



Advancing Opportunities for New York City's Young People Through the Advance & Earn Program

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Advance & Earn is a New York City program that offers a continuum of education and employment services — from preparation for high school equivalency (HSE) exams to occupational training and internships — paired with comprehensive support services to help young people meet challenges to participation. This brief shares findings from a descriptive study conducted by MDRC and funded by the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and New York City Young Men's Initiative that sought to describe the program's implementation and participant experiences.

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(A note from the New York City agencies that commissioned this study can be found at the end of this brief.)

Background and Context

Approximately one in seven young people in New York City between the ages of 16 and 24 are not in school and not working.¹ Disconnection from school and work during these transformative years can have negative, long-term consequences for a range of outcomes — including earnings, experience with incarceration, and physical and mental well-being — that result in significant costs for these young people, their communities, and society at large.²

Often referred to as “opportunity youth” or “disconnected youth,” young people who are not in school or working disproportionately come from low-income families and are people of color.³ However, their skills, needs,



and experiences can vary depending on their age, amount of schooling and work exposure, experiences with traumatic events, and other factors such as parenthood, child welfare involvement, or legal system involvement. Research suggests that these young people need a diverse and comprehensive set of services that can meet them where they are and help them progressively advance their skills, credentials, and experiences toward economic mobility.⁴

In this context, the Advance & Earn program aims to accommodate New York City’s opportunity youth at different stages of education and skill development. The program incorporates lessons and evidence from previous city-funded education and employment programs for opportunity youth by more closely integrating academic and workforce services under one program to help young people enter and advance in their career pathway. These prior programs included: (a) the [Young Adult Literacy Program](#), which provided academic services and work-readiness services to young adults without a high school credential and with low literacy skills, and (b) Intern and Earn (formerly the [Young Adult Internship Program](#)), which provided short-term paid internships to opportunity youth.⁵ Based on feedback from young people, practitioners, and community-based organizations, Advance & Earn was designed to unify these previously separate services into a single, integrated pathway that supports youth from basic skills development through HSE attainment and entry into in-demand occupations.

The Advance & Earn program was launched in February 2020 and has completed two cohorts each year since then – for a total of 10 cohorts between 2020 and 2024. As of 2024, five community-based organizations – referred to as “providers” from hereon – offered Advance & Earn services across seven program locations in the city. (Program providers and locations are listed in Table 1.) All providers have a long history of offering education, employment, and supportive services to people who face barriers in the traditional labor market, including opportunity youth. The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) oversees the program, supported by the New York City Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) and the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity).

Table 1. Advance & Earn Program Providers

Provider	Program Location	Advanced Training Sectors
AHRC New York City	Staten Island	Direct support professionals (DSPs), who assist people with disabilities
CommonPoint	Bronx, Queens	Healthcare occupations, including technicians and nurse assistants
The Door	Bronx, Manhattan	Green construction, masonry, and landscaping
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow	Brooklyn	Digital marketing, hospitality, and masonry
Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center	Manhattan	Culinary arts

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

SOURCES: New York City Department of Youth and Community Development and program providers.

NOTES: ^aCommonPoint began its Advance & Earn programs in the Bronx in early 2023. Between 2020 and 2022, another community-based organization in the Bronx provided Advance & Earn services.

^bThe Door operates an “Advance & Earn PLUS” program in the Bronx that specifically serves young people with experience in foster care and the juvenile justice system.

^cThe Advanced Training site for The Door’s Manhattan program during the study period was at the Woodlawn Conservancy in the Bronx.

Program Services and Target Outcomes

Advance & Earn offers three separate program “tracks” — each with a distinct set of services involving academic preparation, work-related skills training, and access to employment. The program also offers case management and comprehensive support services to help young people address barriers to participation and navigate their options after the program. A key goal is to help young people with limited skills and work experience enter the program and allow them to grow and progress within the same program.

Based on participants’ skill levels on entering the program and their individual goals, participants may choose to complete just one track or all three. Participation in any of the tracks is expected to lead to employment or enrollment in additional education or training. For example, if a participant does not continue to HSE Prep after finishing the Pre-HSE track, the program supports them to transition to employment or other education or training options that may better fit their needs.







