



## **Boston's Summer Youth Employment Program: Building a More Holistic Workforce Development System for Boston's Youth**



**YOUTH  
EMPLOYMENT  
AND  
OPPORTUNITY**

 Northeastern University  
**Dukakis Center for  
Urban and Regional Policy**



**Blakely Consulting**

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# **Boston's Summer Youth Employment Program: Building a More Holistic Workforce Development System for Boston's Youth**

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## I. Introduction

Cities across the United States have developed summer youth employment programs with the goal of improving a range of behavioral, academic, economic, and social outcomes of young people. In Boston, as many as 10,000 youth participate in the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) every year at hundreds of business, nonprofit organizations, and city departments where they learn valuable and important skills that set them up for future success. Prior research conducted by Northeastern University in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development has demonstrated that the Boston SYEP reduces involvement with the criminal justice system, increases the likelihood of high school graduation and college enrollment, and boost employment and wages in the 12-18 months after youth participate in the program (Office of Workforce Development, 2017).

Compared to other cities, the Boston SYEP operates as a coordinated ecosystem that proved highly resilient during COVID and was a key factor in ensuring that the Boston SYEP could pivot to a hybrid format. Each summer, youth are placed into jobs through one of five intermediary organizations, each of which serves a different target population based on their needs. These organizations include Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), John Hancock's MLK Scholars, City of Boston's Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (OYEO), and Youth Options Unlimited (YOU). During summer 2020, the intermediaries came together to develop

four new tracks of programming to enable youth to safely engage in meaningful activities. This included a Learn and Earn program which enrolled students in college-level courses to earn credit and gain certifications; as well as a Virtual Internship program which supported businesses and community-based organizations with a platform of ready-made projects, collaboration supports, and dashboard to manage youth workers. As a result, the City invested an additional \$4.1 million of CARES Act funding into the SYEP to employ the same number of youth, at the same number of hours, and the same rate of pay during summer 2020. In contrast, other cities, such as New York, initially shut their program down, leaving thousands of young people unemployed.

In the spirit of building back better after COVID, the City of Boston and the other SYEP intermediaries recognize the importance of increasing coordination and alignment across the ecosystem. The goal is to develop a more holistic and inclusive workforce development system to provide a range of high quality, skill building opportunities that support youth throughout their journey as they transition from high school to postsecondary education/training and careers. To lead this effort, the Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (OYEO) has deepened its research- practice partnership with the Northeastern University under a new multi-year project funded by the William T. Grant Foundation. That work includes the following multi-year agenda:

### **Year 1: Process Evaluation and Feasibility Study**

- Perform an ecosystem mapping analysis of intermediaries and partners
- Conduct an efficiency and equity audit of the City's systems and processes for placing youth into summer opportunities
- Develop a set of feasible recommendations for increasing coordination and alignment across the Boston SYEP ecosystem

### **Year 2: Strengthening Program Features**

- Diversify job types by industry, occupation and sector (public versus private positions)
- Improve job quality through skills mapping, employer-partner training, and use of work-based learning plans for student assessment
- Develop job laddering over summers and across intermediaries to further development
- Create digital badging system for skills that are recognized by schools and employers

### **Year 3: Expanding Opportunities for Youth**

- Expand post-secondary opportunities that are connected to careers in occupations and industries in high demand in Greater Boston (e.g., Learn and Earn program)
- Expand year-round work-based learning opportunities for youth that can be aligned with BPS curriculum
- Connect the youth development pipeline across stakeholders (e.g., Boston SYEP, BPS, community colleges) and programs (e.g., Tuition Free Community College, apprenticeship)

This report is the culmination of the Year 1 activities which included extensive data collection, rigorous analyses, and a strategic planning effort that focuses on the City's summer jobs program and the role it plays in the broader SYEP ecosystem. During the spring and summer of 2022, the research team analyzed youth application and hiring records; interviewed youth, parents, employer-partners, and staff; and conducted several small-scale pilots aimed at increasing program access, efficiency, and equity. Our findings inform a set of recommendations to inform the collective efforts of Boston SYEP stakeholders and provide a blueprint for future implementation through this Summer Jobs Consortium. The goal is to ensure a brighter future for Boston's youth as they continue to navigate the social, emotional, and learning losses brought about by the pandemic.

The rest of this report is organized as follows. Section II provides a systems mapping of the Boston summer jobs ecosystem and how SuccessLink is situated within that landscape. Section III highlights youth experiences with the program and summarizes the research evidence to date on the Boston SYEP's short- and long-term impacts on youth academic, employment, and behavioral outcomes. Section IV presents the findings of our SuccessLink efficiency and equity audit along with the results of our pilot interventions to improve matching and onboarding of youth into jobs. Section V summarizes our key findings and provides a set of recommendations along with a SWOT analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats regarding the feasibility of implementing these changes. Section VI lays out our concluding thoughts for positioning the Boston SYEP ecosystem in the long-term with a focus on improving equity of opportunities for Boston's youth.

## II. Boston Summer Jobs Ecosystem Mapping

The first section of this report will map out the ecosystem of Boston SYEP. This includes a brief description of the intermediary organizations and the youth that they serve as well how youth navigate the ecosystem when searching for a summer job.

### A. Overview of the Boston Summer Jobs Ecosystem

Introduced in the early 1980s, the Boston SYEP currently relies on approximately \$10 million in city, state, private sector, and philanthropic funding to connect roughly 10,000 youth each summer with about 900 local employers. All Boston city residents aged 14 to 24 years are eligible for the program. These youth represent significant untapped potential in terms of productivity and talent for developing the City's future workforce. As such, the goals of the Boston SYEP are two-fold:

- To increase youth labor market attachment by providing youth with the tools and experience needed to navigate today's job market on their own, and;
- To reduce the inequality of opportunity across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups by increasing access to early employment experiences for disadvantaged youth.<sup>1</sup>

Participants work a maximum of 25 hours per week for a six-week period from early July through mid-August and are paid the Massachusetts minimum wage. Youth may be placed in either a subsidized position (e.g., with a local nonprofit, community-based organization, or city agency) or a job with a private-sector employer where the employer pays the youth directly. In

addition, the Boston SYEP requires 20 hours of job-readiness training using a hands-on, competency-based work-readiness curriculum. Modules include evaluating learning strengths, developing soft skills, and practicing job readiness.

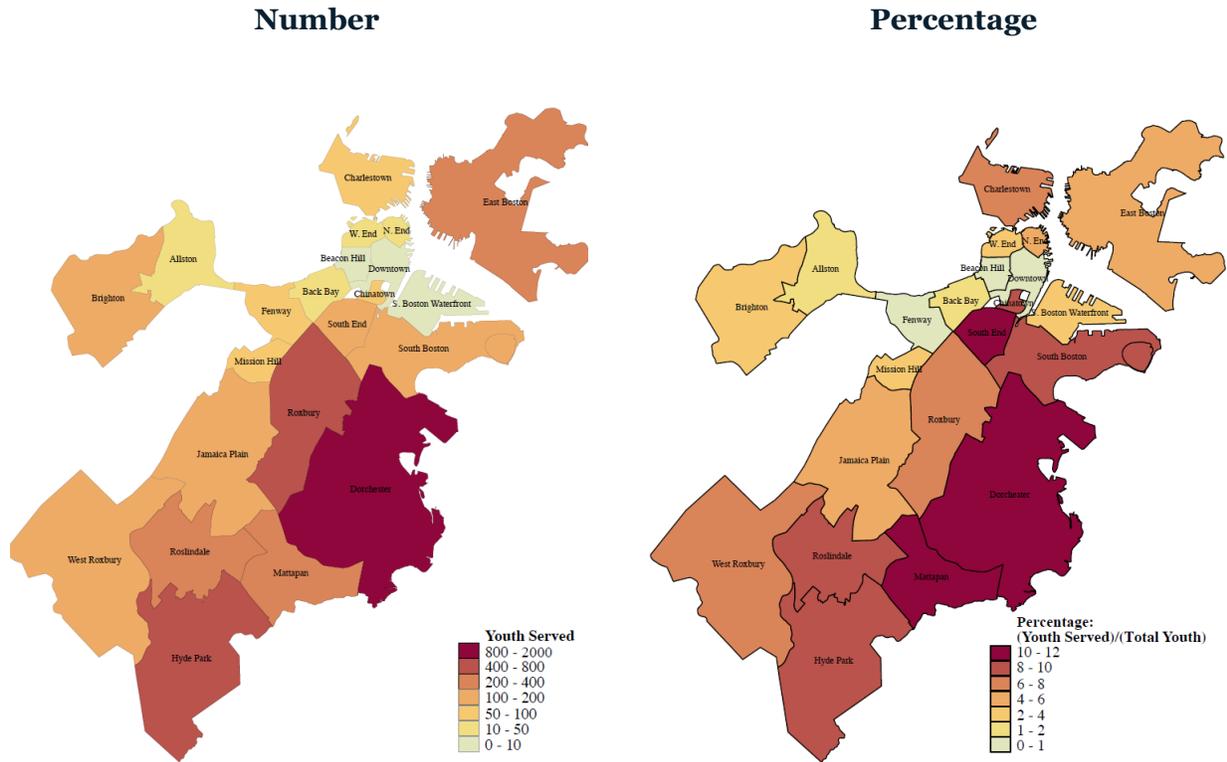
Like most workforce development programs, funding for the Boston SYEP ecosystem is fragmented, requiring the intermediaries to braid together multiple sources of support, each with their own strings attached. For example, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (OWD) administers state funding from Comm Corp's YouthWorks grant to four of the five Boston SYEP intermediaries (the exception is MLK Scholars which is funded by John Hancock). YouthWorks funding guidelines require that only 20 percent of the youth are repeat participants. As a result, the intermediaries supplement OWD funding with support from private philanthropy (e.g., ABCD), other grant programs (e.g., YOU) and private sector employers (e.g., PIC) to serve as many youth as possible.

Figure 1 shows that the Boston SYEP serves a representative population of youth age 14-24 years from all 23 of the city's neighborhoods with greater representation among low-income communities of color such as Dorchester (about 33 percent), Roxbury (about 10 percent), and Mattapan (about 9 percent). Figure 2 shows that each intermediary serves a different segment of the youth population. For example, ABCD serves younger youth from low-income families while YOU serves older youth, mostly males, who have been court-involved. Survey data reveal that more than half of SYEP youth use their earnings to pay some type of household bill, highlighting the importance of the program as a source of income for low-income households.

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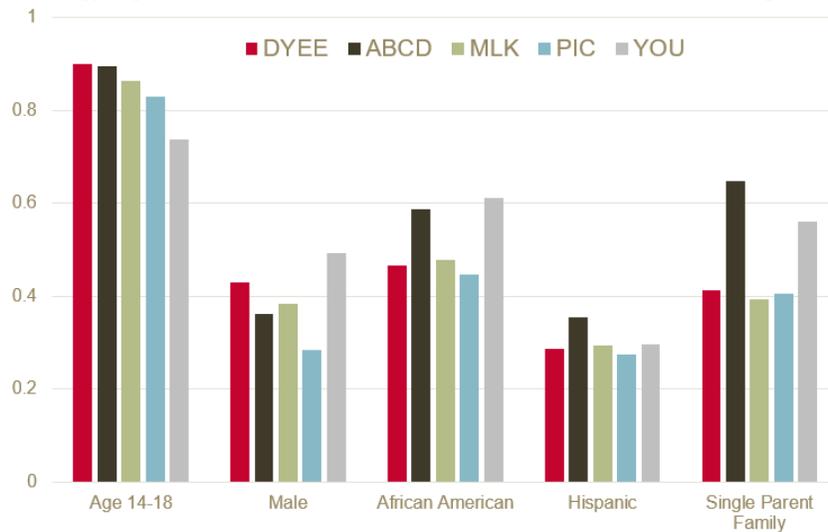
<sup>1</sup> City of Boston. Reducing Inequality Summer by Summer, December 2017.

**Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of Youth Served by the Boston SYEP, 2022**



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by ABCD, OYEO, PIC, MLK, and YOU.

**Figure 2. Demographic Characteristics of Boston SYEP Survey Respondents**



Source: Authors' calculations based on survey data collected by Northeastern University.

## B. Description of Intermediary Organizations within the Boston SYEP Ecosystem

Each intermediary is responsible for reviewing applications, supervising job placements, and delivering the program’s career readiness curriculum. Table 1 summarizes the number of youth, the population served, the types of jobs, and the funding sources for each intermediary. We discuss each intermediary in detail below.

### **Action for Boston Community**

**Development (ABCD):** ABCD is a large and established nonprofit that works in all of Boston’s 18 neighborhoods. Because of the high number of applications it receives for the limited number of SYEP jobs available, ABCD uses a lottery to assign youth to jobs. The enrollment period typically spans February through June, and applicants are notified of their lottery status and job assignment in late June. Most youth are placed in subsidized jobs at community-based organizations, primarily in daycares and day camps, but also in other non-profits focused on human services, healthcare, and the arts. Of those selected by the lottery, almost all (about 85 percent) accept a job offer, with only a handful dropping out of the program. Only 25=30 percent of youth who are not selected find a job during the summer, indicating the difficulty for youth to secure jobs even with Boston’s relatively low unemployment rate (JPAL 2022).

