INCREASING THE NUMBER AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDENT INTERNSHIPS AND RELATED OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

big picture learning, february 2020
Since October 2018, Big Picture Learning (BPL) has been conducting, with Carnegie Corporation of New York support, a pilot project in New York State to design and test a program for helping schools develop and employ a CDOS (Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential) Option 1 graduation pathway with student internships as a core component. Research and experience make a compelling case for providing all students with an internship opportunity as an integral part of their high school experience.

Based on our work in the field, we believe CDOS Option 1 provides a significant opportunity, but remains underutilized in schools and districts, largely because of its documentation and credential requirements and the challenge of creating the infrastructure -- culture, systems, structures and practices -- to support a robust and rigorous program of internships and related out-of-school learning opportunities as part of the secondary school experience.

This much-need option, open to all students, aligns with NYSED’s current examination of rigor (in both demands of the learning challenges provided to students and the quality of their responses to those challenges), course progressions, and assessment in high schools. Internships can help schools achieve their goal of graduating significantly more young people with a diploma and credentials that have value. NYSED can support this transformation by improving guidelines; refining and expanding resources, tools, and technical assistance; providing timely CDOS-related data; and conducting an evaluation of the CDOS system.
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FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES BY ETHNICITY
WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE WE COMING TO?

Several forces are converging to signal a sea change in how our society prepares young people for success in their work and careers as well as in raising a family and participating in civic life. Work -- what, how, and where it is accomplished, and by whom -- is changing rapidly. The workplace is increasingly mobile and virtual. Rapid developments in automation, artificial intelligence, and communications require that work is accomplished through human partnerships with ubiquitous and protean technologies.

In such an environment, based on faint images of what work will be like in five or ten years from now, businesses are trying to hire the workers they will need for tomorrow. US population demographics indicate that there will be a shortage of qualified workers in our future, so schools will need to be sure that no young person leaves high school unprepared. Finding and nurturing a diversity of talents for that future workforce is job #1 for educators, but our education system is judged to be ill-equipped to accomplish that task for current needs, much less for an indistinct future. So, educators must ensure that all students stay in school and graduate with a high school diploma and high levels of college and work readiness.

Despite the increasing demands of the workforce and workplace, the value of the traditional high school diploma is declining, reflecting low levels of relevance and rigor. A recent Brookings report indicates that the percentage of high school graduates is only slightly improved over the last decade, rising from 79% in 2009 to 80% in 2018, and remains appalling. For NY State, the New York Times and the NY State Education Department report corresponding percentages of 77% in 2009 and 80% in 2019. The magnitude and persistence of the performance shortfalls indicate that simple refinements to the existing design and system are unlikely to work, particularly for those young people who have had limited satisfaction and success in the traditional system, students who are often poor or Black and Hispanic. In fact, these graduation gaps follow along racial lines, as evidenced by the 2019 subgroup graduation rates reported by NYSED (Figure 1).
The poorest districts graduate only slightly higher than half of their students on-time, and Black and Hispanic students graduate at a rate approximately 20 points lower than their White and Asian peers.

Racial disparities also can be observed in enrollment and completion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) coursework, as students of color enroll in, and complete fewer CTE courses. The relative success of CTE programs for some students must be tempered by the violations of equity of access and the disappointing longitudinal data on CTE graduates. A 2014 National Assessment of Career and Technical Education report found that a high percentage of high school graduates who enter CTE-concentrated postsecondary programs depart their field of study within two years. No one CTE-related postsecondary concentration retains even 20% of its initial enrollees (the health science sector does best at 19%), even when students have already received these pathway credentials while in high school (see exhibit 6.5 on page 91 in the aforementioned report). This data reflects students’ failure to make informed decisions about their interests and career interests while still in high school.
Schools are particularly struggling to motivate and engage young people in deep and sustained learning. Moreover, as indicated in Gallop’s 2014 student poll, nearly half of the students responding either were not engaged (28%) or actively disengaged (19%) in school. Thus, a disturbing percentage of young people stay in school, but drop out psychologically and are only superficially engaged in learning, even though they graduate with a high school diploma and go on to some form of postsecondary learning.

