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THE CASE FOR A NATIONAL UNIVERSAL SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) is an informed, independent, and unwavering voice for positive action representing low-income New Yorkers. CSS addresses the root causes of economic disparity through research, advocacy, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.

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Introduction

Earlier this year, the Community Service Society of New York (CSS) released a report calling for the creation of a universal summer internship program for New York City youth.¹ Under our proposal, every New York City high school student would have the option of extending each year of high school with a paid summer internship experience. Our proposal received strong support, including an endorsement from *The New York Times*, and helped fuel a broad advocacy effort to expand and enhance the city's commitment to summer youth employment programming.² The subsequent New York City budget agreement expanded the city's existing summer jobs program to serve more youth than ever and called for the creation of a new city task force to review and recommend enhancements to the city's current program.³

CSS continues its advocacy at the local level as we seek to further expand summer jobs to universal service levels and change how the existing program is delivered, to make it better integrated into the high school curriculum and focused on developing labor market skills. But support for summer youth employment programs is also growing at the national level.⁴ The challenges facing young people trying to get a foothold in the labor market are not unique to New York City, nor are the dramatic educational benefits that accrue to high school students who engage in productive career development experiences. A recent report from the Brookings Institute provides a comprehensive analysis of how high quality summer jobs programs can provide benefits to students, and how leaders across the country can strengthen their current efforts.⁵

It's time to radically transform the way we think about and structure summer youth employment programs. Rather than being seen as a way to keep inner city youth occupied and safely off the streets during the dog days of July and

August; we should turn summer jobs into an integral part of the high school academic year that affords all students an opportunity to gain a foothold in the labor force. That means reshaping programs to give students exposure to occupations and industries that will be hiring in the future, intentionally focusing on teaching soft skills needed to succeed in the work world, and providing pay that gives all parties a real stake in making summer jobs productive.

The importance of a universal service model

In their recent report, Martha Ross and Richard Kazis of Brookings have provided an excellent overview of the current state of summer youth employment programs and argued for a sizable federal investment in competitive grants to expand quality programs. We support that approach, but would take it one step further: ***test the idea of making a summer internship experience available to every high school student who wants to participate within that school, district or community.***

The “universal” element is the key component of our proposal. We know from our history that the quality of programs and public support for them both go up dramatically when they benefit all segments of the population. Think Social Security, Medicare, and universal pre-kindergarten. Resume and skill-building summer internships should not just be the province of young people lucky enough to have families able to tap their networks and the ability to afford unpaid internships. Quality summer work and learning opportunities need to be built into the high school curriculum for everyone. Universal summer internships offered to every student can fundamentally reshape high schools, enhancing their ability to be drivers of American competitiveness in the new world economy.

It is an ideal moment for bold change in this direction. The crisis of youth employment has taken on a dire new shape in today's labor market, and is unlikely to change without intervention. At the same time, we are gaining new knowledge about how work-based education at an early age can benefit young people. It is time to use our new understanding of these dynamics to fundamentally rethink how we prepare all youth for long-term success in the new economy.

This document leans on our original proposal for New York City, as well as the findings of the Brookings study, to make the case for a universal internship program at a national level, and is organized as follows:

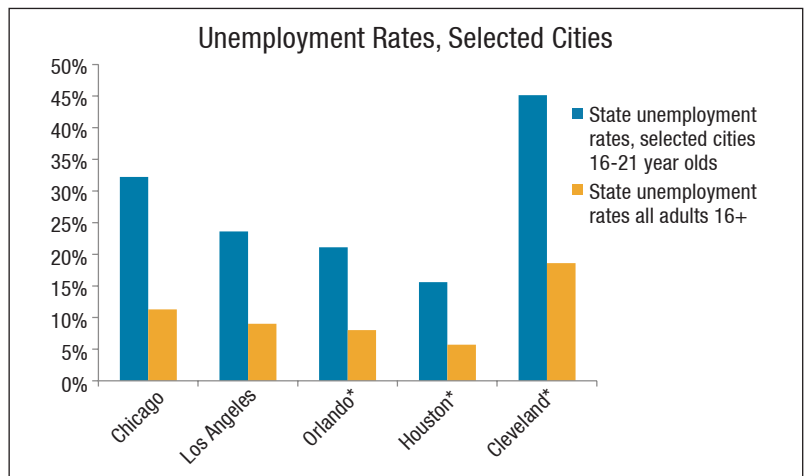
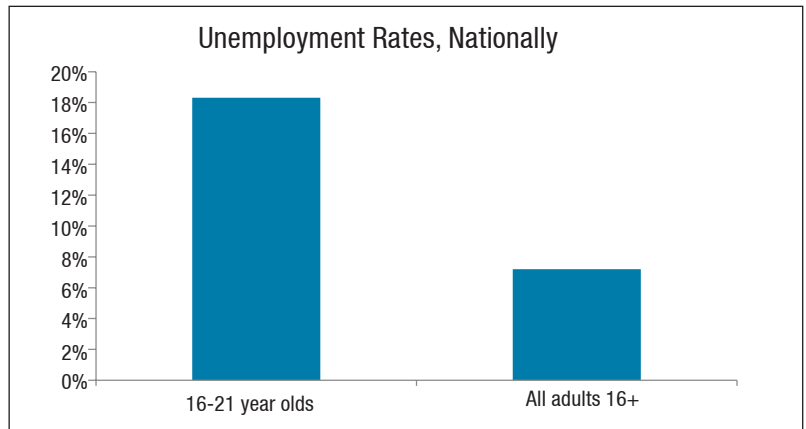
1. The Need for Intervention: The New Crisis of Youth Unemployment
2. The Promise of Youth Employment Programs
3. Our Proposal for a Universal Summer Internship Program
4. Suggestions for Implementation