Each track offers 20 weeks of services, delivered to cohorts at the participating community-based providers.⁶ To enter any of the tracks, a young person must live in New York City and have authorization to work in the United States. Two tracks — the Pre-HSE and HSE Prep tracks — serve individuals between 16 and 24 years of age who do not have an HSE credential. The third track — the Advanced Training track — serves individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 who already have an HSE credential.

Figure 1 and the descriptions below provide an overview of services and target outcomes for each of the three tracks.

Program Track 1: Pre-HSE

The Pre-HSE track is designed for young people who read below a ninth-grade level and need intensive academic services to make progress toward their HSE credential. The primary focus is on academic instruction, with services to build foundational work-readiness skills and career awareness. The track offers weekly academic instruction, as well as ongoing work-readiness training that includes topics such as time management, workplace etiquette, resume development, stress management, and computer literacy. Between 2020 and 2024, participants received up to \$150

Figure 1. Overview of Advance & Earn Services Offered by Program Track

	Pre-HSE	HSE Prep	Advanced Training
Participation criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No high school credential Reading level: grade 4 to 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No high school credential Reading level: grade 9 and above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has high school credential Meets training program requirements
 Academic instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GED test preparation: math and language arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GED test preparation: math, language arts, science, and social studies 	
 Skills and credential training		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic credential instruction (such as food handler or retail specialist) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive training to gain skills and credentials for in-demand occupations
 Work experience and readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work-readiness training and services for exploration of careers and postsecondary pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paid internship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paid internship in training sector
 Financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly participation stipend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internship wages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internship wages
 Case management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized service plans and regular check-ins Access to mental health counseling (through on-staff social workers or referrals) Navigation of benefits and supports (such as accessing food or housing) 		
 Transition support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-program follow-up for at least 90 days Support with accessing higher education or training Job search and placement assistance 		
Target outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade-level gains in literacy and math Enrollment in HSE Prep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school credential Basic industry credentials Work experience Post-program employment Post-program enrollment in higher education or training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry credentials in high-demand occupations Work experience Post-program employment related to training Post-program enrollment in higher education or training

SOURCES: Interviews with staff members and participants and review of program documents.

NOTE: Training programs for different sectors or occupations in Advanced Training often have specific eligibility requirements, such as a driver’s license.

each week as a stipend for participation in instructional hours; the stipend was increased to \$240 in early 2025.

The main goal of the Pre-HSE track is to improve participants' literacy and math skills and support their transition into the HSE Prep track of Advance & Earn.

Program Track 2: HSE Prep

The HSE Prep track enrolls participants with the goal of helping them earn their HSE credential and significantly boost their work readiness. The track offers weekly academic instruction in language arts, math, science, and social studies – the four subjects tested on the General Educational Development (GED) exam, the HSE credential exam used in New York State.⁷

Work-readiness training for this track focuses on building skills for applying to internships and jobs (such as resume creation, cover letter writing, and interviewing) and providing participants with basic industry credentials in retail, food handling, or office applications. The track also offers placement in an internship at the local minimum wage for up to 250 hours.⁸

The primary target outcomes include HSE credential attainment, and either enrollment in postsecondary training or education (including Advance & Earn's Advanced Training track), employment, or both.

Program Track 3: Advanced Training

The Advanced Training track supports young people who already have a high school credential. Individuals in this track participate in a training program and an internship opportunity, and attain more advanced, industry-recognized credentials in occupations that are in demand among the city's employers. DYCD works with providers to select trainings that are aligned with priority industry sectors identified by the city; providers may also propose trainings in additional sectors that have high employer demand in their specific communities. Offerings have included occupational training in healthcare, construction, culinary arts, commercial driving, green energy, disability support, and digital marketing. Types of training offered have changed over time and reflect a combination of factors, including trends in employer demand, young people's interests, and availability of qualified training organizations that providers can partner with. (Table 1 lists the training options offered in 2024.)