ABCD’s high take-up rate stems in part from serving a predominately low-income school-aged population. Most youth learn about the ABCD summer jobs program because their families have received other support, such as fuel assistance, from the organization. ABCD applicants are typically aged 14-15 years and most (nearly 90%) were in school at the time they applied. Just over 50 percent are African American and 30 percent are Hispanic, with roughly 7 percent reporting limited English ability. More than half of youth applicants come from a single

parent family and upward of 18 percent acknowledged receiving cash public assistance of some form. Nearly 7 percent report being homeless and less than 5 percent list themselves as having a disability (Modestino 2019).

### **Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (OYEO):**

OYEO’s mission is to engage and employ Boston’s youth through a variety of activities including the Mayor’s Youth Council, the Participatory Budgeting process for youth, and the SuccessLink employment program which provides both year-round and summer job opportunities. The SuccessLink summer jobs program serves anywhere from 3,000-7,000 young people every summer depending on the funding that is available, making it the largest Boston SYEP intermediary. The program typically serves youth aged 16-19 years across a wide variety of jobs, including positions within City departments. In addition, SuccessLink serves a smaller group of youth aged 19-24 years as peer leaders.



Through SuccessLink, youth are placed into jobs with employer partners either as direct hires through OYEO or as grant partners. Youth applying to “direct” jobs must create a profile and apply through the City’s iCIMS hiring platform. Direct partners select youth through the platform after which youth must go through the lengthy onboarding process to be hired by the City of Boston including verification of all hiring documents.

**Table 1. Program Characteristics of Boston SYEP Intermediaries**

<b>SYEP Intermediary</b>	<b>Number of Participants (pre-COVID)</b>	<b>Funding Sources for Support</b>	<b>Youth Population Served</b>	<b>Types of Jobs Offered</b>
<a href="#"><u>Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)</u></a>	800-1200	City of Boston, state, private philanthropy, other grants	Low-income youth typically age 14-15 years	Subsidized jobs primarily in daycares and day camps as well as community-based organizations
<a href="#"><u>Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)</u></a>	2000-3000	City of Boston, state, private sector employers	Youth age 16-19 years who are Boston Public School students	Subsidized jobs in daycares and day camps, non-profits, and healthcare. Private sector jobs in biopharma, hospitals, finance, banking insurance.
<a href="#"><u>Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (OYEO)</u></a>	3000-5000	City of Boston	Youth age 15-18 years, older youth aged 19-24 years serve as peer leaders	Subsidized jobs in daycares and day camps, non-profits, healthcare, and city government
<a href="#"><u>John Hancock MLK Scholars Program (MLK)</u></a>	500-600	John Hancock	Youth age 15-18 years	Subsidized jobs in daycares and day camps, non-profits, healthcare, and business
<a href="#"><u>Youth Options Unlimited (YOU)</u></a>	100-150	City of Boston, other grants	Court-involved youth age 14-24 years	Subsidized jobs in community based organizations

Source: Authors' categorization based on interviews with each intermediary.

In 2020, OYEO offered their employer partners the option to become “grant” partners and instead receive funding to support wages for a pre-determined number of youth hired for a summer job through their organization. Youth applying to “grant” jobs follow a link off the SuccessLink page to apply directly to the employer partner. The “grant” partner is then responsible for managing the application, selection, onboarding, and payroll processes for those youth positions.

Finally, OYEO is also responsible for granting out funding to other City of Boston summer youth programs. These include the Office of Workforce Development’s Learn and Earn program that supports youth enrolling in community college courses, the City’s Dreamers Fellowship that supports skill and leadership development for immigrant youth regardless of status, ABCD’s Summerworks Program, and YOU Boston’s Summer Youth Employment program.

## **Boston Private Industry Council**

**(PIC):** As Boston's Workforce Development Board and a school-to-career intermediary, the PIC also provides a variety of work-based learning activities for Boston Public School (BPS) students. Starting in the fall, PIC career specialists conduct outreach in 31 BPS high schools, working with roughly 2,600 students to prepare them for work through a series of work readiness workshops and career exploration activities. At the same time, the PIC employer engagement team secures hiring commitments from over 150 top employers, which range from Fortune 500 companies to hospitals to technology start-ups.

The PIC program includes both subsidized jobs in community-based organizations (about 200-300 jobs) as well as private sector internships where employers directly pay youth wages (about 2500 jobs pre-COVID). PIC staff coach students to apply to at least three private sector internships based on their interests and skillsets and all applicants are given the opportunity to interview before employers make their final selection. Students who are not placed in a private sector internship are offered subsidized employment with a nonprofit organization in the community or are coached to apply for jobs outside of the PIC's network of employers.



Relative to the BPS student population, PIC participants are typically older with a greater share of students in grades 11 or 12, in part because employers tend to select more experienced students. These are typically rising juniors and seniors who may have already had a summer job experience with either ABCD or OYEO, but are still disproportionately non-white (about 40% Black and 25% Hispanic) and low-income (70% receive free or reduced price lunch) compared to the overall BPS student population (Modestino, Paul, and McLaughlin 2022). To ensure that private sector firms provide meaningful employment experiences for youth, the PIC encourages employers to assess students across six skill categories using the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP). Youth typically show large improvements in critical thinking and problem solving; teamwork and collaboration; and understanding workplace policy, culture.

**MLK Scholars:** MLK Scholars, funded by John Hancock, is a mid-sized program that serves a similar population and partners with many of the same organizations as OYEO. The program typically supports nearly 600 youth at 50 local non-profit and corporate organizations while also directly employing about 30 youth directly at John Hancock. John Hancock also provides online financial education and mental wellness content available to all Boston summer jobs participants through EVERFI. To supplement the experience, John Hancock supports their employees who are involved in mentoring and supervising the students with DEI training and tools to ensure a diverse talent pipeline of Boston youth.

**Youth Options Unlimited:** YOU is a small yet powerful program serving about 100-150 court-involved youth, many of whom are referred by the Boston Police Department through the work of the Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC). YOU participants are typically older, Black and Hispanic males, often living in low-income households. The program is designed exclusively for youth that have had some involvement with the justice system. Typically, youth work collaboratively in small teams at jobs sites outside the city with an on-site YOU Boston supervisor. There are also some individual level placements for young people to work onsite with either a private sector employer, municipal agency, or non-profit organization.

**OWD Learn and Earn Program:** During the summer of 2020, OWD and OYEO collaborated to create the Learn and Earn program as an additional option through the Boston SYEP where youth are enrolled in community college courses. The City covers the cost of the tuition as well as 20-25 hours per week of youth time spent taking the course, meeting with their college coach, and other relevant college programming. During 2020, the Learn and Earn program used the CARES Act funding to serve a diverse population of 500 students with most youth completing their courses and about three-quarters gaining college credit. Since then, the program has been reduced to just 150 participants due to federal funding restrictions on work-related programming. With fewer resources for outreach, the applicant pool has included fewer BIPOC students from BPS open enrollment schools. To address this, Northeastern University worked with OWD and BPS to develop a behavioral nudge with emails targeted at students and parents which boosted applications and participation from open enrollment schools with low college enrollment rates. This email campaign has since expanded to all open enrollment schools.



**Areas of Opportunity:** Even prior to the pandemic, there was a collective recognition among the Boston SYEP intermediaries of the need for greater coordination among themselves to ensure that there are no gaps in terms of either the processes in place or the populations served that would cause some youth to fall through the cracks. For example, there are currently no formal processes in place to solicit opportunities that would allow greater placement of youth with disabilities. Although OYEO currently works with STRIVE, the primary organization for student with disabilities, STRIVE only works with BPS students making it difficult to find opportunities to serve youth that fall outside of the STRIVE eligibility criteria.

Similarly, undocumented youth currently do not qualify for the program due to the need to provide proof of residency and citizenship so that youth can be paid City wages. Currently, OYEO works with the Dreamers Fellowship which provides leadership training and hands-on experience to immigrant youth, regardless of immigration status. Youth are paid a scholarship, rather than wages, to support their participation in the program.

In addition, there are currently no processes in place by which youth could combine a summer job with the Learn and Earn program, despite there being obvious synergies between the two activities in terms of work-based learning. One way to address these concerns would be to implement pilot programs through OYEO that can be evaluated under the current partnership with Northeastern to determine best practices that can then be shared across all intermediaries in the Boston SYEP ecosystem.

### C. How Do Youth Currently Navigate the Boston SYEP Ecosystem?

In general, youth typically apply to the particular organization that serves their neighborhood but there is some overlap across intermediaries in terms of where youth are applying. Table 2 shows that the greatest overlap is typically between OYEO and the other intermediaries, especially ABCD and PIC. Anecdotally, younger youth often apply to OYEO not realizing that there are few job opportunities for 14 and 15 year olds, so they are then referred to ABCD. On the other end of the age spectrum, older youth applying to PIC hope to get a private sector placement but also apply to OYEO as a back-up in case they are not selected by a private sector employer. Note that YOU has no overlap with the other intermediaries due to the highly specialized nature of their program but anecdotal evidence suggests that those referrals do happen on occasion.

There is some evidence from interviews and focus groups that suggests youth move through the Boston SYEP ecosystem on an informal basis as they age. For example,

youth age 14-15 years often gain their first job experience through ABCD as a camp counselor which is one of the few positions open to youth under age 16. The following summer, they often work for a community-based organization through OYEO or MLK Scholars. And then as rising juniors and seniors, they may finally land a private sector internship through the PIC. Where possible and when time permits, each intermediary will refer youth to one another based on the population that they serve (e.g., OYEO will refer youth aged 14 years to ABCD, ABCD will refer court involved youth to YOU).

Based on this progression, it's not surprising that only 22.5% of ABCD participants were employed during the prior summer, as shown in Table 3. In comparison, 40-60% of participants through OYEO, MLK, and PIC had at least one summer of prior employment. OYEO also had the highest rate of repeat participation, with roughly half of youth working for a second summer through SuccessLink and one-third working at the same job site.



**Table 2. Number of Boston SYEP Applicants, 2022**

	ABCD	BPIC	MLK	YOU	OYEO Direct	Total excluding other groups
<b>ABCD</b>	<b>2058</b>	54	20	0	376	1608
<b>BPIC</b>	54	<b>1734</b>	30	0	181	1469
<b>MLK</b>	20	30	<b>409</b>	0	41	318
<b>YOU</b>	0	0	0	<b>142</b>	0	142
<b>OYEO Direct</b>	376	181	41	0	<b>4199</b>	3601
<b>Total</b>						<b>8542</b>

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by ABCD, OYEO, PIC, MLK, and YOU.

**Table 3. Prior Program Participation and Employment among Boston SYEP Youth**

	OYEO	ABCD	MLK	PIC	YOU
Percent employed at all last summer	39.8%	22.5%	57.7%	47.1%	31.4%
If employed, repeat participant in the program	51.1%	19.4%	14.2%	17.2%	12.7%
If repeat participant, employed at same job site	33.7%	32.2%	59.7%	19.1%	26.3%

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by ABCD, OYEO, PIC, MLK, and YOU and survey data collected by Northeastern University.

The quantitative data doesn't provide enough information to determine whether youth are experiencing career progression within the Boston SYEP ecosystem. However, interviews with employers suggest that there are opportunities for advancement either formally or informally with employers giving youth who return for a second summer more responsibility, sometimes even paying them at a higher rate by using other sources of funding to increase their pay. This practice is difficult to measure because youth who are being paid from other sources are not reported to OYEO as part of the SuccessLink program data collection efforts. A system-wide data sharing system would help the City understand how youth move between employers, intermediaries, and funding sources.

In the meantime, it's useful to consider how the Boston SYEP ecosystem might be more intentional about laddering job opportunities for youth. For example, how many OYEO participants might be able to meet with a PIC career specialist and secure a private sector placement the following summer? OYEO data indicate that about 2,100 participants in 2021 also applied to the program during 2022. Of those students about 42 percent were enrolled in one of the three BPS exam schools, 20 percent were enrolled in a BPS pilot school, and another 20 percent were enrolled in a BPS open enrollment school, suggesting that this kind of coordination could provide some degree of job laddering across intermediaries and summers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For a list of the 20 BPS schools that have a PIC career specialist assigned to them, see

<https://studentjobs.bostonpic.org/find-your-career-specialist.html>.

**Areas of Opportunity:** Most of the intermediaries in the Boston SYEP ecosystem would like to see more fluid transitions from one provider to another so that youth can build on their skills from one summer to the next. One way to encourage this would be to market these opportunities all in one place, through a hub for youth jobs information in Boston, so that youth and their families can be fully informed about all of the opportunities that are available to them. In addition, creating data structures to allow for a formal referral system between intermediaries could help identify and encourage youth that are ready to move up the job ladder from entry level jobs to mid-tier positions with CBOs to private sector placements with employers.