1. The Need for Intervention: The New Crisis of Youth Unemployment

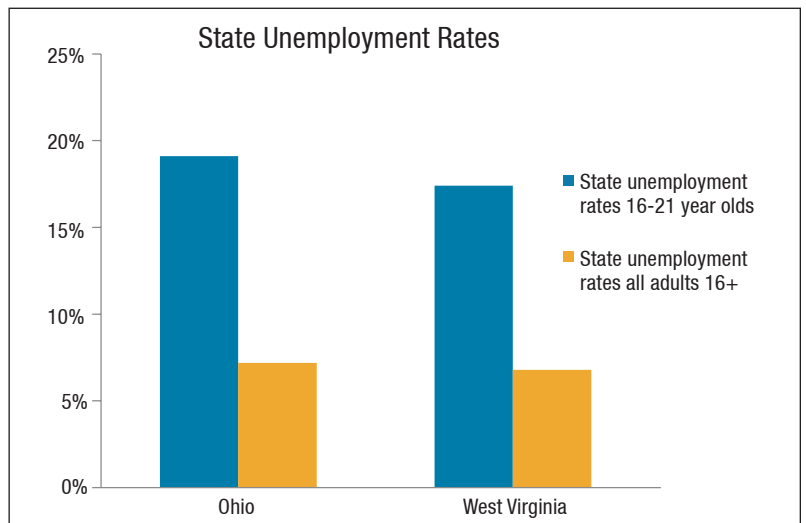
Across the nation, youth are facing increasing difficulty in finding work. The unemployment rate for young people between the ages of 16 through 21 far exceeds that of all adults.⁶

This disparity is heightened in many cities. In Chicago, the youth employment rate is nearly triple that of all adults. In areas with generally high unemployment rates, young people face even more dire conditions. In Cleveland, where broader adult unemployment approaches one in five, unemployment among young people between the ages of 16 through 21 nears one in two. And even in areas such as Houston, where unemployment rates are relatively low for the broader population, young people still see great difficulty in finding work.

The challenges for youth seeking jobs are not confined to cities, and are also felt at the state level: in Ohio and West Virginia, two states where the broader adult unemployment rate adheres close to the national average, youth unemployment rates are significantly higher. These dynamics may have severe consequences for young people, their communities, and our economy. Economists use the term “path dependency” to describe how early employment is a strong predictor of longer-term labor market success, particularly for younger workers. One study found that jobless teens were less likely to hold jobs four to five years later.⁷ For disadvantaged youth, a lack of employment can disproportionately hinder the chances of a successful career later on in adulthood. Separate research has found that whereas middle and higher income teens may be able to successfully substitute



*Due to data limitations, figures for Orlando, Houston, and Cleveland include their broader metropolitan areas.



higher education for early work experience, lower-income youth who do not work at an early age have subsequently lower rates of employment and earnings later as adults.⁸

But the benefits are notable when young people do find jobs. One study has shown that for every year teenagers work, their income rises an average of 15 percent while they are in their 20s.⁹ Other research finds that employment as an adolescent contributes to higher earnings over their lifetime; develops non-cognitive skills such as time management and determination; and may even contribute to decreased crime as students spend more time in structured, supervised activities.¹⁰

The scope of the current youth employment crisis is relatively new, and may be a permanent feature of the new labor market. The recessions of the early 2000s and 2008–2010 took disproportionate tolls on young job-seekers. And in both cases, when employment levels improved overall, young job-seekers did not share in the recoveries. Much of this has to do with the changing nature of the economy. Many jobs that were once available to young people, particularly those with lower skill levels, such as manufacturing, have continued to diminish.¹¹

In addition, labor market studies have documented how many older workers have stayed in the labor market for longer, perhaps as a result of generally lower levels of retirement savings and pension plans, crowding out younger workers. Similar research has noted that older workers now occupy many jobs that were previously more likely to be held by younger workers, particularly in industries such as retail, which have often been gateways jobs for youth.¹² Young people are less able to succeed in finding jobs if they are competing against older workers

with more experience. And if youth cannot land their first jobs, then they are increasingly disadvantaged as they seek work as they grow older.