Participants begin the program track with classroom instruction and hands-on training in their chosen occupation and also receive work-readiness instruction related to the field of training (such as workplace norms in a healthcare facility). This training prepares them for the next part of the program – earning their credential and completing a paid internship of up to 250 hours in their chosen field.

The primary target outcomes include earning an industry-recognized credential, as well as either securing employment in the field of study, enrolling in higher education or training, or both.

Services Offered in All Tracks

Advance & Earn offers a set of comprehensive services across all three tracks, including:

- **Individualized case management and coaching to promote engagement and mitigate challenges to participation.** The program helps participants navigate career and life goals, access public benefits, meet basic needs (like food and housing), and connect with various other resources such as mental health support.
- **Support transitioning to or advancing in higher education, training, or employment.** Advance & Earn offers opportunities for college and career exploration (such as mentoring, college trips, and reviews of educational or training requirements for career interests), support with enrollment and financial aid, and assistance with job search and placement.

Study Overview

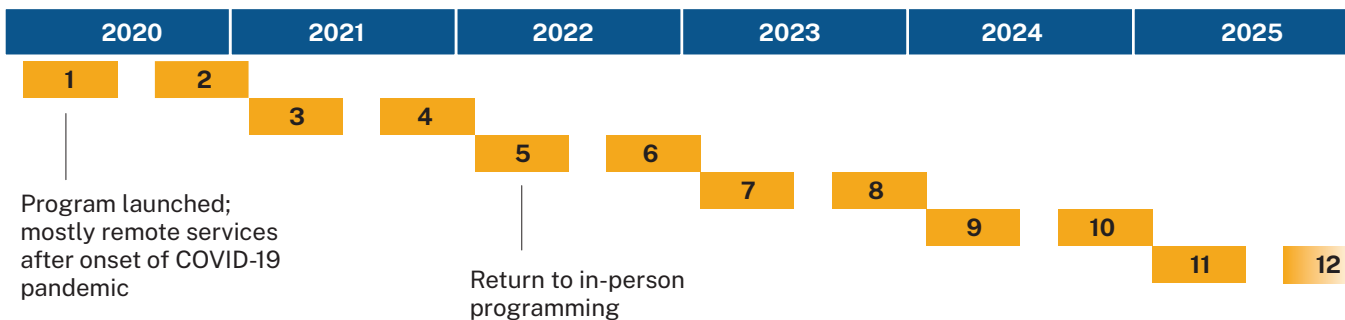
In 2024 and early 2025, MDRC collaborated with DYCD, NYC Opportunity, and YMI to conduct an implementation study of the Advance & Earn program. The primary goals of the study were to describe (a) participant engagement and experiences in the program, and (b) factors that support or challenge the program's implementation, with an eye toward potential improvements for the future.⁹ Data sources for the study included program visits and interviews with staff members and participants conducted between October 2024 and January 2025, as well as administrative data on participant characteristics, program participation, and in-program outcomes for the 10 program cohorts between 2020 and 2025. (See Figure 2 for a timeline of program implementation and data used for this study.)

Using principles of participatory research, the study team engaged an advisory group of program participants and alumni to inform the data collection and analysis for the study.¹⁰ (See Box 1 for more information on the advisory activities.) This study documented the program's implementation and participant experiences in 2024 and may not reflect experiences of the previous cohorts, particularly those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. (For more about the effect of the pandemic on the program, see Box 2.)

The sections that follow describe who participates in Advance & Earn, how young people engage with services across the three program tracks, and the progress they make during the program. The brief then draws on interviews with staff members and participants to highlight significant aspects of the participant experience, implementation challenges faced by providers, and considerations for strengthening the program moving forward.