#### D. What Types of Jobs are Available Within the Boston SYEP Ecosystem?

Although the Boston SYEP has a far higher share of private sector jobs compared to similar programs in other cities, the ecosystem is still heavily dependent on nonprofit partners for job placements. The jobs available within the Boston SYEP ecosystem are likely to differ from those available across the Boston labor market because they are designed to provide developmental opportunities for youth. However, it's useful to compare the industries represented by SuccessLink jobs to those that are in high-demand across the City of Boston to identify any sectors for future expansion. Categorizing jobs by 2-digit NAICS code, the broadest category of industry, Figure 3 shows that Boston's high-employment sectors such as healthcare and business are under-represented among the jobs available to youth through the SuccessLink program while other sectors such as camp counselor and human services are over-represented.

While it might not be possible to provide summer jobs opportunities across every

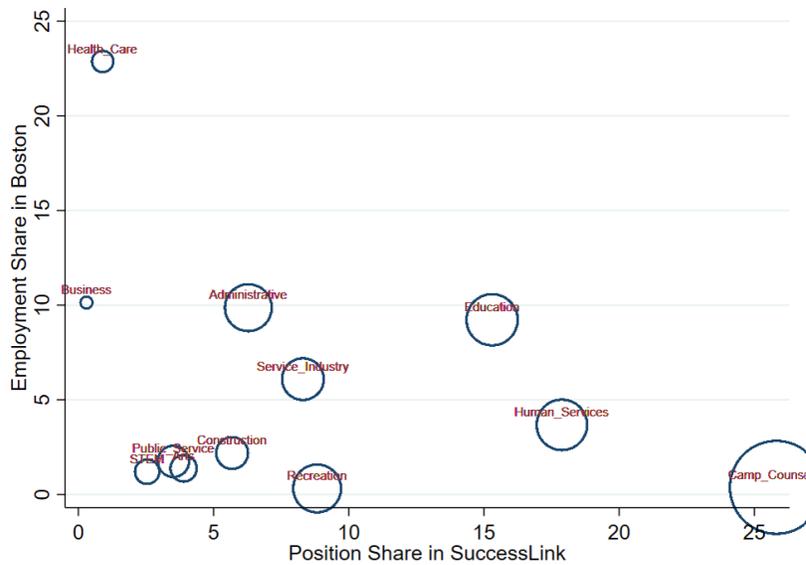
industry, there are some key areas that youth have indicated that are of interest for future career development. Survey data shown in Figure 4 indicate that youth are interested in industries such as healthcare, business and financial, life/physical/social sciences, and IT—sectors that are currently under-represented in the SuccessLink program that present an opportunity for development.



Given the jobs that are currently available through SuccessLink, where do youth choose to apply? Is there a large degree of mismatch between youth interests and what is available? Figure 5 shows that there are certain types of jobs that are “oversubscribed” meaning that they have more applicants than positions available such as childcare (e.g., camp counselor). Other jobs are “undersubscribed” with fewer applicants than positions such as human services.

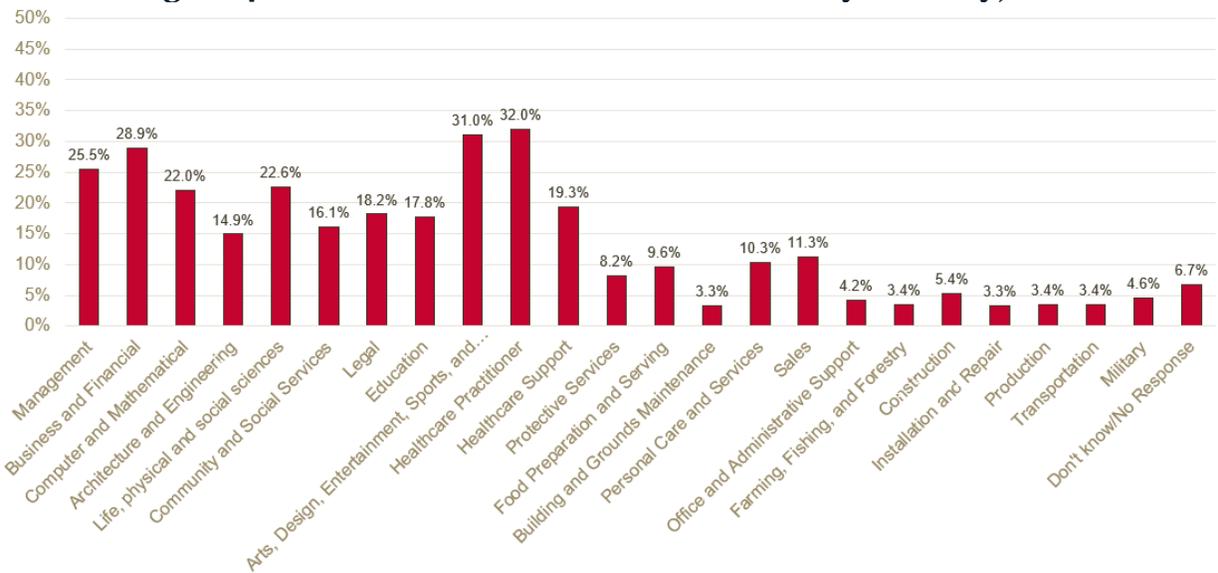
Because of this potential mismatch between the job types that are available and youth interests, intermediaries such as OYEO perform an important function each year to help match young people to open positions across the summer jobs ecosystem.

**Figure 3. Comparing Number of SuccessLink Job Openings to Boston Employment by Industry**



Note: The size of the “bubble” represents the number of youth positions in the SuccessLink program.  
 Source: Authors’ calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

**Figure 4. Job Interests for SuccessLink Youth by Industry, 2021**



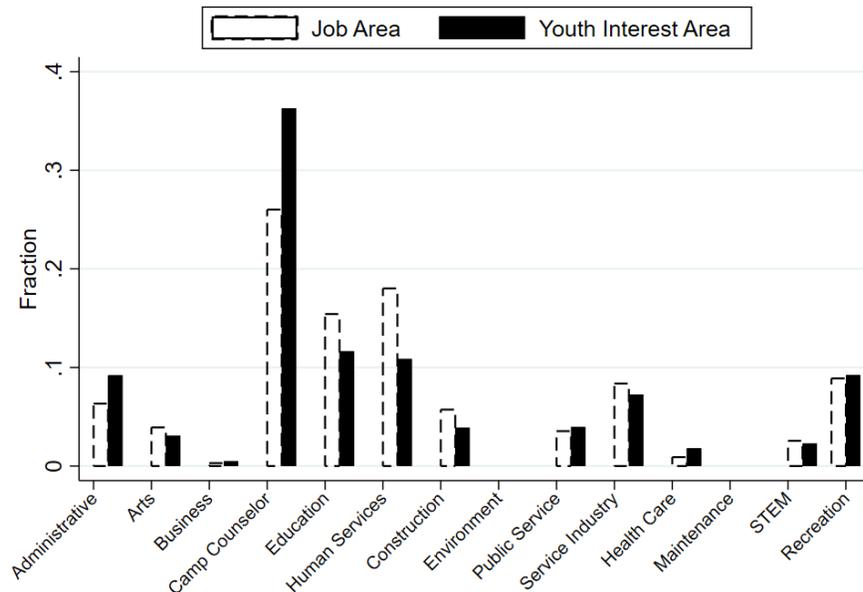
Source: Authors’ calculations based on survey data collected by Northeastern University.

### Areas of Opportunity:

Greater engagement of private sector firms could be one way to scale-up the Boston SYEP ecosystem while also providing early employment experiences that are more aligned with youth interests and jobs that are in high demand. Recall that job opportunities through the PIC program range from Fortune 500 companies to hospitals to technology start-ups. These employment experiences expose students to potential career paths in a wide array of professional workplace settings across key industries such as healthcare; finance, insurance, and real estate; and professional, scientific, and technical services which account for 75 percent of the PIC summer internships. This presents an opportunity to expand the pool of SuccessLink job opportunities by focusing on areas that would be complementary to PIC such as careers in the green economy, real estate, and IT.

Providing professional development can help employer partners write better job descriptions, manage youth employees, and navigate hiring and payroll systems. In addition, improving job quality through skills mapping and using of work-based learning plans for student assessment could provide more opportunity to ladder job opportunities from summer to summer across entry-level and more skilled positions both within OYEO and across the Boston SYEP ecosystem. This will require doing a skills inventory of jobs with employer-partners to create a tiered job system for youth placement. However, such a system could serve as the basis for developing a city-wide badging system based on the skills and experience youth gain from their summer job that is recognized by all intermediaries, Boston Public Schools, community colleges, and employers with sites operating within the City of Boston.

**Figure 5. Comparing SuccessLink Youth Applications to Number of Openings**



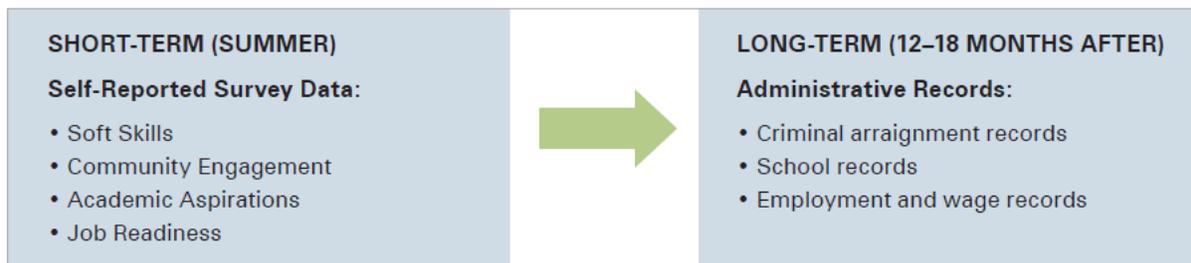
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

### III. Youth Experiences: Boston SYEP Program Impacts

With funding from the William T. Grant Foundation, the Northeastern University has been engaged in a multi-year evaluation with the City of Boston since 2015 to assess the impact of the Boston SYEP on youth employment, education, and criminal justice outcomes, with a specific focus on reducing inequality across groups. To assess the program’s impacts, we link data on both short-term changes in behavior that occur during the summer to long-term changes in

employment, education, and criminal justice involvement that occur after youth participate in the program. We measure changes in short-term behaviors with regard to soft skills, community engagement, academic aspirations, and job readiness that occur during the summer, using a survey administered immediately before and after the program. Longer-term criminal justice, academic and employment outcomes are evaluated during the 12 to 18 months after the program ends using data from administrative records. As shown in Figure 6, we then link these two datasets to determine which short-term behaviors are potentially driving the improvements in longer-term outcomes for youth.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 6. Evaluation Model for Assessing the Link between Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes**



#### A. Research Findings on Short- and Long-Term Impacts

**Even when the job market is relatively good, the Boston SYEP boosts employment rates among youth and provides them with more meaningful work experiences.**

- Only one-quarter to one-third of youth in the control group were able to find a job on their own. This indicates the difficulty that youth face in securing their own

employment during the summer, even when there is a relatively low unemployment rate.

- SYEP participants were more likely than to report that they would consider a career in the type of work they did, had an adult they considered a mentor and whom they could use as a reference in the future, and felt better prepared to enter a new job.

<sup>3</sup> Most of our analysis is based on youth who applied to the Boston SYEP through Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD). We focus on ABCD because it is one of the two intermediaries that make use of random

assignment due to the high number of applications it receives for the limited number of SYEP jobs that are available. We have also used data from OYEO for years in which a lottery was used to assign youth to jobs and find very similar outcomes.

**Survey data indicate that youth participating in the Boston SYEP experienced significant improvements across a variety of short-term behaviors and skills.**

- The share of participants who reported they **plan to attend a four-year college** or university and/or save for college increased by nearly 5 percentage points.
- SYEP participants also indicated **sizeable growth in job readiness skills** such as preparing a resume and a cover letter and practicing interviewing skills with an adult.
- **Work habits improved** with a significant increase in the share of participants who reported knowing “how to be on time” and “how to organize my work.”
- SYEP participants’ **attitudes toward their communities improved greatly** (by 15 percentage points) during the summer relative to the control group.
- Participants also showed **significant improvements in social skills and behaviors**—such as managing emotions, asking for help, and resolving conflict with a peer.
- Across all of these domains—academic aspirations, job readiness, and social skills—improvements were larger among African-American and Hispanic youth, suggesting the program has the potential to **reduce inequality across groups**.