The graduation rates for four-year and two-year colleges are an economic and social tragedy. A 2015 Hechinger report indicates that one out of every 14 students attending a community college has already earned a bachelor’s degree. At some community colleges, the proportion is as high as one in five. These are adults who could not convert their BA degree into a high-wage job. The Wall Street Journal reports that almost half of college graduates are underemployed in their first job, and, of those, roughly two-thirds remain in jobs that don’t require college degrees five years later. The magnitude of these shortfalls calls for more than superficial changes to the prevailing design of schools and schooling.

TRANSFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK STATE

Within this general context, NYSED is currently addressing several specific challenges, particularly with respect to what constitutes student success, how that success is best developed, and what evidence students need to provide to demonstrate competence and accomplishment. Given the needs of our shifting employment landscape and the potential for improving students’ ability to explore that landscape and make plans for their futures, secondary schools in NYS have a significant opportunity to enhance the student learning experience they provide for their students.

Currently, members of the NYS Board of Regents are conducting a series of listening sessions throughout the State to inform potential shifts in policy to reflect exemplary design and practice in the field. Their questions focus on how schools might expand the range of learning opportunities and learning environments that schools provide to achieve much higher levels of success by all students. How, for example, might NYS’s Employability Profile serve every student, whether they arrive in the workplace with a high school diploma or two- or four-year college degree? How might the Career Plan serve as a core component? How might the Career Exploration Internship Program (CEIP) serve all students?

In 2013, the New York State Board of Regents offered the CDOS (Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential) graduation pathway as a way to bolster career readiness instruction for high school students, with particular attention to opportunities for special education students. In 2016, the Regents expanded the CDOS credential as an option for all New York State students to use as either an endorsement
to their diploma or as a substitute for one of the five Regents’ examinations (in most cases the Global History exam) required for graduation. CDOS comes in two flavors -- Option 1 and Option 2. Table 1, taken from the NYSED website, shows the comparison of rigor and benefits for Option 1 and Option 2, the latter awarding a credential based solely on a third-party test, such as WorkKeys or Skills USA.

The CDOS Option 1 provides an opportunity to employ internships as part of every student’s learning program. The CDOS credential enhances the traditional diploma to communicate to employers what students have accomplished and are prepared to accomplish, whether they are going on to college or the workplace, or some combination of both. Yet, despite the ostensible attractiveness of the CDOS Option 1, to date it has been underused.

In 2017, according to NYSED statistics, of the 9,900 students who graduated through the new pathways (alternative assessments, CTE, CDOS), only 8% of students used the CDOS pathway. The exact number of CDOS students is 792; however, this number includes both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM &amp; CTE INSTRUCTION (OPTION 2)</th>
<th>INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES (OPTION 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ exposure to professional work standards provided through a classroom or shop/lab instructor.</td>
<td>Students’ exposure to professional work standards and immersion in work environment provided by a mentor, as well as numerous professionals and clients in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn about potential careers through textbooks, videos and internet research</td>
<td>Students experience career options and sample job opportunities through site visits, job shadowing and on-site internships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn how to develop a resume.</td>
<td>Students gain job experience for their resumes and build a professional network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn job-specific skills from a qualified educator in a classroom or shop/lab setting.</td>
<td>Students learn what is currently happening in the field of their interest through hands-on experience with a professional mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ work and learning are assessed through traditional learning.</td>
<td>Students’ work and learning are assessed using real-world standards applied to their authentic work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Option 1 (216 verified internship hours) and Option 2 (CTE and employability coursework and testing). This indicates that the number of students graduating through the internship option is even smaller. Similarly, in 2018, only 1,568 students graduated with CDOS Option 1 or Option 2 credential. **In 2019, this number has grown to 2,508 students.** While this growth is promising, this number represents about one percent of the State’s graduates.

Since October 2018, Big Picture Learning (BPL) has been conducting, with Carnegie Corporation of New York support, a pilot project in New York State to design and test a program for helping schools develop and employ a CDOS Option 1 graduation pathway with student internships as a core component. The internship program, as part of a system of out-of-school learning opportunities, provides a deep and sustained workplace learning experience, thereby enabling students to build professional networks; site-specific knowledge; and professional, social-emotional, and academic competencies.

Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski have described the continuum of “leaving to learn” opportunities that all schools should provide to all of their students. This continuum includes guest speakers, travel, shadowing, field trips, internships, and forms of apprenticing. All these activities can be addressed through the State’s Career Exploration for Internship Program and can be part of a CDOS Option 1 pathway. As New York’s education policies continue to evolve, it’s essential to ensure that out-of-school learning opportunities and internship pathways serve all students and that workplace learning supports a variety of postsecondary transitions.

**MAKING THE CASE FOR INTERNSHIPS AND RELATED OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Why should internships be an option available to all students? What benefits do internships provide to students? There is a long and robust literature that testifies to the power of situated learning. Internships and other forms of out-of-school learning shift the locus of learning into the community and the workplace, where work, social-emotional, and discipline-based competencies can be developed authentically and deeply. It is these out-of-school contexts and settings that help students develop a sense of self, a sense of place, and a sense of accomplishment in a community of practices and in the broader professional community. Feelings of well-being emerge from that development. The relationships that students form with adult mentors through high-quality internship experiences provide them with another caring mentor as well as the foundation for a robust professional network.

Workplaces enable young people who may not have had success in the traditional school setting to discover, exploit, and demonstrate their varied and valued talents and accomplishments that often are unrecognized in traditional academic settings. Researchers studying the impact of internships and mentorships for low income youth note the strong positive impact of these experiences on young people’s confidence,
positive self-concept, and networking and advocacy skills. These skills serve young people regardless of their postsecondary journey -- in higher education, careers, skills trades, service, and family life. These skills are essential for low income youth in New York State.

An internship program can serve all students, not just those in CTE programs or students going directly into the workplace after high school graduation. There is, or certainly should be, a "career" and a "technical" aspect to all learning, just as there is, or should be, an applied, "hands-on" aspect to all of learning. Even high school students aspiring to be architects, doctors, or lawyers might want to explore the career and the technical aspects of their preparation for those professions. High schools can offer internships to enhance career education and preparation for lifelong learning, whether it be two- or four-year college or a job-embedded training program.

Internships provide value-added opportunities to students, thereby achieving increased motivation and engagement. Educators can increase student engagement by providing
all high school students with access to diverse program options that match their career interests and the ways they wish to pursue them. And within those programs, students need choices that allow them to customize their career paths.

Opportunities to experience work and the workplace while in high school may help students to make better informed decisions about their future education and the job and career opportunities that may (or may not) be a good fit for them. When Karen Arnold from Boston College conducted her research on alumni from Big Picture Learning schools, she found that interest-driven internships affected longitudinal outcomes 5-10 years after high school graduation. She found that 74% of BPL school students who went directly into the workforce after high school reported securing a job from a professional contact they developed through their high school internship experience. Furthermore, 88% of alumni enrolled in college or post-secondary training within 2 years of graduation. And, of those alumni not enrolled in college or post-secondary training, 96% were employed.

In research conducted on an internship program in the trades, Darche in 2019 found that while the very individualized approach to internships as central to curriculum was unique, the principle of sequencing authentic projects over time, and the structure of the experiences themselves -- driven by student interests, linked to rigorous learning goals, carefully planned, thoughtfully facilitated, and rigorously assessed -- can be easily emulated and scaled.

The Pilot Project

BPL is currently engaged with a small but diverse group of educators from throughout New York State with a wide range of experience with internships and with the CDOS requirements and credential process. BPL is providing technical assistance to these school- and district-level educators in setting up an internship system, supporting students in finding and pursuing internships, and in documenting student work and accomplishments. BPL is also helping district and school leaders integrate the CDOS Option 1 documentation and credential requirements into their school accountability systems and employ an online internship management system.

When a high-quality internship program and a CDOS credential system are in place, the benefits to all students are tangible and significant. Given those benefits, particularly for those students who have limited success in their pre-high school experience and are furthest from opportunity, why do we not have more widespread implementation of internships and CDOS throughout NY State? Why do so few high schools in New York use internships and other out-of-school learning as a learning opportunity and environment for all of their students? What are the incentives and impediments attending the use of the CDOS system?
To address these questions, BPL conducted interviews and focus groups with school and district practitioners during the pilot work on developing a variety of internship programs and particularly CDOS Option 1 internships. Some educators had very limited experience with internships or were just beginning to explore the use of internship systems; others had well-developed internship systems; nearly all had some experience with CDOS. We posed several questions.