Figure 2. Advance & Earn Timeline and Study Overview

Advance & Earn Cohorts, 2020-2025



Study Components

PROGRAM DATA ANALYSIS	IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS	ADVISORY GROUPS
Analysis of data collected by the programs on participant demographics, service engagement, and in-program outcomes <i>Conducted for cohorts 1 to 10</i>	Program visits and interviews with staff members and participants to understand how the program works on the ground <i>Conducted during cohort 10</i>	Focus groups with program participants, alumni, and frontline staff members to shape data collection and analysis <i>Conducted during cohorts 9 and 10</i>

Box 1. Participant and Staff Advisory Activities

To ensure young people’s voices were central to the evaluation, the research team convened a “youth advisory committee” made up of current and former Advance & Earn participants. Over the course of the project, the committee met four times to shape the evaluation – from refining research questions and testing interview protocols to interpreting findings and advising on how results should be shared. Most meetings were held in person to support engagement, with the final session conducted virtually to accommodate participants and focus on sharing results. Young people were compensated for their time and expertise. The research team worked closely with the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and program providers to recruit participants. Those who participated in the youth advisory committee were not eligible to participate as research subjects for interviews.

The research team also engaged virtual focus groups of frontline staff from each provider during the design phase of the study and the analysis of the qualitative data. Together, these efforts helped ensure the evaluation reflected the lived experiences of those most directly involved in the program.

Box 2. Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The implementation of the Advance & Earn program in its early years was dramatically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As indicated in Figure 2, the program began in January 2020, and due to the pandemic, services were moved online in March 2020. Programs provided laptops and internet-enabled tablets to participants and delivered remote instruction, allowed remote internships that were project-based, and extended the time period to obtain certain advanced training credentials due to various testing challenges. Between 2020 and 2022, DYCD and the providers adapted the implementation of the program to meet the evolving context of the pandemic and its effects on communities and the labor market. Programming began to transition back to an in-person format during cohort 4, with cohort 5 and subsequent cohorts meeting in person.

There were major disruptions in the implementation of the model as intended during program launch as the pandemic unfolded. These disruptions affected participant recruitment, engagement, and outcomes. Participant interviews involved only cohorts from 2024 to 2025 and thus did not provide much information about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the program. However, a few of the staff members interviewed worked at Advance & Earn during the pandemic and were able to report on the effects they observed on participants. For example, they reported that sustaining engagement in virtual instruction during the pandemic was often difficult for providers and participants due to lack of access to reliable Wi-Fi or disruptive home environments. Return to in-person programming also came with its own challenges to participant engagement; for example, attending virtual classes was easier for some students than attending in-person classes.

Participant Characteristics

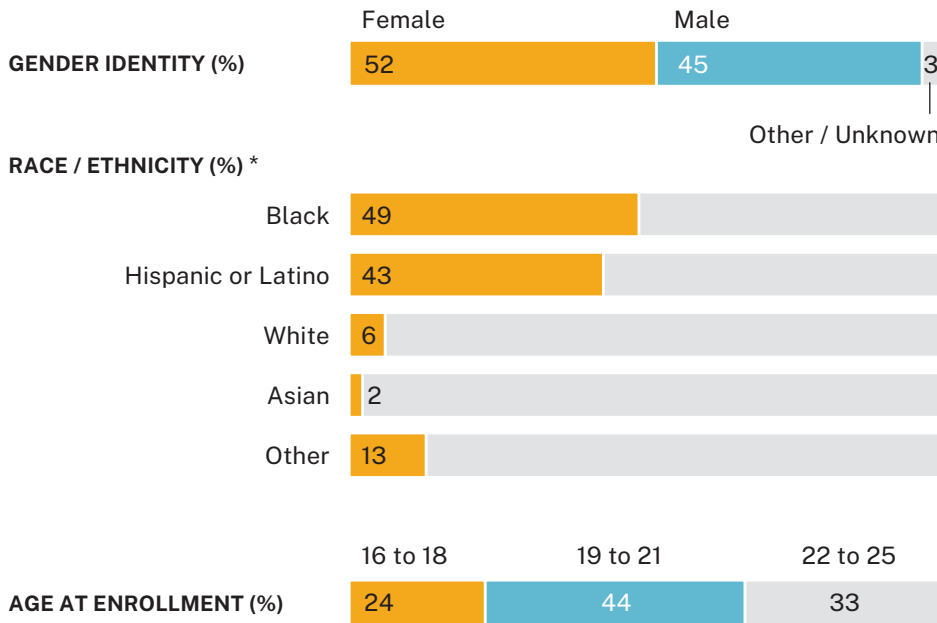
Between 2020 and 2024, a total of 3,895 young people enrolled in the Advance & Earn program across all three tracks. The average age of participants upon entering Advance & Earn was about 20 years old, and a little more than half of the participants identified as female, as shown in Figure 3. Nearly half of the participants identified as Black and about 40 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, reflecting the overrepresentation of these demographic groups among opportunity youth in New York City.¹¹