**Administrative records on long-term outcomes shows that the Boston SYEP decreases criminal activity, increases high school graduation rates, and boosts employment and wages during the 12-18 months after completing the program.**

- Improvements in soft skills and community engagement were linked to a **35% reduction in violent crime and a 29% fall in property crime** for the treatment group during the 18 months after participating in the program.
- Improvements in academic aspirations and work habits were linked to a **22% fall in dropout rates due to better attendance and grades**.
- Private sector jobs also **increased the likelihood of taking the SAT and enrolling in college**, shifting enrollment from 2- to 4-year institutions.
- Improvements in job readiness skills were linked to a 9-percentage point **increase in employment and a 30 percent increase in wages** during the year following participation for opportunity youth of color ages 19-24 years.
- Across most measures, larger improvements in outcomes were observed among youth of color and/or at-risk youth. A simple back-of-the-envelope calculations suggests that the **long-term benefits of the Boston SYEP outweigh the costs by more than 3-to-1**.

## B. Pivoting during COVID

During COVID, Northeastern worked with OWD and OYEO to develop alternative programming that would provide youth with the same opportunities for skill development and yield the same positive long-term outcomes. Given the interest in understanding how the new virtual options might compare to more traditional in-person summer jobs, we collected survey data during the summer of 2020. Overall, these virtual options yielded experiences that were comparable, and some cases, superior to in-person summer jobs.

### Virtual Internship Track

**Virtual internships can provide both increased flexibility and equity as well as greater integration with academic learning.**

- Yielded jobs that were **better matches with their career interests** than in-person job offerings and youth were more likely to report wanting to pursue a career related to their summer experience than youth who had in-person jobs.

- Youth were equally or more likely to report asking for directions when things are unclear, **working in teams**, and not getting upset when others corrected their mistakes.
- Yet they reported being **less likely to receive timely feedback from supervisor** or developing in-person skills like making eye contact (not easy over zoom).

### Learn and Earn Program

**Most participants completed their courses (88%) and 78% passed their courses for credit, giving students a positive pre-college experience.**

- Youth were more likely to report that their college coaches **helped with career and education goal setting**.
- Participants showed **increased levels of self-regulation and self-efficacy**, all of which significantly predict future academic performance.
- Significantly **reduced the financial opportunity costs** associated with pursuing post-secondary education by eliminating the tradeoff between getting a job or taking a class.



### C. What do Youth, Parents, and Employers Say about the Impact of the Boston SYEP?

While it's important to measure outcomes using surveys and administrative records, hearing about the lived experiences of youth, their parents, and employers, is incredibly powerful. Over the past several years we have conducted focus groups, interviews, and surveys with open-ended response questions to give voice to the people whose lives are most affected by the program.

#### **Youth Voice**

For the first time post-COVID, we conducted focus groups youth with employed at three OYEO job sites—The Boys and Girls Club Dorchester, Teen Empowerment, and BCYF Mildred. In total, 24 youth participated in the focus groups and shared their experiences applying for, securing, and working at their respective sites. Below are common themes we observed during these conversations.

- Overall, youth were looking for jobs that were conveniently located (close to home), had flexible schedules, and that fostered a respectful, engaging environment.

- Youth reported strong relationships with their peer workers and other staff. Relationships with supervisors varied—some youth reported seeing their supervisors as mentors or friends, while others reported a more “hands-off” relationship.
- After graduation, most participants planned to attend college. Those who did not, planned to attend trade school, or go straight to work.
- Most of the youth had learned skills that would be translatable to their field of interest such as professional conduct, patience, problem-solving, adaptability, and communication skills.
- Youth had mixed reviews about the SuccessLink onboarding process. Social security cards and birth certificates were commonly cited as being difficult to find and upload. Younger workers also had a difficult time getting their physical exam paperwork. The process was easier for older youth as well as those who had the support of a guidance counselor/other adult who had access to appropriate documents.



Using a technique called **PhotoVoice**, we also asked youth at the start of the summer “What do you hope to experience by having a job/internship this summer? Please reply below and/or upload a photo with a caption.” We received over 120 responses to this question including the following illustrative photos and captions from our pre-survey that ranged from symbolic (e.g., growth) to very practical (e.g., teamwork, feeling safe and helped, community). Figure 7 shows a handful of examples.

**Figure 7. Youth Pre-Survey PhotoVoice Entries**



PreSurvey: "Daylight growth "



PreSurvey: "Working together is an ultimate achievement in what you believe is the way to reach a goal"



PreSurvey: "a place where u can feel safe and welcomed at all times. they will do the best they can to help you. "



PreSurvey: "community"

Similarly, we received about 120 responses on the post-survey when we asked “In your own words, how would you describe your summer? If you choose, you can also upload a photo that captures how you feel about this summer(optional). What caption would you write for the photo that you just uploaded?” The responses ranged from being happy and satisfied and learning new skills to facing challenges and finding community. Figure 8 provides several examples.

**Figure 8. Youth Post-Survey PhotoVoice Entries**



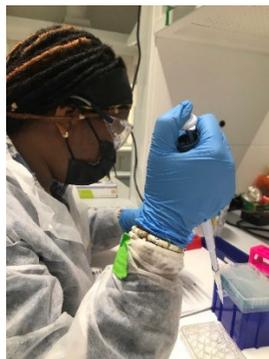
PostSurvey: "satisfied "



PostSurvey: "developing new skills"



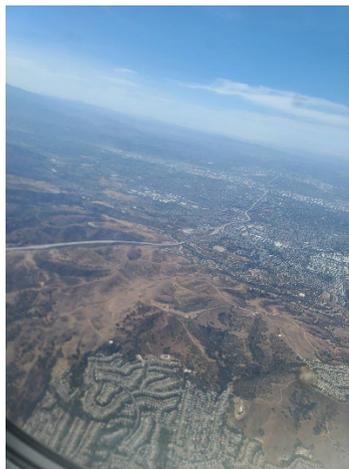
PostSurvey: "As a community, learn and grow with fellow colleagues "



PostSurvey: "Bioengineering student"



PostSurvey: "Warming Summer After a one locked inside"



PostSurvey: "How high my challenges were"

## Parent Survey

In the fall, we also conducted a parent survey for all legal guardians of youth who had applied to the SuccessLink program. Despite it being a busy time of year with schools finally re-opening in-person after COVID, we received 173 responses, largely from moms, just over half of whom were BIPOC with most living in Dorchester, Hyde Park Mattapan, or Roxbury.

- About 70 percent of parents had encouraged their youth to apply to the SuccessLink Program, of whom about 85 percent had received a job offer through the program and most of them had accepted that offer.
- Parents offered a lot of support to their youth during the application process most commonly reminding them of the deadline (68%), helping them create a profile (45%), helping them search for a job on the website (49%).
- During the onboarding process, 40% reporting that they had helped their youth “to a large extent.” Just over one-third of parents reported that the Massachusetts Employment Permit was the most difficult document to obtain, due to the need to obtain a signature from a healthcare provider.
- Overall, roughly 80 percent of parents indicated that their youth would apply again to the SuccessLink program.

We also asked several open-ended questions to hear about parents’ views in their own words. For example, when asked “In what ways do you think having a job impacted your youth’s development?” we received

over 100 responses from parents that were overwhelmingly positive highlighting youth gaining responsibility, work ethic, independence, confidence, social and emotional skills, and financial capability:

- *“I believe it is an amazing opportunity to work during the summer. My daughter was a camp counselor which demands her attention, she must be responsible, and also energetic. I think it's a perfect job for a high school student.”*
- *“It was a great experience in every way. Using public transportation, learning about having a boss, seeing different peoples, work, ethics, and earning and saving money.”*
- *“It was his first job, and he had a good experience and learned responsibility and work ethic from it. I'm grateful he had the opportunity following the pandemic.”*
- *“My daughter learned a lot of the process of interviewing, preparing for an interview, meeting new coworkers and learning a new job. She had a great experience meeting new people and learning to be responsible for working with children. She is still in touch with many of the coworkers her age.”*

We also asked parents “What suggestions do you have for improving the program (e.g., application process, job matching process, hiring process)?” When prompted, parents noted challenges around the web site, required paperwork, and communication. They also suggested recruiting at schools, matching jobs with youth interests, and development of specific skills.

## **Employer Survey**

This year we also conducted a fall employer survey to gather feedback on a number of topics, including how employers viewed the program and its impact on the young people that they employ. A total of **42 out of 170 employer partners responded** (about a 25 percent response rate) so far. Most of the respondents were small, community-based organizations located in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Chinatown that had worked with OYEO in prior years and participated as a direct employer-partner.<sup>4</sup>



When asked **“What do you think is working well with the SuccessLink program?”** employer partners praised the OYEO staff and were grateful that the City was enabling them to provide opportunities for youth:

- *“We have been fortunate to have great youth participants who are engaged with and enriched by our program as well as contributing to our organization's work.”*
- *“I think it's a great opportunity to get young adults involved in the community and introduce them to various job opportunities as well as professional skills.”*

- *“The SuccessLink youth improve the quality of our summer program by increasing staffing. Their contributions to classroom management, curriculum, and parent communication are much-appreciated by the Lead Teachers!”*
- *“SuccessLink allows us to pay youth employees who we otherwise wouldn't have budgetary capacity to employ. It allows us to offer youth employment opportunities and creates exciting professional learning experiences for young people in our communities. Young people can learn skills while they support our programs.”*
- *“We love hosting SuccessLink youth workers and leaders! The field of nature-based early education needs more teachers of color; SuccessLink provides a pipeline for us to train a diverse group of aspiring teachers over the course of several years.”*

Of course, not everything went smoothly. **When asked what could be improved,** employers primarily pointed to the need to provide direct deposit rather than having to pick up paper checks, the ability to address payroll issues in real-time, the need to streamline the onboarding process for youth to submit paperwork, and the desire for a better website to improve the application and hiring process.

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<sup>4</sup> See the Appendix for a full list of SuccessLink employer partners.

**Areas for Opportunity:** The Boston SYEP produces transformative positive impacts for youth both in the short- and long-term. In the short-term the program develops soft skills and work habits, boosts community engagement, and raises academic aspirations. In the long-term, it reduces involvement with the criminal justice system, increases high school graduation and college enrollment rates, and boost employment and wages—with greater impacts for youth of color. During the pandemic, City leaders innovated by adopting new models like the Learn and Earn and Virtual Internship programs—both of which have since become a part of the summer jobs ecosystem. There is an untapped opportunity to scale-up these innovations that were implemented during COVID, such as the Learn and Earn and the Virtual Internship programs, to help foster a wider array of work-based learning opportunities. There is also room for improvement in terms of SuccessLink processes and program features.

## IV. Improving Efficiency and Equity

Matching youth to jobs in the context of a workforce development is challenging for any organization but especially so when done at the scale. This is because the match must be of sufficient quality such that both the youth and the employers will accept the placement—and accept it quickly rather than waiting around for a better offer. In addition, online job platforms, if not designed well, can also create additional barriers for youth that lead to inefficient and inequitable outcomes. For example, “phantom” job postings that are not actively soliciting new

applicants due to employers having pre-existing relationships with youth can be discouraging. And platforms that were not designed to process high volumes of applicants over a short period of time, lacking the ability to cross-check matches and/or the technology to seamlessly complete paperwork, can create bottlenecks that slow down or entirely derail the process.

Given that one of the intended goals of the Boston SYEP is to level the playing field for low-income youth living in marginalized communities, we might be concerned about both the efficiency and the equity of how these assignments are made in response to the complexity of matching youth to jobs. This can actually be a sizeable problem when placing upwards of 3,000-6,000 participants as OYEO staff do every summer through SuccessLink. By efficiency, we mean how many jobs go unfilled during the summer, leaving youth unemployed, employer-partners without the labor they need, and funding unspent. By equity, we mean whether those who ultimately get selected are at least representative of the pool of applicants in terms of race, ethnicity, and school type (e.g., exam or open enrollment school).

During the summer of 2022, Northeastern performed an efficiency and equity audit of the SuccessLink application and hiring system. This included interviews with youth, employers, and SuccessLink staff as well as an analysis of application, employer selection, and onboarding data from the SuccessLink (iCIMS) hiring platform. In anticipation of the findings, we also piloted both a job matching algorithm and a hiring nudge to address the efficiency and equity issues that had arisen from examining data trends from prior years. We specifically aimed to answer the following questions:

## Research Questions

- **What barriers exist for youth applying to SuccessLink?** *How many youth fail to complete the application process for SuccessLink? What job characteristics drive youth applications (e.g., distance, employer, industry/occupation) in the Boston program?*
- **What inequities arise when employers are selecting youth?** *What youth characteristics drive selection by employers? Are there unexplained disparities in which youth receive an offer by race, ethnicity, or school type? Can we develop a job matching algorithm to improve equity?*
- **What bottlenecks prevent youth from completing the hiring process?** *Once selected, how many youth fail to complete the hiring process? Which youth are most likely to complete the hiring process? Can we implement a hiring nudge to improve efficiency and/or equity in the hiring process?*

### A. SuccessLink Job Application and Hiring Process

The SuccessLink program places anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 young people into summer jobs every summer, making it the largest Boston SYEP intermediary. Youth are introduced to these opportunities both through SuccessLink outreach and employer recruitment efforts. OYEO staff manage this application process at scale through a combination of well cultivated partner relationships, technology, and extensive effort and personal support.