Summer represents the time of year when young people have the greatest chance of finding that crucial first work experience, but it has never been harder for teens to find employment during these months. Nationally, teens are 40 percent less likely to find a summer job today than they were in 2000.¹³ And perhaps more troubling is the strong positive relationship between family income and summer youth employment. Young people from households earning less than \$20,000 are half as likely to obtain a summer job as those from households earning over \$100,000.¹⁴

Today's labor market is no longer providing young people with the opportunities to obtain jobs on their own, and acquire the skills and experiences that both they and our economy need for long-term success.

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2. The Promise of Youth Employment Programming

Programs that provide youth with subsidized work experience can fill the void created by a weak private labor market for youth. Jobs today demand more skills than ever, both in terms of technical or job-specific know-how (often referred to as “hard skills”), as well as the range of abilities to succeed in the workplace such as punctuality, communication, and problem-solving.¹⁵ Many argue that these “soft” or “non-cognitive” skills are not only of equal or greater importance, but key outcomes that young people do not achieve through the K–12 school system.¹⁶ These life skills not only increase youths’ chances of success in the workplace, but their likelihood of being able to successfully navigate other complex environments, such as university administrative systems and college campuses.¹⁷

Youth employment programs are most likely to give young people these valuable career and life skills when they are clearly designed and implemented to achieve these outcomes.¹⁸ Summer jobs programs, however, have not always enjoyed the benefits of such design. Much of this is due to their legacy as programs more targeted to prevent negative outcomes than to produce positive ones. Many summer jobs initiatives were originally created as efforts to “keep kids off the streets” and prevent violence. Indeed, federal funding for summer jobs has largely followed nationally acclaimed episodes of violence and rioting in the 1960s, 70s, and 90s.¹⁹

Recent rigorous evaluation of New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) produced findings consistent with this history. Researchers found that participants enjoyed benefits including increased school attendance, improved state exam passage rates, and decreased the likelihood of incarceration and mortality.²⁰ But participants did not demonstrate employment and earnings gains in the years following their summer

experience. In our original New York City proposal, we argued that this suggested the need to enhance the program to intentionally target those outcomes. As currently designed and operated, SYEP offers program providers little opportunity to assess participants, identify work sites, and create appropriate matches, components generally recognized as fundamental to successful workforce development initiatives.²¹

The example of New York City, described in detail in our original proposal, shares many challenges of other cities. Researchers at Brookings find that most summer jobs programs are limited in their design, and call for making these programs more intentionally aimed at developing the skills that will support longer-term preparation for labor market success.²²

“It is unwise to expect too much of current summer jobs programs and their ability to position young people for future labor market success... few are well-integrated or articulated with year-round youth development, educational, or training programs.” – Brookings Institute

As currently offered, summer jobs programs, while beneficial in many regards, are a missed opportunity to significantly address the challenges that young people face in today’s labor market.

Background on Summer Youth Employment Programs, Nationally

Despite the growing evidence about their value, federal support for summer employment programs has fallen significantly. In the 1990s a nearly one billion dollar federal allocation toward summer jobs slowly faded to negligible amounts by the beginning of the 2000s, leading to drops in enrollment of 50 to 90 percent among the largest programs.²³ In response to the Great Recession, during which youth unemployment surged, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funded 314,000 jobs for youth in the summer of 2009. This experience, as well as continued elevated levels of youth unemployment, revived interest among policymakers in summer jobs programs, although federal funding largely disappeared by 2010.

There is a large amount of variation in summer youth employment programs nationwide, as they are typically administered by city and county governments. Government agencies will either directly operate the program or contract out functions such as the recruitment and matching of youth and worksites to community-based organizations. This kind of decentralization has led to both creativity and experimentation, but also uneven performance across programs.