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOU FACING WITH RESPECT TO SUCCESSFULLY PROVIDING INTERNSHIPS AND RELATED WORK-BASED AND WORKPLACE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES? WHAT REGULATIONS, POLICIES, AND POLICIES-IN-PRACTICE IMPEDE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS? WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO CHANGE IN ORDER FOR INTERNSHIPS AND RELATED WORK-BASED AND WORKPLACE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO BE USED MORE BROADLY IN YOUR SCHOOLS?

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WITH RESPECT TO USING CDOS? WHAT FACTORS MIGHT INFLUENCE YOU TO CHOOSE OPTION 2 OVER OPTION 1?

WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO CHANGE IN ORDER FOR CDOS TO BE USED MORE BROADLY IN YOUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT?

As we conducted these discussions, we reviewed relevant documentation regarding internships and CDOS and observed programs in operation. We focused on three overlapping topics: internships, the CDOS1 and CDOS 2 options, and the larger system in which these play out, with a particular focus on how districts and schools provide equitable access to a large and diverse set of student learning opportunities.
We have organized what we have learned thus far from the pilot program around two major topics:

• What is happening with respect to internships and CDOS and in the larger context and setting in which these initiative are operating?; and

• What are the challenges districts and schools are facing in their development and implementation of internship programs and their use of the CDOS credentials? We were particularly interested in how educators in districts and schools addressed these challenges as they designed and pilot tested their internship programs.

Our discussions with district and school practitioners provided several insights about the status of internship programs. There is substantial and significant variation among districts and schools with respect to these programs. The expansion of the CDOS program to serve all students has provided a significant incentive to districts and schools to develop internship programs, but even districts already offering some form of internship opportunity are in early stage development.
PERCEPTIONS The CDOS pathway is often viewed by schools and districts as a “fallback” option for students who are deemed not capable of, or interested in, rigorous study or higher education. Moreover, the internship structures offered do not provide to students voice and choice or exposure to a variety of professionals and fields to students, but instead often center on work-based learning in service or retail employment settings in entry level positions. Few practitioners see the opportunity that internships provide for stimulating and supporting the transformations many high schools are undertaking to increase student motivation and engagement.

ACCESS Most high schools do not offer internships to any of their students. Moreover, even where internships are offered, they are not available to all students and the selection process is essentially a screening based on academic performance. For example, some schools provide internship opportunities only to seniors who have completed all traditional graduation requirements. Few CTE programs offer internships and related out-of-school learning opportunities as an integral part of their course offerings. Rather, most CTE programs attempt to bring the workplace into the school in the form of simulated learning environments -- simulations for example, of a construction site, manufacturing plant, or hospital.

REGENTS’ REQUIREMENTS There is pressure put on those implementing internship programs to avoid disrupting the teaching to the standardized Regents exams. Therefore, schools find it hard to allow students to attend internships during the school day. Some core subject teachers find it hard to meet seat or lab minute requirements for Regents exams or just having enough time to get through the massive amount of curriculum material to prepare students for Regents exams.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM DESIGN Some alternative schools with a flexible design provide a more personalized and supportive environment than a traditional high school or even a traditional CTE school/program. We found that such personalized environments are correlated with higher graduation rates. High-quality internship programs provide personalization systems, interest-based internship opportunities, and opportunities for meaningful career exploration. Many early stage internship programs are bolted onto existing high school system and structure and unaligned with other parts of students’ total program of study and career plan.

COMPENSATION Some internships are paid; most are not. This is a complex issue in that family economic circumstances sometimes put pressure on students to earn money to contribute to their family’s income. These students might need to forego unpaid internship opportunities that might benefit them in the long term, for example, positioning them well for post-secondary and careers, and give priority to work in low-wage, low-skill jobs. In such cases, the economic factors may outweigh those related to the quality of the internship experience and its alignment with the student’s career learning plan.
LOGISTICS Many schools do not have a transportation system that is designed to support the internship program. To a large extent, this is a question of money and resources available, but also logistics. Students use public transportation when it is available. Internship programs require that students have workplace insurance, which schools typically provide. For internships that take place during the school day, schools must make adjustments in the school calendar and daily schedule while complying with restrictive NYSED seat time requirements.

STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Internship programs benefit from trained and, in some cases, specially certified staff, and require that at least some educators take on new roles and responsibilities. Staff must work to ensure that students keep open the option of both college and career pathways and maintain the required CDOS documentation. Special training and support are required, but professional development, or the funds to provide such professional development, is often difficult to secure.

ALIGNMENT WITH HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM Ensuring rigorous internship program standards and high-quality individual student internships is a continuing challenge. Staff must maintain documentation of all aspects of the internship experience, particularly with respect to competencies addressed and accomplishments in these experiences. Often, there is limited alignment between the internship experience and the in-school program of study. Typically, schools have had difficulty granting credit for learning accomplished outside of school. School transcripts seldom provide a space for recording such accomplishments.

DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION Some of those practitioners we interviewed described CDOS reporting requirements as cumbersome and antiquated. Schools need help implementing existing, and/or developing their own tools for rigorously evaluating the student internship experience and the resulting learning. Another systemic challenge is the dearth of data on the CDOS program. There is little or no program monitoring and evaluation, but it appears that NYSED is developing systems to provide district and school leaders with tools to collect workplace learning data and manage Career Plans.

GUIDANCE Practitioners reported that the career planning guidance materials are quite dated, particularly as compared to those for the college pathway. As an example, they noted the lack of clarity about what constitutes workplace learning activities and what are the appropriate documentation and assessment materials.
DISTRICTS’ USE OF CDOS CREDENTIALS

Our discussions with district and school practitioners provided several insights about the use of CDOS Options 1 and 2.

PERCEPTIONS Districts and schools have an incentive to use CDOS, as CDOS graduates count as 1.5 graduations in the NYSED accountability assessment. Nevertheless, some educators’ perceptions of CDOS were sometimes negative, viewing the pathway as appropriate primarily for those students who cannot pass all of the Regents exams, or who were not “college-material.”

LIMITED CDOS USE Many schools are providing some form of internships, but not completing the steps required for obtaining a CDOS credential. Record keeping and staffing were cited as barriers. Workplace learning experience/accomplishments were generally not described on the typical high school transcript nor were they aligned and integrated with the in-school program of study.

CDOS OPTION 2 Many districts prefer using CDOS Option 2, a work readiness test, because of its low cost and relatively simple administration requirements. Option 2 does not require that districts offer internships. Option 2 is an “easier out,” despite it being a less valuable option, in terms of meaningful college and career preparation. It is not known what value employers place on tests such as Work Keys or Skills USA for signaling workplace readiness. One practitioner lamented that it is unfortunate that some people mistakenly think that, “the complex challenge of workplace readiness can be reduced to a test score.”
WHERE IT’S WORKING

Despite the several challenges we identified in our field work, we observed several examples of potentiality in the alternative school designs employed by a few BPL and BPL-inspired school programs that employ internships and related workplace learning opportunities as a core component of their programs of study. These school programs, although far from representative, have demonstrated how internships and related out-of-school learning opportunities can work. LaFayette High School in the Syracuse area, Newburgh’s NFA West, and Ken-Ton High School in the Buffalo area provide all students with an opportunity to pursue internships as an integral part of the comprehensive student learning plan.

For example, in the LaFayette High School’s Big Picture program in LaFayette, NY (just south of Syracuse), the faculty employs a school design that has at its core an internship system that has every student in grades 9-12 engaged in internships typically focused on their interests, particularly career interests. Over the 10+ years since its founding, LaFayette has worked through many challenges as it has improved its design and practice, it is well-positioned to take advantage of CDOS Option 1. LaFayette continues to improve and has employed creative and innovative ways to procure a sufficient number and breadth of internship opportunities, providing transportation to those opportunities, and aligning the internship learning with the in-school learning. CDOS requirements regarding learning plans and reporting requirements are addressed within the school’s systems, structures, and practices.

These schools find it relatively easy to respond to CDOS reporting requirements, as data collection is built into the schools’ systems and staff assignments. LaFayette uses the Employability Profile as its internship assessment tool. The required Career Plan aligns well with the school’s use of an individual student learning plan. Internship mentors provide student evaluations three times a year. Appropriate staffing—workplace coordinator and partnership specialist—are in place, as are enabling time structures, schedules, and assessments. School staff coordinate with workplace mentors to guide student projects and evaluate student work—competencies demonstrated and accomplishments documented.