In prior years, OYEO placed youth using a modified lottery process that followed a “60-40” rule. Employer partners were allowed to select youth for 60 percent of their OYEO-funded openings and the remaining 40 percent were filled by OYEO using simple random assignment within job type/location. In 2017, due to a lack of resources, OYEO moved to allow employer partners to select 100 percent of their youth with the caveat that 40 percent of those youth are new to the organization. However, the rule is not enforced and employers vary in their understanding of whether it is still in place. Among the remaining 60 percent, youth may have prior experience with the organization, either as a former youth employee or, in the case of some of the non-profit organization, as a participant in one

of their other programs (e.g., after-school, tutoring, food pantry). In those cases, the employers direct the youth to complete OYEO’s online application but their position at the employer is virtually guaranteed.

As of 2020, OYEO offered their employer partners the option to become either “direct” or “grant” partners. Youth applying to “direct” jobs must create a profile and apply through the City’s iCIMS hiring platform so that the Office of Human Resources (OHR) can verify all documents (e.g., onboarding) and then integrate youth hires into PeopleSoft (e.g. human capital management and payroll platform) so OYEO can manage payroll. Direct partners select youth through the iCIMS hiring platform after which youth must go through the lengthy onboarding process to be hired by the City of Boston.

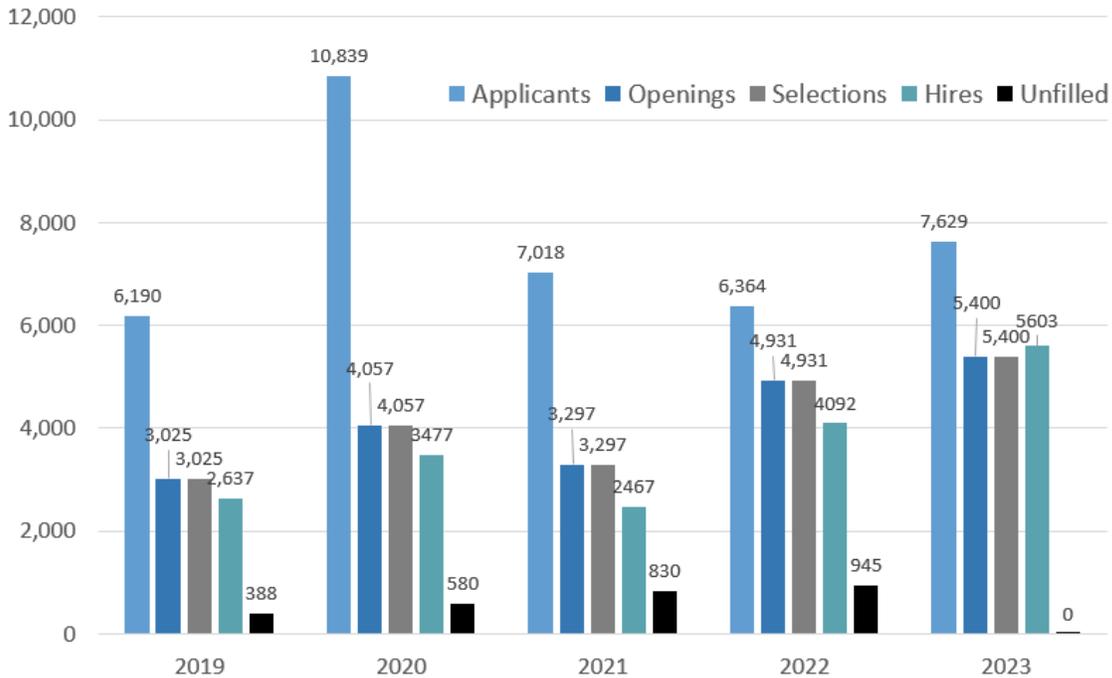
Rather than relying on the OYEO to operate the hiring and payroll process, “grant” partners instead receive funding to support wages for a pre-determined number of youth hired for a summer job through their organization. Youth applying to “grant” jobs follow a link off the SuccessLink page to apply directly to the employer partner. The “grant” partner is then responsible for managing the application, selection, onboarding, and payroll processes for those youth positions.

In addition, OYEO is also responsible for granting out funding to other City of Boston summer youth programs. These include the Office of Workforce Development’s Learn and Earn program that supports youth enrolling in community college courses, the City’s Dreamers Fellowship that supports skill and leadership development for immigrant youth regardless of status, ABCD’s Summerworks Program, and YOU Boston’s Summer Youth Employment program.

applying to the program than there are placements available, even prior to the pandemic. However, since moving away from OYEO actively placing youth into jobs, hundreds of positions (10-15 %) are left unfilled each summer as a result of the complex matching and onboarding processes. Summing across all three partnership types (Direct, Grant, Program), It should be noted that the other summer jobs intermediaries placing youth across many types of employers, such as the Boston PIC, face similar challenges that results in jobs left unfilled.

As shown in Figure 9, the program is oversubscribed with far more youth

**Figure 9. Number of SuccessLink Applicants and Hires versus Job Openings**



Source: Authors’ calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

## B. Application and Selection Process for Direct Employer Partners

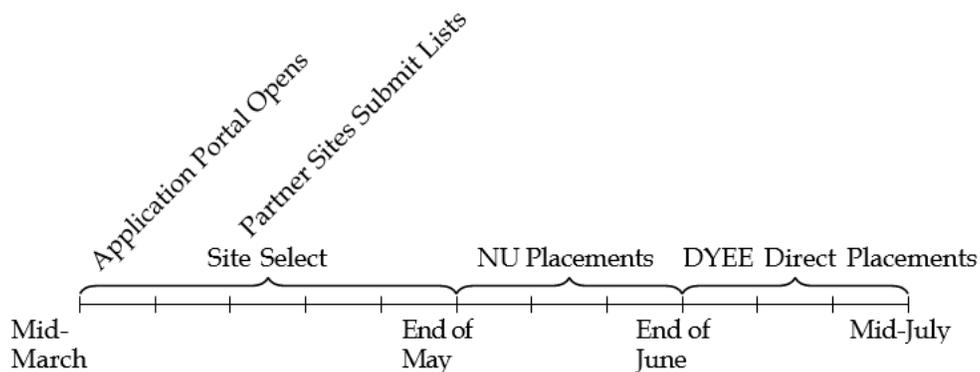
Direct employer partners select which youth to extend offers to from among those that apply through the SuccessLink online application portal (iCIMS). Figure 10 shows that timeline of the job application, selection, and hiring process during the 2022 summer hiring season. In early spring OYEO begins its outreach efforts, choosing employer partners and allotting SuccessLink program slots to partners. The application portal typically opens by mid-March and youth are able to apply to multiple jobs, with each job requiring a separate application. Partner organizations start selecting youth in late March and are required to finish their selections by the end of May, although sometimes this deadline is not always enforced.

Once a youth has been selected by an employer partner, iCIMS automatically sends an email to the applicant congratulating them and asking them to complete the hiring (onboarding) process

to confirm that they are eligible for employment and provide the necessary information for the City's payroll system. Figure 11 illustrates the hiring process which includes upwards of 10 different steps, including uploading multiple documents to prove age, residency, and school status such as a social security card, household utility bill, and a school report card. A large number of youth fail to make it through the hiring process, again leaving some jobs unfilled and some youth unemployed - despite being matched during the application process.

After a certain date, any remaining openings are back-filled by OYEO directly placing youth into jobs, typically as part of several in-person hiring events that take place just before the start of the program. A position can be unfilled for three reasons: at the time the partners selected there were more open slots than applications, or slots opened up because youth declined positions, or youth failed to complete the hiring paperwork by the deadline.

**Figure 10. SuccessLink Application, Selection, and Hiring Timeline**

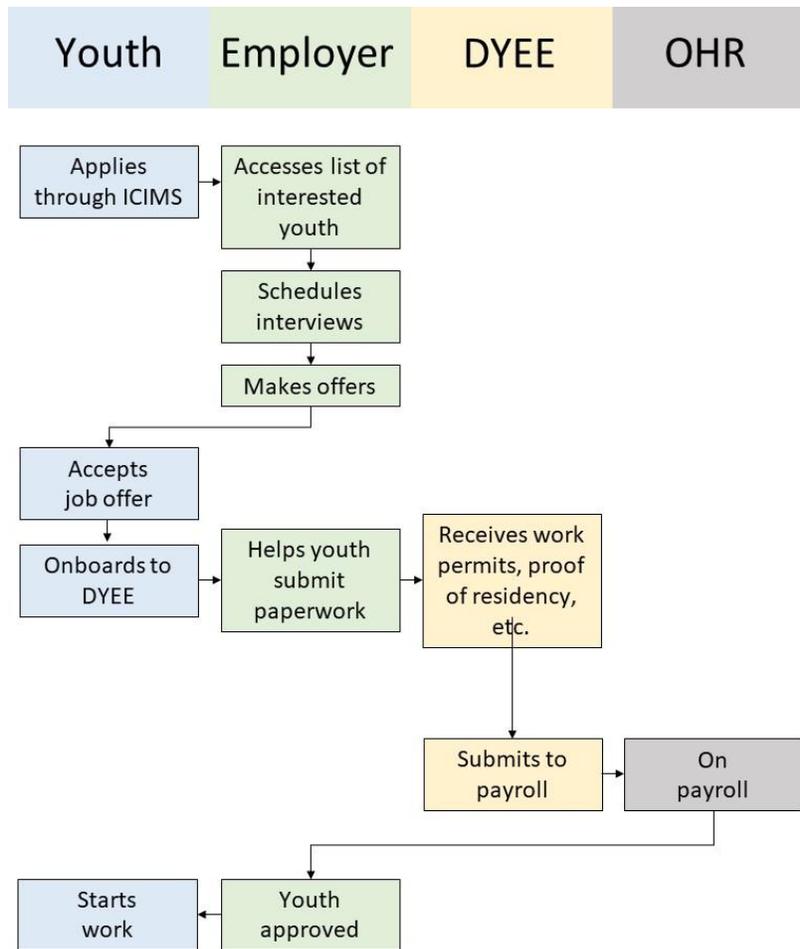


During the summer of 2022, we implemented our job matching algorithm to place youth into unfilled positions in June prior to the in-person event to reduce the burden on OYEO staff. From among the remaining applicants for each position, we randomly selected youth to be placed into jobs that were yet to be filled. We stratified these placements by race and school type so that the resulting overall distribution would match the characteristics of youth in the applicant pool.

“We Hire” event where youth were assigned to an open position based on their interest and location constraints as well the employer’s requirements. Placing youth in positions that match their individual interests and requirements as well as meeting the employers’ needs requires significant personalized attention and effort on the part of OYEO staff. In some years this could mean placing upwards of 1,000 youth manually to be able to fill all of the SuccessLink job openings before the start of the program. This is a herculean task given the limited number of staff, and as a result there are often jobs that go unfilled.

At the end of June, OYEO invited any youth that had applied but were not yet placed in a job to their usual in-person

**Figure 11. Hiring (Onboarding) Process for Youth Selected by OYEO Direct Employer Partners**



Examining application and hiring data from prior years reveals that the matching and hiring processes consistently produce outcomes that are not only inefficient but also inequitable. For example, white youth are disproportionately placed into summer jobs compared to Black and Hispanic youth resulting in the share of white youth placed into jobs being 2.5 to 5.5 percentage points higher than their representation in the overall applicant pool (see Table 4 below). Although the differences between application and placement rates may seem small, when applied to the total number of job openings available each year (e.g., 3,000-4,000), this translates into several hundred slots per summer being disproportionately assigned and significantly limiting the equitable distribution of job opportunities across young people of different racial backgrounds.

### C. Improving Equity and Efficiency during Summer 2022

To better understand where both bottlenecks and bias arise in the SuccessLink program, we examined the process during summer 2022 across three phases: (1) how youth apply to jobs, (2) how youth are selected for jobs by employer partners, and (3) how youth navigate the hiring (onboarding) process. During each of these phases, systematic disparities may arise from procedural barriers, cultural bias, and misinformation. Although we cannot completely identify the source of these disparities, the goal is to measure where and to what degree they are occurring and test how we might improve the process.

**Table 4. Difference in Application versus Placement Rates by Race for SuccessLink Jobs**

	Percentage Point Difference: Share of hiring pool minus share of applicant pool			
	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>White (Not Hispanic or Latino)</b>	5.47	4.01	3.75	2.56
<b>Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino)</b>	-1.51	-1.77	-0.61	1.99
<b>Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino)</b>	0.15	1.40	-0.85	-1.77
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	-3.53	-3.26	-1.71	-2.46
<b>Two or More Races (Not Hispanic or Latino)</b>	0.13	-0.06	-0.27	0.00

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

## Phase 1: Youth Applications

During the 2022 summer job cycle, we observed 6,364 unique youth applicants. Of those users, approximately 33.2% of them (2,110) never completed a valid job application.<sup>5</sup> The high rate of incomplete applications suggests that the application process may pose as a barrier for youth. Table 5 provides descriptive statistics for all youth who successfully completed an application. On average, SuccessLink applicants were 16-17 years old, a little less than half were female, two-thirds identified as youth of color, and 16 percent did not speak English as their first language. Only 11 percent attended and

exam school and almost 30 percent had participated in SuccessLink before.