In most publicly supported programs, youth ages 14–21 are employed for five to seven weeks, at 15 to 35 hours per week. Most jobs are in nonprofit or public sector. In some cities, philanthropic funds supplement public investment. Some jobs are competitive, with private sector employers willing to pay for higher-skilled, generally older youth. Levels of pre-employment training vary from a few hours

to several days. Most summer jobs programs are stand-alone interventions that are not integrated with year-round schooling

Given the decentralized nature of these programs, little comprehensive national data on them exist, but the best estimates place the number of youth employed in the summer of 2015 at approximately 115,766. New York City had the largest program (54,263) followed by Chicago (24,679), Washington (13,230), Los Angeles (11,644), Boston (10,360), Philadelphia (8,813), Baltimore (8,137), San Francisco (7,937), and Detroit (5,594).²⁴ Similar programs also exist in smaller cities like Harford, CT (2,090) and Cincinnati, OH (776). In most areas, demand for publicly funded summer jobs far outweighs their supply.²⁵ Program costs also vary widely, with youth wages, usually at the state minimum wage, making up the largest part of programs costs. Adding support staff and services bring most program costs to \$1,400 to \$2,200 per participant.

The recently revised federal job training legislation and funding package, the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides little guidance or support for summer programming. The act requires that public agencies spend at least 20 percent of their WIOA funding on work experience activities that include summer jobs. Yet most of WIOA youth dollars are targeted at older, out of school youth, for whom a summer job is not an ideal programmatic fit, and who are more in need of year-round programming

3. Our Proposal for a Universal Summer Internship Program

A growing body of evidence supports the benefits to young people who participate in education that is infused with career development experiences. Contextualized education provides relevance for students, keeping them engaged and on track to graduate. At the same time, these opportunities help students build skills for future workplace success, and spark curiosity for advanced study toward specific careers in college. Studies of career and technical education (CTE) programs across the country have found that high school students engaged in these experiences are more likely to graduate. And whereas these programs once faced concerns about the possibility they might steer students away from college, these same studies have showed no harm in college going among participants.²⁶

Despite their benefits, CTE schools will always be a relatively small share of the broader set of high schools. Yet this should be no reason to deny high schoolers not engaged in CTE from the benefits of work-based learning. The recent report from the Brookings Institute provides a comprehensive analysis of how strong jobs programs can provide benefits to students, and their findings echo many of those we advocated in our original proposal. In particular, among other drivers of high quality programming, the authors call for matching young people with age- and skill-appropriate opportunities, and connecting the summer program to other educational services.

We believe that the best way to accomplish those goals is by making summer jobs a formal extension of each high school academic year, offered to (but not required of) every student. Refashioned as such, a summer job can become a valuable internship experience that can

increase students' engagement in high school, build skills they do not acquire during the academic year, and spark their interest in not only jobs available to them directly after graduation, but also in the types of higher education required by more advanced careers.

Connecting summer jobs to the school year experience can vastly increase the likelihood for young people to achieve these outcomes. Currently, most summer jobs programs exist separately from schools. By offering contracts to serve schools, rather than youth across one or more neighborhoods, program providers can focus their resources inside the school building. Just by being in schools, summer jobs providers will be able to develop deeper relationships with and assessment of each individual young person. This will allow them to connect them to summer opportunities that align with their interests and abilities, or which can strengthen areas that require growth. High schools offer a natural sequence that summer jobs providers can use to align experiences with age and skill level, and can also be used to incentivize performance, if students are required to meet certain achievement benchmarks for different types of summer experiences. Schools can also build off of each student's summer experiences when they return to school in the fall.

We believe that it is time to merge what we know about the expanding crisis of youth unemployment with the growing consensus about the value of career development experiences within education. We have an opportunity to rethink education for today's labor market, by ensuring that every high school student has the opportunity to engage in summer internships that provide them with the skills required to succeed in college and careers, which they do not receive in schools.

The importance of a universal service model

When offered to all youth across an entire high school, school district, or locality, a summer jobs program can become an internship program that fundamentally transforms high school education for the 21st century. Offering summer jobs as a universal educational opportunity, available to all youth, offers the following benefits:

- **Empowered schools and communities** – as discussed above, when summer jobs are offered as a universal option to high school students, they become easier to integrate into the high school structure, strengthening schools’ engagement with their students, and their ability to prepare their students for college and careers. Schools then also become hubs for community and economic development, able to organize cadres of younger students for community service projects and older ones to provide extra manpower to local public and nonprofit organizations, as well as private businesses.
- **Powerful support for families** – across the country, families struggle to engage their children in meaningful and safe experiences during the summer. Whereas higher income households have more resources to offer enrichment opportunities, families across the economic spectrum would benefit from having a formative, paid internship experience available to their high school aged children during the summer.
- **Broader political viability** – if offered universally, summer jobs are less likely to be seen as “programs for poor kids,” avoiding both stigma among youth who might be otherwise hesitant to participate, as well as political turf battles about public monies being used for only low-income constituents.