These schools offer the CDOS Option 1 credential to all students; LaFayette also offers the CDOS Option 2 credential to its students, reasoning that the test (in their case, WorkKeys) is an "easy test" for their students, and provides one more accomplishment that students have in their graduation portfolio. Ken-Ton is very supportive of CDOS Option 1—in terms of accountability, on the CCCCR measures, it’s the equivalent of taking AP or IB coursework—but does not use Option 2 because the staff does not feel that the WorkKeys or other tests adequately assess workplace readiness. All three programs report higher student graduation rates than those for students in their traditional high schools, which especially considering that they were initially created (and continue to generally enroll) students who had not experienced success in more...
conventional high schools, is a strong testament to the increased engagement and motivation of their students as a result of their learning experiences (including internships) and pro-educational environment and culture created at those schools.
SUMMING UP

The CDOS Option 1 credential remains underutilized in schools and districts, largely because of its documentation and credential requirements and the perceived challenges of reallocating resources to provide the infrastructure—culture, systems, structures, and practices—to provide a student learning experience that includes an option to pursue a robust and rigorous internship as part of their program of study.

Several cultural and organizational systems and structures in high schools militate against a CDOS internship system in a traditional high school. The “regularities” embedded in the design of traditional high schools include structures that support discipline-based silos, rigid time structures, staffing and staff allocations, and so forth. Some educators, principals, and system-level leaders find these calcified systems daunting. Both public and professional mindsets about workplace learning pose challenges to districts and school creating internship programs. Programs that are perceived as not leading directly to a four-year college degree pathway are often viewed as less desirable and valuable. Consequently, some schools give more attention to conventional college preparation than to career preparation and supporting the growth of the human potential of each individual student. Educators frequently explicitly and tacitly communicate these mindsets to parents and the community. Such a system has a high potential for inequitable services to students.

OPPORTUNITY ABounds

Based on our work in the field and our discussions with practitioners, we believe CDOS Option 1 provides a significant opportunity, but it appears that few educators see the opportunity, and even fewer are prepared to grasp it. Our onsite observations in schools and our many lengthy individual and group discussions with educators in a diverse group of schools has given us a deep appreciation of what it takes to design and implement a high-quality internship program that is open to all students. Expanding student access to CDOS Option 1 internships aligns with NYSED’s current examination of rigor (in both the demands of the learning challenges provided to students and the quality of their responses to those challenges), course progressions, and assessment in high schools and reaches out to the very students schools need to keep in school and learning productively.

Internships—the ones that really matter to students and produce the outcomes that matter to them and to schools and society—need to be an essential option for all students. A growing body of research and experience testify to the benefits of internships, but they are seldom made available to those students who might particularly benefit—those who have had limited success with traditional high school learning experiences and learning environments, students who are often poor, students of color and those furthest from opportunity. An internship program can provide these students with choice, challenge, relevance, and authenticity in their programs of study.
EARLY STAGE STARTUPS

Based on what we have learned from our pilot project, we conclude that it’s a bit of the wild west throughout NY State with respect to internships and CDOS Option 1. There are a few early stage start-ups in place, incentivized by the CDOS Option 1 credential, and these schools are making implementing systems changes to make internships and related workplace learning activities available to all students.

These initiatives have the potential to serve as a catalyst for significant reform. We have observed examples of what an internship program might look like; most are still in a nascent and emergent phase, as early stage start-ups typically are. Internships and other workplace learning opportunities—job shadows, career exploration activities, workplace projects, and apprenticeships—are far from core components of the traditional high school experience. There is considerable variation in scope, depth, and quality of the systems schools have created as well as in the internships themselves. These tentative beginnings point the way. What is needed is a system for driving up quality of the internship programs and of the individual internships.

Our examination of these start-ups reveals the essential components of a high-quality CDOS Option 1 internship program.

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THE CAREER PLAN DRIVES CAREER EXPLORATION WORK, SERVING AS A GOAL AND A RECORD FOR STUDENT INTEREST INVENTORIES, WORK READINESS EFFORTS, AND FOCUSED IMPROVEMENT ON WORKPLACE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE.