We also explored the number of job applications submitted by youth. The more jobs a youth applies to, the more chances they have of being placed in a position that suits their interests and needs. The left hand chart in Figure 12 shows that although youth are encouraged to apply for multiple jobs, most do not: 58% of youth apply to only one job. In part this is because iCIMS is not designed to search for positions by keyword nor to complete multiple applications easily, which creates a barrier for youth when applying to SuccessLink.

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Youth Completing at Least One Job Application**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Count
Age	16.7	1.366	3,727
African American	0.44	0.496	3,761
White	0.15	0.355	3,761
Hispanic or Latino	0.23	0.419	3,761
Asian	0.091	0.288	3,761
Other Race	0.095	0.293	3,761
Female	0.49	0.500	3,761
Fluent in Another Language	0.33	0.469	3,652
First Language English	0.84	0.363	3,652
Attends Exam School	0.23	0.420	3,418
Continuing Candidate	0.097	0.296	3,762
Previously Participated	0.26	0.440	3,762
Number of Applications	3.04	3.744	3,762
Avg Num of Other Apps Per Slot	8.92	12.32	3,762
Earliest App Submitted in March	0.28	0.447	3,762
Earliest App Submitted in April	0.36	0.479	3,762
Earliest App Submitted in May	0.23	0.420	3,762
Earliest App Submitted in June	0.14	0.346	3,762
Recorded Resume Response	0.53	0.499	3,762
Avg Resume Character Length	5976.8	3629.1	3,027
Avg Work Question Length	308.4	280.4	3,143

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

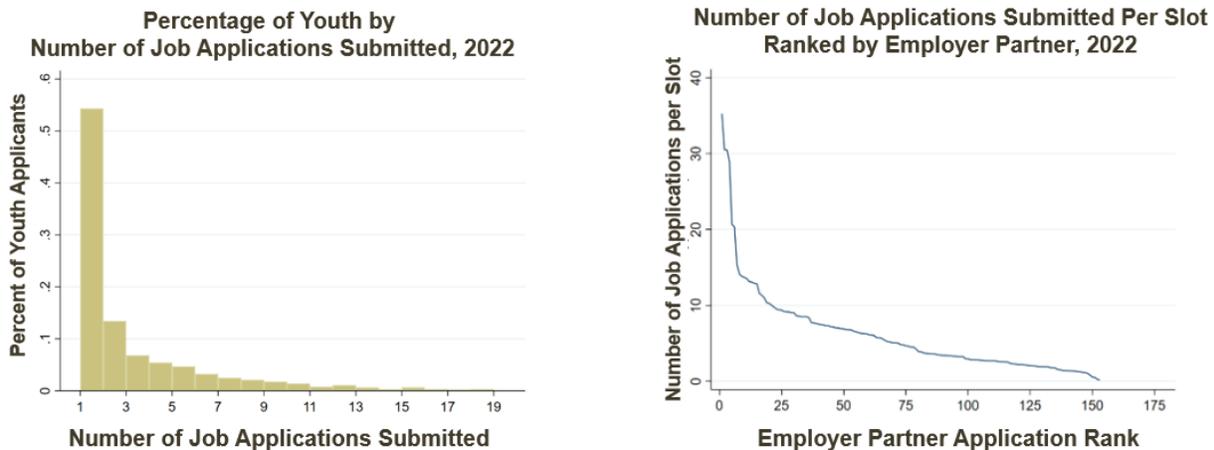
<sup>5</sup> In a few cases, youth did not answer one or more of the screening questions correctly and OYEO staff reached out to correct these errors.

We also find that the distribution of job applications was concentrated among a few employers that receive hundreds of applications while other employers receive only a handful. The most popular employers with the greatest number of applications were YMCA Dorchester (354), YMCA Roxbury (344), Boy & Girls Clubs of Dorchester (324), YMCA Hyde Park (312), YMCA West Roxbury (259), and Zoo New England (234).

And it's not the case that these sites receive a lot of applications because they have the most slots allocated to them. The right hand chart in Figure 12 plots the number of job applications submitted per slot available for each employer. We find that approximately 10 employers are outliers as they have between 15 to 40 applications per slot. If most youth apply to only one job, then the chances of landing one of these jobs is slim to none.

Once youth have applied through iCIMS, employers are able to view all the applications and select the youth who they think would be the best fit for their position. Employer criteria for selecting youths vary widely. Some have very specific requirements. For example, a community-based organization in Chinatown may require youth to be able to answer the phone in Cantonese, Mandarin, or Vietnamese; a theater company may require youth to be comfortable climbing ladders. Other employers receive far more applications than they can process and use various methods to whittle the pile. They depend on observable characteristics such as only responding to youth who shared a resume or who responded to the questions on the application or using the schools that youth attend or their extracurricular activities as screening tools.

**Figure 12. Number of Applications per Youth vs. per Employer**



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO

## Phase 2: Employer Selections

The high degree of mismatch between the number of youth applications per position manifests itself in the initial employer selection process, leaving a large number of youth without a summer job placement. Of the 4,254 valid youth applicants, 3,259 youths applied before the cut-off date for which they could be selected by an employer. Of these 3,259 youth, nearly two-thirds (2,088 or 64 percent) were selected by an employer and the remaining one-third (1,171 or 36 percent), who had at least one valid job application, did not get selected by an employer.

In addition, employers have no way of knowing if youth have applied to or received offers from other employers. Many youth are offered more than one job with some receiving more than 10 job offers. This makes those jobs appear

unavailable until the youth makes their selection and declines all the jobs that they are not going to accept. They often do not turn down a position until they are called by a OYEO staff member. For example, at one point in May of 2022, 2,306 job offers were extended to 1,896 youth, but 267 of these youth had more than one offer. As a result, 677 jobs appeared unavailable due to youth receiving multiple job offers.

Not surprisingly, youth who receive multiple job offers tend to look different from those who receive no job offers. Table 6 shows that white youth make up 21 percent of those receiving multiple job offers but only 10 percent of those receiving no job offers. In contrast, Black and Hispanic youth are disproportionately more likely to be in the group receiving no offers than the group receiving multiple offers.

**Table 6. Number of Job Offers by Demographic Group**

	<i>Multiple offers</i>	<i>At least one offer</i>	<i>No offers</i>
Asian (%)	11	11	10
Black/African-American (%)	40	42	49
Hispanic or Latino (%)	23	21	27
White (%)	21	23	10

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO

Table 7 compares the descriptive statistics for youth who were versus not selected by an employer during the summer of 2022. Youth who were selected by an employer were on average older, white, male, and attend an exam school. They were also more likely to have previously participated in the SuccessLink program. In contrast, youth who were Black, Hispanic, or fluent in another language and/or did not have English as their first language were less likely to be selected by an employer.

To explore which of these characteristics mattered the most when employers made their selections, we estimated a regression to control for all of these characteristics simultaneously as well as application quality (e.g., whether the youth had uploaded a resume and answered a question on the application about why they wanted to work). We find that Black youths had lower rates of being selected by an employer, even when controlling for age, gender, exam school status, number of applications submitted, competitiveness of the job, and application quality.

**Table 7. Characteristics of Youth were Selected versus Not Selected by Employer**

	Not Selected Mean/Std. Dev.	Selected Mean/Std. Dev.	Diff in Means/ Std.Err. in Diff	p-value
Age	16.45 (1.283)	16.84 (1.377)	-0.390 (0.047)	0.0000
African American	0.49 (0.500)	0.42 (0.494)	0.070 (0.017)	0.0000
White	0.08 (0.258)	0.18 (0.382)	-0.102 (0.012)	0.0000
Hispanic or Latino	0.27 (0.446)	0.21 (0.406)	0.063 (0.014)	0.0000
Asian	0.09 (0.288)	0.09 (0.287)	0.001 (0.010)	0.9161
Other Race	0.07 (0.270)	0.11 (0.302)	-0.032 (0.010)	0.0014
Female	0.49 (0.500)	0.48 (0.500)	0.012 (0.017)	0.5040
Fluent in Another Language	0.36 (0.482)	0.31 (0.463)	0.049 (0.016)	0.0027
First Language English	0.83 (0.376)	0.85 (0.357)	-0.018 (0.013)	0.1444
Attends Exam School	0.17 (0.367)	0.26 (0.436)	-0.087 (0.015)	0.0000
Previously Participated	0.18 (0.366)	0.31 (0.460)	-0.131 (0.015)	0.0000
Continuing Candidate	0.00 (0.000)	0.15 (0.341)	-0.146 (0.010)	0.0000
Number of Applications	2.46 (2.384)	3.34 (4.114)	-0.881 (0.128)	0.0000
Avg. Num of Other Apps Per Slot	13.40 (18.986)	6.65 (7.484)	6.751 (0.411)	0.0000
Earliest App Submitted in March	0.21 (0.409)	0.31 (0.459)	-0.094 (0.015)	0.0000
Earliest App Submitted in April	0.35 (0.476)	0.36 (0.480)	-0.004 (0.017)	0.7936
Earliest App Submitted in May	0.30 (0.455)	0.19 (0.403)	0.104 (0.014)	0.0000
Earliest App Submitted in June	0.13 (0.357)	0.14 (0.341)	-0.006 (0.012)	0.6318
Recorded Resume Response	0.58 (0.496)	0.51 (0.500)	0.065 (0.017)	0.0002
Avg. Resume Character Length	6899.11 (4318.965)	5493.35 (3291.955)	1405.758 (136.514)	0.0000
Avg. Resume Flesch Score	-36.31 (46.445)	-9.15 (42.466)	-27.160 (1.640)	0.0000
Avg. Work Question Length	262.46 (237.948)	333.67 (292.795)	-71.211 (10.377)	0.0000
Avg. Work Question Flesch Score	69.14 (24.974)	67.91 (28.577)	1.232 (1.028)	0.2306
Observations	1,267	2,495		

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

## *Job Matching Algorithm Pilot*

To address some of the inequities in employer selections, the Northeastern University research team piloted a job matching algorithm from June 2<sup>nd</sup> to June 21<sup>st</sup> of 2022. Using data from iCIMS, we identified youth who had not yet been placed and had applied to jobs that still had openings. We first placed youth in jobs that were “undersubscribed”—meaning that they had more remaining openings than remaining applicants. We then placed youth in jobs that were “oversubscribed” by running a lottery among the remaining applicants. The lottery was stratified by race, ethnicity and language spoken so that the overall list of placements (employer selections plus algorithm) would have the same racial and ethnic distribution as the total pool of SuccessLink applicants.

After receiving the list of suggested job matches, OYEO verified that the youth was not already selected by another employer and that the position was still available. If both were true, the youth was placed into hiring for the position. For our analysis, we identify youth who were selected by the job matching algorithm using the lists that the research team provided to OYEO each week. We conditioned our analysis on youth who applied before the employer selection deadline to ensure that youth were able to have been selected by the employer prior to the deadline. In total, the research team suggested placements for 420 youth. However, in practice there were 111 youth who were selected both by an employer and the job matching algorithm so that ultimately only 309 youth were placed solely by the algorithm (See Modestino et. al., 2023 for more details).



The job matching algorithm was successful in moving the needle on improving equity across job placements by race and ethnicity. For example, among youth selected by employers only 42 percent were Black compared to 44 percent of applicants. When combined with the youth selected by the job matching algorithm, the share of overall placements (Employer + Algorithm) rose to 43 percent. Similarly, the share of Hispanic youth and youth fluent in another language increased when the employer selections were combined with those chosen by the job matching algorithm.