Most participants did not have previous work experience when they enrolled. Only about one-quarter of participants had ever been employed, and only about one-tenth had ever participated in a work training program. Demographic characteristics and prior training and work experience of the participants did not vary greatly by track.

Consistent with the program's design, Pre-HSE and HSE Prep participants entered the program without a high school credential. Approximately two-thirds had completed tenth or eleventh grade, and 22 percent had completed ninth grade or below. These grade completion levels, however, do not fully reflect the wide variation in academic skills and experiences among these participants. For example, newly enrolled participants who performed below a ninth-grade level on a diagnostic test administered by the program were placed in the Pre-HSE track; however, more than three-quarters of the

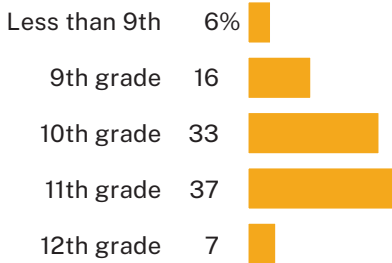
Figure 3. Characteristics of Young People Who Enrolled in Advance & Earn Program Tracks, at the Time of Enrollment

Demographics

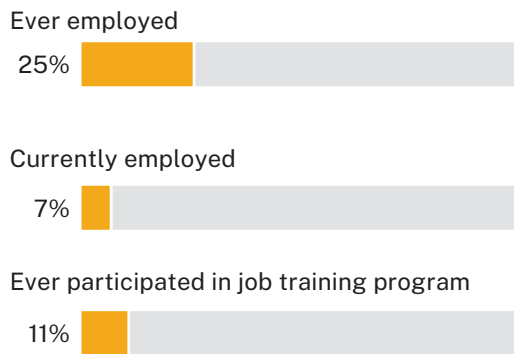


Education

LAST GRADE COMPLETED
Only shown for Pre-HSE and HSE tracks; high school diploma or equivalent credential is required for Advanced Training



Employment and training



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: ^aThe race and ethnicity categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, Hispanic or Latino may be of any race, and White or Black participants may be Hispanic or Latino. Other races include Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan Native. Race and ethnicity data were unknown for a portion of the sample.

^bFor age and education categories, distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

participants placed in that track reported completing at least tenth grade. Many participants also struggled with academic engagement and habits, staff members said, due to interrupted schooling at an early age or prolonged disconnection from high school.

These data, together with insights from program staff and participant interviews, suggest that the program engages young people with substantial needs for education and employment services and a high risk of disconnection. Staff members reported that the program typically serves young people who face challenges related to poverty and instability – such as food and housing insecurity, mental health issues linked to trauma and crisis experiences, and parenting and childcare challenges – that often interfere with their ability to consistently engage in education, training, and work.

Participation and Outcomes in Program Tracks

This section discusses findings from an analysis of administrative data pertaining to participant engagement and in-program outcomes for the 10 cohorts enrolled in the program between 2020 and 2024. Each program track offers a certain number of hours of instruction and training opportunities, with the expectation that take-up will vary by participant needs and skills. Some participants in a cohort, for example, may not attend academic instruction for 20 weeks if they attain a GED credential before the program ends.

At a high level, the data show that:

- Most young people who enrolled in any of the three program tracks opted to participate in academic instruction or work-related skills training.
- Most young people who enrolled in the HSE Prep or Advanced Training tracks participated in internships – notable because most participants did not have previous work experience when they enrolled.