THE EMPLOYABILITY PROFILE SUPPORTS RIGOROUS EVALUATION OF WORK READINESS AND CAN POTENTIALLY TRIANGULATE THE EVALUATION OF A STUDENT, MENTOR, AND CLASSROOM TEACHER, PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON STUDENT WORK AND LEARNING IN THE INTERNSHIP.

THE REQUIRED INTERNSHIP HOURS PROVIDE AN INCREDIBLY VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP AND NETWORK BUILDING.

THE WORK READINESS STANDARDS CDOS ADDRESSES PROVIDE A BACKBONE FOR CAREER EXPLORATION, RIGOROUS LEARNING, AND AUTHENTIC HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES.
CHALLENGES
Challenges arise at several levels: pedagogical, technical, and organizational, including mindsets about learners and learning and the “regularities” of the traditional high school and traditional career and technical education school/programs. In addition to these mindsets regarding the CDOS pathway are the considerable logistical challenges in managing an internship program at scale: identifying, vetting, and certifying workplace sites and mentors, documenting student attendance and learning activities, assessing learning and accomplishments, ensuring student safety, and procuring transportation and insurance are relatively new tasks for educators. Big Picture Learning’s Internship Management System, ImBlaze is just one of a collection of tools and technologies that have been recently designed and developed to ameliorate a number of these challenges. Indeed, an emergent ecosystem of tools and technologies are being developed and continually improved to meet these needs.

Even those schools able, because of their flexible systems, structures, and practices, to employ internships sometimes initially struggle with learning how to secure a sufficient number of high-quality sites and mentors/coaches, supporting workplace coaches, insurance, transportation, staffing, record keeping/transcripts, and so forth. And, of course, there is the evergreen challenge of training and supporting appropriate staff. A deeper challenge, not yet recognized by most educators, is aligning the internship program with the entire high school curriculum and integrating meaningful career exploration into the system as well.

A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE
Providing internship opportunities can initially feel like a significant stretch for many high schools, but, based on our experience and our learning from the pilot work, decidedly not a bridge too far. Over time and with appropriate and sufficient support, high schools can deepen and expand their internship programs, thereby challenging the boundaries of what educators take for granted about schools and schooling and stimulating innovation in providing a more holistic student learning experience.

High-quality internship programs require that teachers work collaboratively and individually to create an authentic and coherent student learning experience that more closely aligns with the way that learning and work take place in workplaces. Internships can be a core component in a continuum of out-of-school learning and work experiences that pose increasingly demanding challenges and require increasingly sophisticated responses—competencies and accomplishments. Such a design requires investment in the education, training, and support of principals, school leadership team members, and teachers.

LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT
It is clear that the spread of high-quality internship programs, even those incentivized by the CDOS Option 1 credential will be slow and uneven without accelerants—support and resources to move beyond piecemeal and fragmented projects to robust
programs. In order to obtain the benefits of an internship program, NY State will need to move from existing pockets of promise in schools, districts, and regions to integrated systems of newly designed components.

Based on our work in this pilot project, we see several areas where leadership and support are needed:

- **Provide expanded and deepened guidance to districts and schools regarding out-of-school learning programs.** Such guidance should equal in depth and breadth that provided to traditional CTE and college readiness pathways.
- **Require the career plan (or similar) for all students.**
- **Provide technical assistance to districts and schools in program design, implementation, and assessment at the school-leadership and practitioner levels.**
- **Provide education, training, and support for teachers and support staff to successfully implement internship programs and guide high-quality student internships.**
- **Develop orientation and training programs for workplace mentors.** These could be offered flexibly through web-based resources.
- **Identify funding sources for appropriate staff.** Show how districts can use Perkins funding as appropriate. Consider classifying work-place learning experiences as CTE pathways to facilitate this shift.
- **Expand and strengthen communication about the CDOS Option 1 program to parents and community members.**