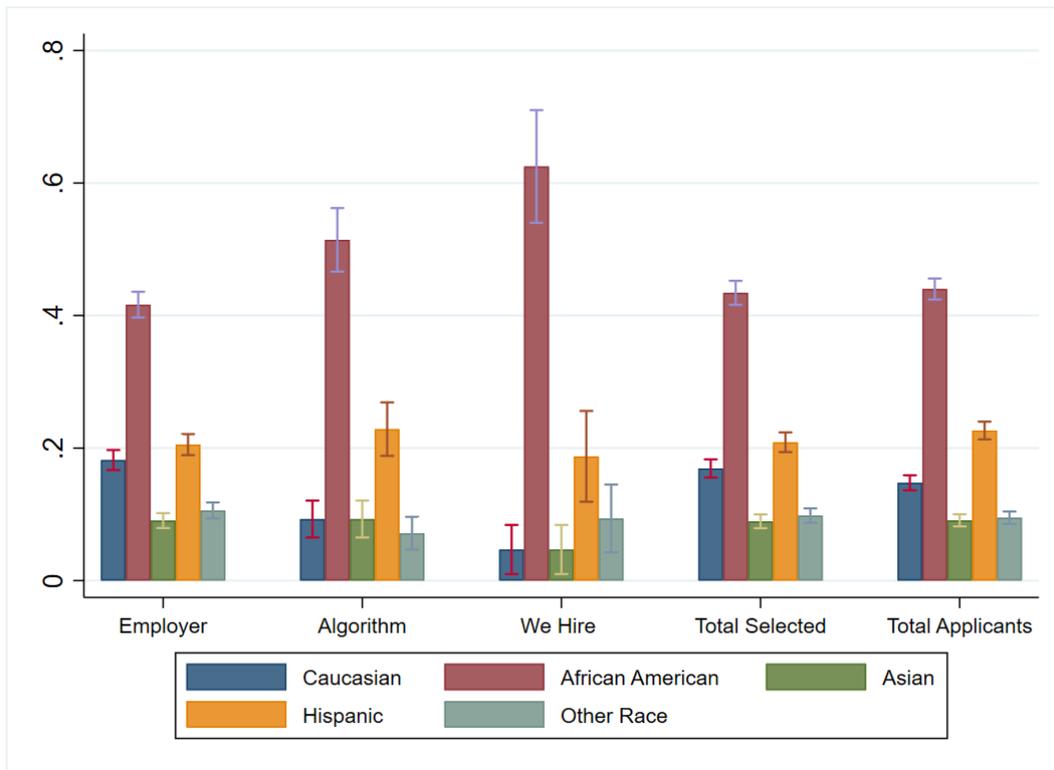
However, the number of youth placed by the job matching algorithm was relatively small compared to the number selected by an employer which limited the ability to improve equity. In addition, many jobs remained unfilled at the end of June due to the large number of youth who had been selected that failed to navigate the hiring (onboarding) process. As a result, it was still necessary for OYEO staff to hold their usual in-person hiring event to fill as many positions as possible before the start of the program, but at least the burden has been reduced.

### OYEO In-Person Placements

At the end of June, OYEO held its usual multi-day “We Hire” event in person between June 21<sup>st</sup> and June 24<sup>th</sup>, inviting all youth who had not been selected for a SuccessLink job to the OYEO offices. During this event, youth were matched with an open position in real-time by an OYEO staff member who provided individualized attention to their job interests and geographical location. In addition, OYEO held youth walk-ins from June 27<sup>th</sup> through July 22<sup>nd</sup> which yielded additional youth placements. Similar to the job matching algorithm, youth placed in-person by OYEO were more likely to be Black, Hispanic, and fluent in another language.

To assess whether the overall impact of the placements made using the job matching algorithm and through the We Hire event, we compare the demographic characteristics of the two mechanisms combined relative to the selections of employers versus the overall distribution of youth applicants. Figure 13 shows that OYEO selected youth (either through the pilot job matching algorithm or through the ‘We Hire’ event) were less likely to be white, and more likely to be Black and Hispanic compared to those selected by employers. We find that the combination of these two mechanisms moved the needle on equity, reducing the disparities in placements across race, ethnicity, and school type (see Modestino et. al., 2023).

**Figure 13. Racial Composition of Selected Youth by Employer versus DYEE versus Total Applicants**



Source: Authors’ calculations based on data from the City of Boston’s Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity. Note: The sample includes youth who submitted a valid application by June 15<sup>th</sup>.

We also checked whether OYEO achieved greater overall efficiency in their job placements by combining the two mechanisms (job matching algorithm pilot plus in-person We Hire placements). In total, OYEO had 2,652 job openings available through their online job portal. As of June 15th, employers had roughly 500 slots that remained open with no youth selected. At the end of the OYEO placement period, 93% of all job slots were accounted for with a youth placement. This overall level of efficiency was at least on par with the better part of the prior performance level achieved pre-pandemic in 2017 (9 percent left unfilled) and a vast improvement over more recent years during which upwards of 18 percent of jobs were left unfilled.

### **Phase 3: Hiring (Onboarding) Process**

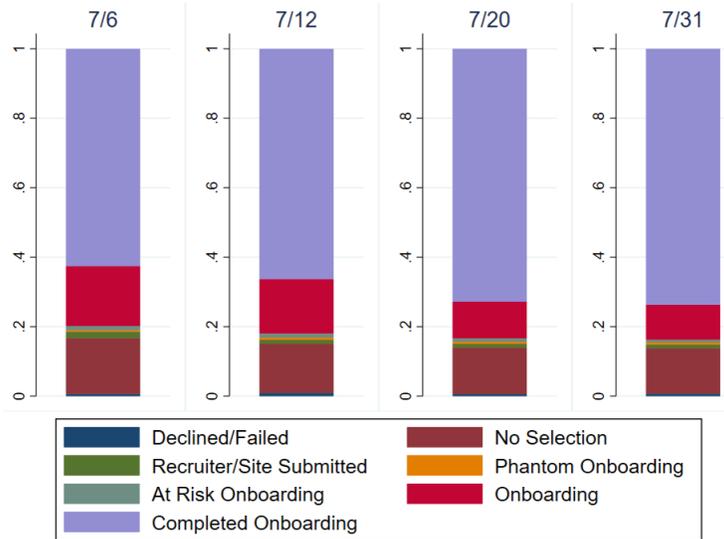
In this final section of the efficiency and equity analysis, we examine how youth complete the hiring process once they have been selected for a position. Recall that completing the hiring process involves completing up to 10 different “onboarding” steps, that include locating and uploading important documents such as a social security card, proof of residency, and a

work permit. On average, youth spent 25 days to complete onboarding with most taking upwards of 5-6 weeks. Put another way, the chance that a youth successfully completes the hiring process is very small once they have been in onboarding for 30 days. Part of this is due to youth who receive multiple jobs offers but do not decline them in time for the slot to be offered to another youth. The more quickly youth can be onboarded into a job and their other job offers returned to the pool, the larger the percentage of jobs that can actually be filled.

When youth are slow to be onboarded, this can delay their start, making it difficult for employers to hold orientation for all youth at the same time. Even worse, if they fail to onboard completely, then the position will not be filled and the youth will not be hired. Figure 14 gives a snapshot of how this process plays out over the course of the hiring season, ultimately leaving several hundred positions unfilled by the time of the program starts. Early on, there are a large number of “at-risk” onboarding positions where youth have been placed in onboarding for multiple positions. In addition, there are a small share of “phantom” onboarding positions where youth have already been hired for another job, but they have not told the employer.



**Figure 14. Distribution of Positions in the Onboarding Process**



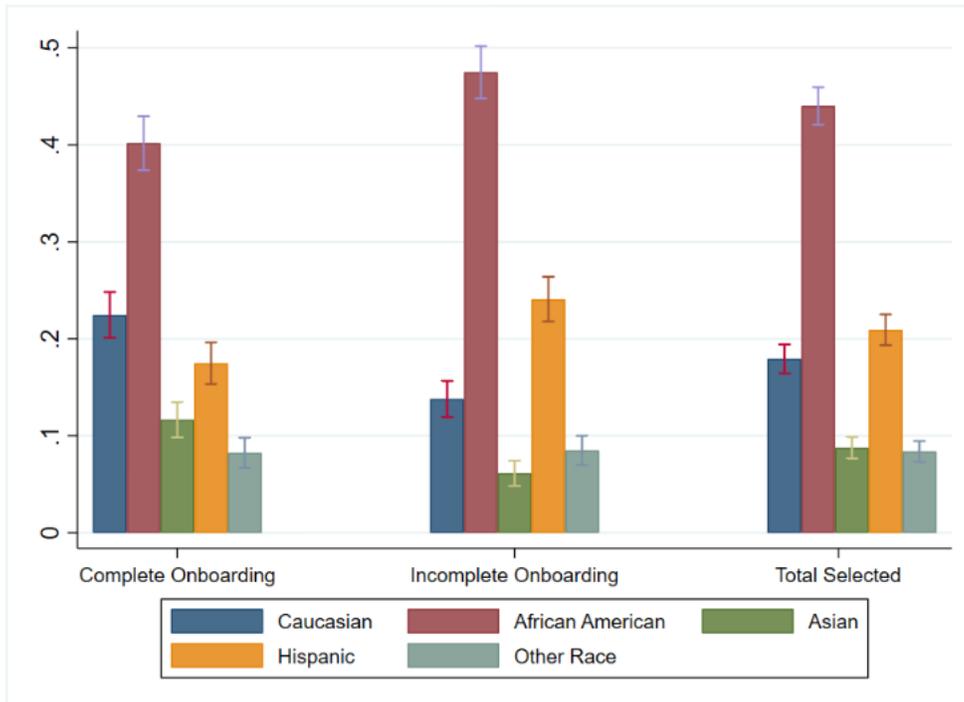
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by OYEO.

Navigating the onboarding process and obtaining and submitting all of the required documentation may present a barrier to other youths and increase inequity among the final, hired population. We focus on those who were selected for a position, proceeded to the hiring stage, but ultimately did not get hired. Note that we exclude youth who declined a position and assume that youth chose to decline a position for reasons unrelated to the hiring process. Figure 15 shows that Black and Hispanic youth were 4-10 percentage points less likely to complete the hiring process. We also find that youth who are fluent in another language are also much less likely to succeed in navigating the onboarding process suggesting that there may be language, cultural, or immigration status barriers that impede the process. Fortunately, youth who previously participated in the SuccessLink program were 9 percentage points more likely to complete the hiring process.

**Areas for Opportunity:** The SuccessLink application and hiring process is a leaky

pipeline from start to finish. Roughly one-third of youth fail to complete the application process and among those that apply to at least one job, the pool of applicants is less likely to be Hispanic. Around half of all youth apply to only one job and anecdotal evidence suggests that many of those jobs are going to youth who already had a pre-existing relationship with those employers. Employers are less likely to select youth who are Black or Hispanic, fluent in another language, or from one of Boston's open-enrollment schools. This disparity persists even when controlling for previous participation in the program and having uploaded a resume as a signal of interest. Fortunately, the combination of our job matching algorithm pilot and the OYEO in-person placements completely eliminates these racial and ethnic disparities between youth who were selected for a position and the overall applicant population. However, Black and Hispanic youth and those fluent in another language are less likely to make it through the onboarding process even if they are selected.

**Figure 15. Racial Distribution of Youth by Onboarding Status**



At the very least, there is an opportunity to educate employers about increasing DEI in their summer youth selection process. This would include sharing the results of the equity audit with employer partners to inform them of how their selection practices influenced the equitable distribution of job opportunities. Changes to the existing iCIMS platform can also help level the playing field across youth. For example, using the information that youth provide on their application to auto generate a resume for all youth similar to the Indeed job

application platform. Finally, a more direct way to improve both equity and efficiency would be to expand the job algorithm pilot and return to the former “60-40” allocation rule. This would allow employers to select 60% of their youth with the remaining 40% placed by OYEO using the matching algorithm developed by Northeastern University to ensure youth of color, those with English as a second language, and students from non-exam schools have equal opportunity to be selected for a position with their organization.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The innovation that came out of the Boston SYEP ecosystem during the pandemic highlighted the collective strength of the intermediaries as well as a need for more intentional strategic planning going forward. In the spirit of building back better after COVID, the City of Boston and the other SYEP intermediaries recognize the importance of increasing coordination and alignment across the ecosystem. The goal is to develop a more holistic and inclusive workforce development system to provide a range of high quality, skill building opportunities that support youth.

### A. Key Findings

During the spring and summer of 2022, the research team analyzed youth application and hiring records; interviewed youth, parents, employer-partners, and staff; and

throughout their journey as they transition from high school to postsecondary education/training and careers.

To lead this effort, the Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (OYEO) has deepened its research- practice partnership with the Northeastern University under a new multi-year project funded by the William T. Grant Foundation. This report is the culmination of the Year 1 activities which included extensive data collection, rigorous analyses, and a strategic planning effort that focuses on the City's summer jobs program and the role it plays in the broader SYEP ecosystem. Here we summarize the key findings, recommendations, and a SWOT analysis of the potential timeline and resources to reach these goals. conducted several small-scale pilots aimed at increasing program access, efficiency, and equity. Our findings inform a set of recommendations to inform the collective efforts of Boston SYEP stakeholders and provide a blueprint for future implementation through this Summer Jobs Consortium.



## Strengths

The SuccessLink program's strengths lie in its close relationships with community-based programs, employers, and agencies across the city. Its dedicated staff place 5,000 young people in jobs in a given summer as well as convening the Summer Jobs Consortium and acting as a repository of best practices in youth engagement and employment.