Data Considerations

The engagement and in-program outcomes discussed in this section should be interpreted in light of several limitations in the data available to the study team. The data do not show how long participants stayed in the 20-week program, making it difficult to interpret engagement measures such as instructional or internship hours. If a participant found employment or entered another training or education program during a cohort, those outcomes may not have been captured in the data. More importantly, many of the gains described by staff members and participants and that can shape post-program outcomes – such as increased confidence, work-readiness skills, motivation, and stability – are not reflected in the administrative records. For these reasons, the analysis below gives only an incomplete picture of the many ways young people progress in the Advance & Earn program.

Lastly, the available data cannot fully reflect program implementation and participation during a period of evolving conditions, as early cohorts were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and providers continually adapted their services to meet shifting needs in their communities. (Box 3 provides a brief snapshot of how early cohorts compared with later cohorts.)

Box 3. Participation and Outcomes by Cohort

Comparing participation and outcomes between earlier cohorts (1 through 4), which were heavily affected by pandemic disruptions, and later cohorts (5 through 10) reveals a mixed picture. Overall, engagement strengthened over time, but progress across academic and employment outcomes was uneven. The key takeaways below apply across all three program tracks and should be interpreted cautiously given the limitations of the available data:

- Engagement improved in later cohorts, with participants completing more instructional and internship hours, on average, across tracks.
- The rate of credential attainment increased among Advanced Training participants in later cohorts, but the rate of employment in the training field declined.
- Re-enrollment rates fell in Pre-HSE and HSE Prep, with fewer participants returning for a second cohort.
- Movement from academic tracks to Advanced Training remained low across cohorts, underscoring ongoing challenges in helping participants advance through the full pathway.

Staff member and participant interviews provide some context for these mixed findings. Program delivery became more stable over time as providers rebuilt employer partnerships and returned to in-person services, which may explain improvements in engagement (particularly increased internship participation). At the same time, participants continued to face challenges in a shifting labor market, and staff members reported lingering effects of the pandemic on young people's mental health, academic habits, and ability to attend consistently — all of which may have contributed to uneven academic and employment outcomes.

Program Track 1: Pre-HSE

The Pre-HSE program track enrolled nearly 1,100 young people from 2020 to 2024, as shown in Figure 4. Ninety-five percent of those who enrolled participated in some academic and work-readiness instruction, attending an average of 156 hours during the 20-week program period (the track offers up to 380 hours of instruction).

Young people who enroll in Pre-HSE (and in HSE Prep) can participate in up to three cohorts in those program tracks if they demonstrate progress but require more time to advance their skills and credentials. Among participants in Pre-HSE, 31 percent re-enrolled in the track at least once.

About 28 percent of Pre-HSE participants increased their literacy levels enough to qualify for the HSE Prep program track, and about two-thirds of those who qualified enrolled in that track. Four percent of those who participated in Pre-HSE received an HSE credential without enrolling in the HSE Prep track.

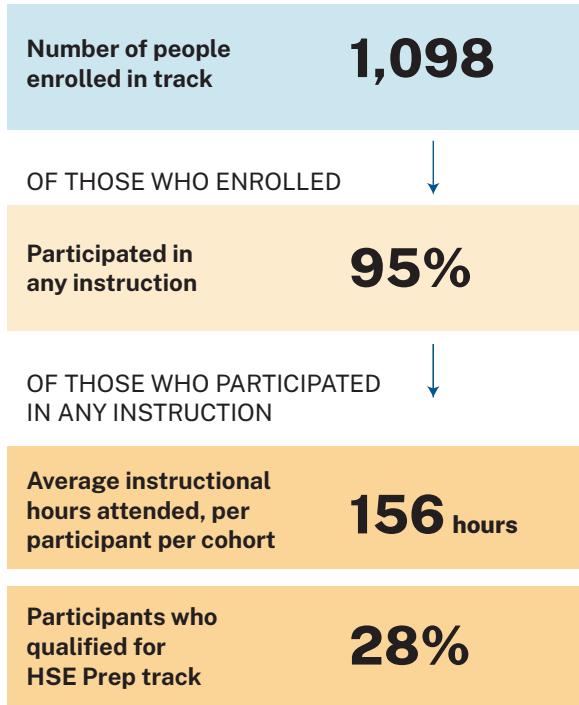
Program Track 2: HSE Prep

The HSE Prep track also enrolled close to 1,100 young people from 2020 to 2024, as shown in Figure 5. Ninety-six percent of those who enrolled participated in some academic and work-readiness instruction, with an average of 74 hours of instruction during the 20-week cohort (the track offers up to 200 hours of instruction). Among participants, 29 percent enrolled in HSE for two or more cohorts.