Our observations of school programs and practices combined with our in-depth discussions with practitioners in both traditional and non-traditional schools have informed us that there is considerable opportunity to substantially and significantly improve students’ learning experiences and accomplishments by employing a high-quality internship program that addresses the CDOS Option 1 requirements. Although there are some technical challenges that need to be addressed, the most significant are likely to be the actual and potential disruptions to the regularities baked into the design of traditional schools and schooling, regularities that have little or weak support in research and literature, but have been nevertheless calcified in traditional designs. Using internships, schools have an opportunity to reconceptualize what constitutes rigor in student learning and work and to expand how each student can demonstrate their competence and accomplishments.
GRASPING THE OPPORTUNITIES
What will it take to grasp those opportunities, to turn the significant potential of CDOS Option 1 into actual systems and structures? We propose starting in interested high schools with small pilot programs that offer a variety of rigorous internships. NYSED can support this initiative with guidelines, resources, tools, technical assistance, CDOS-related data, and an evaluation of the CDOS program.

EXPAND THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE
Educators can use the motivation and engagement that internships provide to keep in school those students that have had limited success in a traditional high school program. The internship system can give particular attention to equitable access to internships, ensuring that all students have access to the full range of out-of-school learning opportunities. Such access should make learning personal, accommodating students’ different ways of knowing and of demonstrating knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Internships should align and integrate with other secondary school transformation initiatives. For example,

PERSONALIZATION How can the internship experience provide the deep personalization that addresses pervasive equity issues and challenges by wrapping what is in essence a career pathway around each and every student guided by comprehensive career and postsecondary planning?

PROJECT-FOCUSED LEARNING How can projects, individual and group, embrace learning that takes place in a work setting and context?

ACADEMICS How can internships include applications of discipline-based competencies (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) in school and out-of-school contexts and settings?

RIGOR How can internships address multiple understandings of rigor, recognizing that it is manifested in many ways beyond the traditional academic?

ASSESSMENTS How can deepened and broadened assessments focus on authentic workplace performances that demonstrate competence and accomplishments?

ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION How can in-school and out-of-school learning experiences be aligned? How can the transcript address both sets of experiences?

Where schools have been successful in providing internships to all their students, it is because they have created a school design—culture, systems, structures, and practices—that embraces out-of-school learning, and internships particularly, as a core of the student learning experience.
SUPPORT INNOVATION AND HIGH QUALITY IN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

NYSED can provide these support services to advance internship systems that serve all students:

**RESOURCES** for staff and targeted education, training, and support services for workplace learning coordinators. Within schools and organizational partners, tools should be identified to manage and assess the internship program and individual student internships.

**STAFFING** Strong internship programs require specialized staff, such as workplace learning coordinators and dedicated teams of college and career advisors.

**PROVIDE TOOLS** for reducing the CDOS 1 compliance paperwork burden.

 Provide increased **FLEXIBILITY IN COMPLYING WITH REGULATIONS** regarding seat time and certifying learning accomplished in internships that fall outside of the school day.

Assist districts and schools in **DEVELOPING A MULTI-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION STAGING** of internship programs as part of a comprehensive high school redesign.

Extend the **PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM** to schools with CDOS-based internship programs.

**SUPPORT COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE** that address quality standards for programs and individual internships, tools and processes for designing, implementing, and monitoring internship programs. Help districts to lead this work as part of their transformation. Aggressively advocate for internship opportunities available for all students, with appropriate support.
Data is needed for several purposes: local accountability and program improvement, documentation of practice, and state-level accountability. Data systems for internships and CDOS need to be aligned with other relevant student performance information systems to provide a one-stop documentation and evaluation system. ImBlaze and similar out-of-school learning management tools can be used to support school- and district-based implementation monitoring and quality assessment.

More and better data would help to identify proof points, document scenarios of use and exemplars, and support the dissemination of information about exemplary designs and practice. NYSED could also conduct/sponsor evaluation research on the impact of internships on students’ motivation and engagement and near- and long-term student success. Both stories and data would help to illuminate the life-changing impact that high-quality internships can have on young people, particularly those furthest from opportunity.

By providing these resources, NYSED can help districts and schools grasp the opportunity the CDOS Option 1 provides to deepen and broaden their internship programs and provide equitable student access to internship opportunities, thereby supporting all students in learning productively through to graduation. The CDOS program will help students earn a diploma and a credential that have value and position them well for family-sustaining careers so that they can participate as civically-minded leaders in their communities.
we activate the power of schools, systems and education through student-directed, real-world learning

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