from earlier grades only when necessary. This "just in time" support can be key to catching up and moving forward.

A study my organization authored with Zearn, an online math curriculum, found compelling evidence that learning acceleration works. The research found that students who experienced learning acceleration completed 27% more grade-level lessons than those who experienced remediation. And they struggled less with grade-level work, debunking the idea that remediation protects students from becoming frustrated with school.

Learning acceleration is an important innovation. But we'll need many more innovative ideas to put all young people on a path to financial security. The pandemic has taught us that adaptiveness is a prerequisite for relevance in a world where fast-moving, exponential change is the new normal. This moment calls not just for better instructional techniques but also for a different education paradigm.

Leaders at every level and from all sectors should join forces to build the public education system our country needs to retain its global competitive edge. That starts with reorienting the focus of K-12 education to offer all students, including our most marginalized, multiple pathways to good jobs in the economy of the future.

College is one path. Coding is another. Climate change mitigation yet another. There are dozens more.

The chaos of the past two years exposed some of the worst about our education system. But it also showed the best: that educators and entire systems can adapt, innovate and succeed against the odds.

The challenges our students face today are daunting but not insurmountable. We can do this. ■

*Tequilla Brownie is chief executive of TNTP, a national nonprofit that helps school systems end educational inequality.*



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**OP-ED**

# EXPOSING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSES—AND ENABLING THEM TO EARN CREDITS—IS A PATH TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS



PAGE CHEUNG

**FOR YEARS EDUCATION LEADERS** and policy-makers have told families that the path to economic mobility runs through college. But unless students graduate from college, they cannot achieve financial independence and long-term stability.

Only 20% of first-generation college students earn a bachelor's degree, and barely 12% of Black and Hispanic students earn a bachelor's in five years.

The average income of an individual with some college experience but no degree is \$39,698, compared with \$71,177 for someone with a bachelor's degree. For too many young people, the path remains inaccessible.

For low-income students, a slight setback—a bureaucratic slipup at a university, say, or a failed class that costs money but earns no credit—can lead to dropping out. About 30% of students who drop out of college do so during freshman year; the leap from high school simply has too many pitfalls. It is incumbent on schools, therefore, to create a smoother transition.

One way is by exposing students to college-level work—and enabling them to earn college credits—while they are still in high school. Immersing students in a college-level course has a profound impact on their persistence and preparedness to tackle difficult coursework once they get to college.

At the charter school we co-founded, we don't limit advanced placement eligibility. Instead, we allow all students to apply

for AP classes, demonstrating their investment through essays and performance tasks. This "big AP" approach allows more students to reap the benefits of advanced coursework. And, of course, students do pass the exam, earning college credit.

Our students also take the lesser-known College Level Examination Program exam, which allows them to accumulate college credits without the structure and training required by AP classes. High schools must align courses with the CLEP exam, and students have multiple opportunities to take and retake the test.

With college credits already banked at the time of matriculation, students are much more likely to graduate from college.

As a city, we can do even more. Thomas Bailey and Davis Jenkins of Teachers College at Columbia recently noted that only a small fraction of New York City high school students participate in the College Now program, which allows them



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to take CUNY classes. We should implement the reforms that Bailey and Jenkins suggest, including more direct partnerships between CUNY schools and being more intentional about the course offerings that are available to high school students.

But why not go beyond that? Oftentimes, students pass on College Now classes because they have unavoidable after-school or weekend commitments. If you're working part time to contribute to the household or are a caregiver for younger siblings, traveling to a campus after school or on weekends simply isn't an option.

Why not permit high school teachers to become credentialed as adjuncts for certain CUNY schools, then align their courses to the school's curriculum and allow students to take credit-bearing classes at their own high school? This would lower some of the barriers kids face in earning college credit without diminishing the rigor of the class.

Too often policy-makers pay lip service to the importance of a college degree but fail to create the structure necessary to support our most at-risk students in getting one. If we want to see college graduation rates go up, we need to create more opportunities for students to be exposed to college-level material while still in high school. ■

*Page Cheung and Arthur Samuels are co-founders and co-executive directors of MESA Charter High School in Brooklyn.*

**OP-ED**

# MAKING SURE EVERY STUDENT LEARNS TO READ: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?



KIM SWEET

**IN MY 25 YEARS** as an education advocate in New York City, one constant has been the hundreds of frustrated parents each year whose children struggle with reading and cannot find help in the public school system.

One of the most fundamental responsibilities of schools is to teach children how to read, yet at Advocates for Children of New York, we regularly work with middle and high school students who are unable to read menus or job applications, much less novels and textbooks.

The scope of the problem is apparent in the city's test scores. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, only 36% of Black and Hispanic students in the third through eighth grades—as well as 29% of students who are homeless and 16% with disabilities—scored proficiently in reading on state tests.

Mayor Eric Adams and Schools Chancellor David Banks have called attention to the issue and vowed to tackle it, announcing plans for universal dyslexia screening, changes in curriculum, new programs and schools for students with dyslexia, and a Literacy Advisory Council. The proposals represent a historic effort to support students in learning to read and could be transformative.

Fundamentally changing the city's approach to reading instruction requires a comprehensive plan that reflects the science of reading and the reality of students' experiences. The approach also should encompass both general and special education, as difficulties with reading are not limited to students with dyslexia.

For starters, every school in New York City should be using a curriculum that is both culturally responsive and aligned with the scientific evidence on reading development. Historically, schools have been free to use any literacy program they like. Banks has said that during the next year, all schools will instead be asked to switch to a "phonics-based literacy curriculum" for grades K-2.

Instituting guardrails and consistency in the curriculum across the city is a critical first step. Coupling the change with ongoing, job-embedded support

and coaching for teachers will be essential to ensure it's successful.

Schools also must be prepared to offer effective intervention for every student, regardless of grade level or disability status.

Although Adams' proposal includes new funding for dyslexia screening, what matters most is how the screening results are used. With \$250 million in one-time federal pandemic relief funding slated for "academic recovery and student supports" in 2022-2023, the administration has an unprecedented opportunity to begin building out a literacy safety net that provides one-on-one or small-group intervention to all students who require help.

The need is more urgent than ever in light of the pandemic, as many young children struggled to master critical foundational skills via remote instruction and are at risk of falling further and further behind as they are expected to read increasingly difficult texts.

Improving literacy instruction will not be easy, but we cannot afford to shy away from the challenge. The new administration can bring together stakeholders, focus on the needs of students and create lasting change so that all children learn to read. ■

*Kim Sweet is executive director of Advocates for Children of New York.*



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