Many parents believe that it is important for their children to work during the summer as part of their growth and development, as well as to provide supplementary income for their families. Others believe that their children should use their summer time to engage in experiences that intentionally build their skills for college and careers. A universal, paid summer internship program embedded in the high school experience accomplishes all of these goals.

“The history of social policy has a clear lesson. Programs that benefit all citizens do more to reduce poverty than programs targeted to the poor. So a new strategy for family security makes more sense than another War on Poverty.” – Theda Skocpol

The Specifics of Our Proposed Program Model

The original CSS report proposed refashioning and expanding the program into a universal initiative tied to the high school experience, with the following broad components:

- The guaranteed offer of a summer job to all high school students, as they complete grades 9–12, through a rebranded Summer Internship Program. The initiative would essentially consist of an optional additional seven weeks of programming available all high school students. It is important to note that participation in a summer internship would be optional, so students with the interests and resources to pursue other opportunities would be able to do so in any given year of their schooling.
- Students would be matched to summer jobs through their school, which would help place them in experiences that match their skills, interests, and stage of development. Program providers would establish different program service tracks, for students completing 9th through 12th grade. Although further programmatic details are best left to localities, schools, and program providers, our original proposal suggested a design that might include:
 - 9th graders in community service projects, along the lines of existing service corps programs. Youth would learn broad job and life skills such as showing up on time, working in teams, communications with supervisors, etc. Participants could receive stipends or education savings accounts instead of wages. Neighborhoods and communities would benefit from a range of public service project accomplished by summer youth participants.
 - 10th graders in public or nonprofit sector employment. As initial job placements, participants could work or engage in service-learning projects in local nonprofit or public organizations, bolstering the capacity of these organizations to provide services during the summer months. Youth would earn stipends or wages.
 - 11th and 12th graders in public, nonprofit, or private sector employment. Participants could repeat the same types of jobs or choose to explore different fields. Employers could request repeat participation of the same youth, potentially offering promotions or deeper connections with the employer. Youth would earn local minimum wages.
- The program would be administered by community-based organizations (CBOs), who would receive contracts to offer summer job experiences to all the youth at a specific school. Ideally, program funding would support one or more school-based summer internship coordinators, allowing for much stronger connections between the students' summer and year-round experiences. Schools could experiment with offering coursework during the year, in partnership with the summer jobs contractor, which prepared students for and/or built off of their job experiences.
- Students who need to repeat grades for graduation would receive specific remedial programming as part of their summer experience. Students who need to attend summer school would be accommodated to do so, while still participating in the program.

4. How to Implement this Proposal

We agree with the authors of the Brookings study, who call for a renewed federal investment in summer jobs, along with a range of efforts to increase knowledge of and support the usage of the components of program quality. In terms of funding, the Brookings authors suggest a five-year competitive demonstration project, with \$600–800 million per year going to public area applicants for planning and implementation of demonstration programs, in addition to rigorous evaluations and learning communities designed to document promising practices. We believe that this represents a strong and sensible initial federal commitment to revitalizing summer youth employment.

Where we differ from the authors of the Brookings report is that we feel it is imperative to test how summer jobs might work as a universal initiative for all youth in a given area. Many of the shortcomings of existing summer jobs programs, documented in our original NYC proposal and the Brookings study, are due to the fact that summer jobs initiatives exist as programs separate from year-round schooling for young people. We believe that the best way to improve summer jobs is to stop considering them as separate efforts from conventional K–12 education, and to merge them with each young person’s high school experience. As discussed in the previous section, we believe that when offered to every student in a high school, district, or locality, a universal summer internship program can radically transform and enhance the ability of high schools to prepare youth to compete in the new economy.

The demonstration grant model proposed by the Brookings Institute authors offers the perfect context to test a universal model of service. We would recommend that approximately half of the proposed grant funding should be awarded to applicants proposing universal approaches that would serve entire schools, districts, or localities. Evaluators could compare the outcomes of these school-based saturation models with other pilot programs utilizing distinct designs.

NOTES

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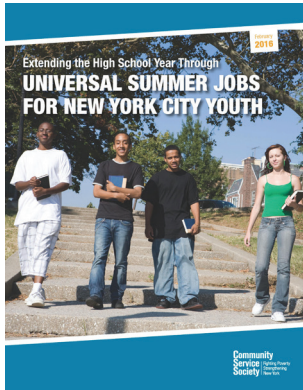
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