- **The Boston SYEP produces transformative positive impacts for youth both in the short- and long-term.** In the short-term the program develops soft skills and work habits, boosts community engagement, and raises academic aspirations. In the long-term, it reduces violent and property crime by 30%, increases the likelihood of high school graduation by 5 percentage points, raises four-year college enrollment rates, and boosts employment and wages during the 12-18 months after participating in the program. The program's impacts are greater for youth of color and BPS students from open enrollment versus exam schools.
- **Compared to the New York or Chicago model, the Boston SYEP's strength lies in its decentralized system which proved highly resilient during COVID.** This was a key factor in ensuring that Boston could pivot its summer jobs program during the summer of 2020. The Boston SYEP ecosystem innovated by adopting new models like the Learn and Earn and Virtual Internship programs—both of which have since become a part of the summer jobs ecosystem. Compared to traditional in-person summer jobs, these new programs provide similar skill development (e.g., soft skills, academic aspirations) while also providing additional benefits in terms of career exploration and mentoring.
- **The SuccessLink program's strengths lie in the long-term relationships formed with city departments, private sector employers, small businesses and community-based partners.** OYEO's dedicated staff place 3,000-5,000 young people into jobs with over 250 organizations each summer. Since the pandemic, OYEO has been an incubator for innovative program changes and a repository for sharing knowledge across the Boston SYEP ecosystem.

## Weaknesses

SuccessLink is hampered by a small staff, a data system that is not designed around youth workforce development goals, and a largely manual process. Having to use the City's Office of Human Resources is a major weakness of the SuccessLink system. The Office of Human Resources is not designed to onboard 6,000 new workers in a space of a few weeks, only to remove them from payroll a few weeks later. The lengthy process to onboard youth, forced retirement savings, and occasional hold-ups and errors in issuing checks are opportunities for youth to have negative experiences. These limitations can create barriers for youth along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic status and foster inequity in both selection and hiring.

- **The SuccessLink application process is hampered by a hiring system (iCIMIS) that is not designed for rapid, high-volume job placement and creates barriers for youth, especially those of color.** One third of youth fail to complete an application and this is a greater barrier for Hispanic youth. Of those who complete an application, more than half apply to only one job, severely limiting their chances of being selected by an employer.
- **Left unchecked, the employer selection process through SuccessLink reproduces the inequities that exist in the broader labor market.** Youth who are selected into jobs by employer partners are more likely to be white, speak only English, and attend one of the city's prestigious exam schools compared to the demographic characteristics of youth who apply to the program. These inequities are sizeable. For example, white applicants are 10 percentage points more likely to be selected by SuccessLink employers relative to their representation within the pool of applicants, accounting for several hundred youth placements every summer.

## Opportunities

There are multiple places where youth who especially need jobs might be disadvantaged within the SuccessLink hiring system from the application portal to the employer selection process to the onboarding system. In addition, the SuccessLink program does not allow for or enable any kind of seniority or career ladders within jobs. Employers, however, do recognize youth who have worked with them for more than one summer, sometimes with supervisory responsibilities and even with higher pay. Formally acknowledging these more senior positions will help youth direct their energy to jobs they are eligible for, and help employers be more transparent with youth, families, and OYEO about the youth that they are rehiring from year to year.

- **Our job matching algorithm pilot clearly improved equity across job placements by race and ethnicity.** This resulted in an overall allocation of placements that more closely matched the distribution of applicants who were Black, Hispanic, and fluent in another language. This successfully reduced the number of manual placements undertaken by OYEO staff and combined, completely eliminated the racial and ethnic bias of the overall selections such that it closely resembled the distribution of all applicants.
- **Although there are a variety of job opportunities available through SuccessLink, these opportunities do not always reflect the broad career interests of youth nor the occupations and industries that are in high-demand.** For example, jobs in business and healthcare are under-represented among SuccessLink offerings while those in childcare and education are over-represented. In addition, not all job experiences provide the same developmental opportunities for youth to learn new skills and move up a career ladder. It is difficult for youth to find job opportunities that offer a structured progression from entry to more skilled positions across summers or employers.

## Threats

There are a couple of places where there appears to be duplication of effort or opportunities to streamline. One is in the placement process. While iCIMS is helpful in gathering all of the youth information in one place, it rarely collects all of the information that employers need to make a decision. Most employers engage in a secondary screening or interview process. A second area of inefficiency is that OYEO staff manually place hundreds of youth into jobs late in the process when those youth have not been placed into jobs -- either because they were not selected or did not make it through the onboarding process. And the onboarding process is onerous for youth, employers and families in which no documentation is retained from one year to another, so youth complete the entire onboarding process every time they take a job through SuccessLink.

- **The SuccessLink onboarding process through the iCIMS platform creates large inefficiencies that leave program resources untapped.** Among those who are selected for a job by an employer during the application period, only half of youth are able to complete the hiring process. This results in a time-consuming manual job placement process just before the program starts that is overwhelming for OYEO staff. Even after youth have been manually selected for a position, these onboarding challenges continue to reduce the efficiency of the program, resulting in 300-600 (about 9-18 percent) of youth placements failing to result in a job each summer. Once onboarded, employers and youth have no way to track timesheets through iCIMS resulting in payment delays that persist for weeks.
- **Although the decentralized nature of the Boston SYEP ecosystem has proved resilient through the pandemic, there is a need for greater coordination and alignment to ensure that young people are able to build skills from one summer to the next.** The youth workforce development system is fragmented across city and state agencies, employers, and community based organizations. It's also siloed from other institutions that provide developmental opportunities for youth such as BPS and community colleges. There are certain state regulations and practices that create barriers for laddering opportunities from one summer to the next and from high school into post-secondary experiences.



## B. Recommendations

In this section we lay out a set of recommendations to position the Boston SYEP ecosystem in the long-term with a focus on improving equity of opportunities for Boston's youth. In order to address these issues, we make the following recommendations. One recommendation that cuts across all three categories is the need to invest in a new job hiring platform that would improve efficiency and equity by:

- Allowing youth to easily search for jobs and supports multiple job applications.
- Automating job matching by interest areas, location, occupation/industry, and skill levels and reducing the need for manual placements.
- Reducing barriers to onboarding by enabling youth to upload documents during the application process, and
- Enabling OYEO staff to track multiple applications across youth to ensure that jobs do not go unfilled.

### Enhance SuccessLink processes to increase access:

- **Start the application process in February and involve BPS in outreach and marketing to encourage youth to apply earlier and to multiple jobs.** Ask BPS guidance counselors to send SuccessLink communications to students and parents and provide time during advisory, study hall, or after school to complete a SuccessLink profile with help from a teacher or guidance counselor. Host WeHire events during March/April/May in partnership with community organizations to educate youth about job opportunities and help youth apply to multiple positions.
- **Make changes to the existing iCIMS platform to simplify the application process and level the playing field across youth.** Change ICIMS features to make it searchable by criteria (by location, occupation, industry, and skill level) and easier for youth to apply to multiple jobs.
- **Invest in a new SuccessLink job hiring platform** that allows youth to seamlessly search for jobs on multiple criteria, process, better supports applying to multiple positions, enables youth to accept the job prior to being placed into onboarding, and makes it easier to upload documents and complete required steps in the hiring process.

### Increase oversight of SuccessLink employer selection process to improve equity:

- **Educate employers about increasing DEI in their summer youth selection process.** Share the results of the equity audit with employer partners to inform them of how their selection practices influenced the equitable distribution of job opportunities. Host a “DEI Academy” for all employers (potential, new, and existing) to train employers to better use information on youth characteristics during the hiring process.
- **Make changes to the existing iCIMS platform to level the playing field across youth.** Provide a mandatory drop-down menu of choices, rather than an optional open-ended question, for youth to indicate why they are interested in a particular position. Use the information that youth provide on their application to auto generate a resume for all youth similar to the Indeed job application platform.
- **Address the current inequity in SuccessLink employer selections by expanding the job algorithm pilot** and returning to the former “60-40” allocation rule. This would allow employers to select 60% of their youth with the remaining 40% placed by OYEO using the matching algorithm developed by Northeastern University that ensures youth of color, those with English as a second language, and students from non-exam schools have equal opportunity to be selected for a position with their organization. Refine job matching algorithm to include interest areas, location, occupation/industry, and skill levels to inform the acquisition of a new hiring platform.
- **Invest in a new SuccessLink job hiring platform (see above)** that can automate job matching by youth interest area, location, occupation/industry, and skill level to reduce the need for manual placements.

### Invest in SuccessLink resources to improve program efficiency:

- **Add OYEO staff capacity to provide youth with onboarding assistance to complete online forms and upload documents.** Expand pilot program to notify parents when youth are placed into onboarding and inform them of the steps and documents that their youth needs to complete.
- **Remove re-enrollment barriers so that youth do not need to resubmit hiring paperwork and documentation every season.** Create a simplified re-verification process through OHR to collect important data, forms and documents only where necessary to increase the likelihood that youth make it through onboarding.
- **Make changes to the existing iCIMS platform to track youth and ensure that jobs do not go unfilled.** Change ICIMS features to include a separate step for youth to accept the job before they are placed into onboarding.
- **Invest in a new SuccessLink job hiring platform (see above)** that reduces barriers to onboarding by tracking multiple applications across youth, collecting documents during the application process to reduce bottlenecks, and notifying youth and parents when to complete the next step in the process.

### Increase SuccessLink job opportunity and job quality:

- **Expand the pool of SuccessLink job opportunities** to include more industries and occupations that are in high-demand in the private sector. Focus on areas that would be complementary to PIC (e.g., healthcare, STEM occupations) and align with careers in the green economy, real estate, and IT.
- **Improve job quality** through skills mapping to develop criteria and categorize jobs. Require employers to make use of work-based learning plans for student assessment to measure skill growth. This information can be used in the future to develop job ladders and skills badging to guide youth development and connect to future opportunities.
- **Provide training to help employer-partners** ensure that they are providing a meaningful job experience for youth. This would include how to design youth jobs, write better job descriptions, mentor youth employees, and navigate the City's hiring and payroll systems.

### Increase coordination and alignment across the Boston SYEP ecosystem:

- **Establish a Boston Youth Jobs Hub** through OYEO to act as a central source of information for parents and families so that they might connect with any intermediary as well as other resources helpful in guiding youth engagement and employment.
- **Create data sharing agreements and infrastructure across intermediaries** to allow for a formal referral system and ensure that no youth fall through the cracks.
- **Ladder job opportunities from summer to summer** across entry-level and more skilled positions across intermediaries. This will require doing a skills inventory of jobs across the ecosystem to create a tiered job system for youth placement.
- **Develop a city-wide badging system** based on the skills and experience youth gain from their summer job that is recognized by all intermediaries, Boston Public Schools, community colleges, and employers with sites operating within the City of Boston.

### Expand work-based learning opportunities for youth

- **Scale-up innovations that were implemented during COVID**, such as the Learn and Earn program and the Virtual Internship program to help foster a wider array of work-based learning opportunities that include post-secondary education.
- **Incubate pilot programs through OYEO that can inform best practices** across the Boston SYEP ecosystem such as expanding opportunities for youth with disabilities and undocumented youth.
- **Create work-based learning opportunities that are year-round and span the youth development pipeline** by connecting stakeholders (e.g., Boston SYEP, BPS, community colleges) and programs (e.g., Tuition Free Community College, apprenticeship) to support young adults (age 19-25) as they prepare for and secure permanent jobs while earning livable wages.
- **Advocate for changes to state regulations and practices that create barriers for youth.** Change work permit requirements so that youth can obtain a work permit without having a job offer in hand (unless it is a "dangerous" job operating equipment) and without a doctor's signature (or with the signature of a school nurse). Ask Comm Corp to amend requirements that only 20% of youth can be repeat participants and allow YouthWorks funding to be used for educational developmental activities that are career oriented (e.g., Learn and Earn).

### C. Looking Forward

The strengths that the OYEO staff bring to the process are tremendous. They have abundant willingness to support youth, employers, and partners and work incredibly hard during the placement season. They have a personal desire to place youths in jobs that will be supportive of their long-term goals and often end up placing a large number of youth into jobs manually at the end of the hiring process. The OYEO staff have deep relationships with employers and partners organizations, and their contextual knowledge is often not captured anywhere, making it very challenging for interns or automated systems to lighten their workload.

Although OYEO's budget and scale have increased over the past two years, these changes will clearly require additional resources. OYEO runs the largest youth employment program in the City of Boston, managing a budget over \$10 million annually and connecting up to 5,000 youth to jobs year-round. Yet the department experiences a high degree of turnover and relies heavily on college-aged interns to support the day-to-day operations to administer SuccessLink. Continued investment in a stronger staffing infrastructure is needed to ensure that the City of Boston is committed to building a more holistic youth workforce development system as well as ensuring equity in all of its programming.

As the convener of the Boston Summer Jobs Consortium it makes sense that OYEO take a leadership role to provide data and analysis, strategic planning, and City resources that can help increase coordination and alignment across the intermediaries, fill in gaps across the ecosystem, and lead innovative efforts to improve job quality and expand opportunities for young people. But this work must be done as part of a coalition to preserve the decentralized system that proved so resilient during the pandemic.

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