About one-third of those who participated in instruction attained their HSE credential by the end of their cohort. About two-thirds of young people who enrolled in HSE Prep participated in an internship, with an average of 136 hours of work experience during a cohort (the track offers up to 250 internship hours).

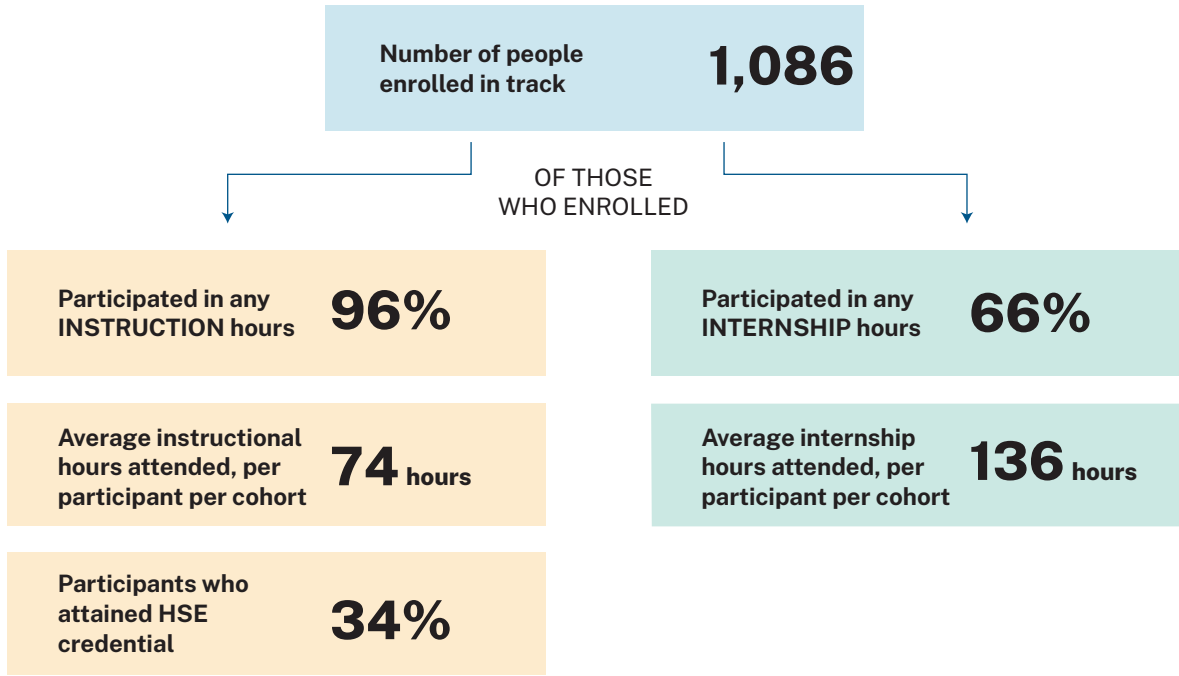
For context, these in-program outcomes are generally consistent with findings from Project Rise, a similar New York City-funded program that served opportunity youth from 2011 to 2015. An evaluation of Project Rise found that 28 percent of participants earned their HSE credential within 12 months and 72 percent of participants began an internship.¹² The internship participation rate for HSE Prep is also comparable to findings from the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP), a precursor to Advance & Earn, in which about 77 percent of people who enrolled began a subsidized internship. Notably, Advance & Earn’s participants entered with less prior work experience than participants in these comparable programs—only 25 percent had ever been employed at enrollment, compared with 65 percent in Project Rise and 72 percent in YAIP—suggesting the program is reaching a more disconnected population.¹³

Figure 4.
Pre-HSE Participation, 2020-2024



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

Figure 5. HSE Prep Participation, 2020-2024



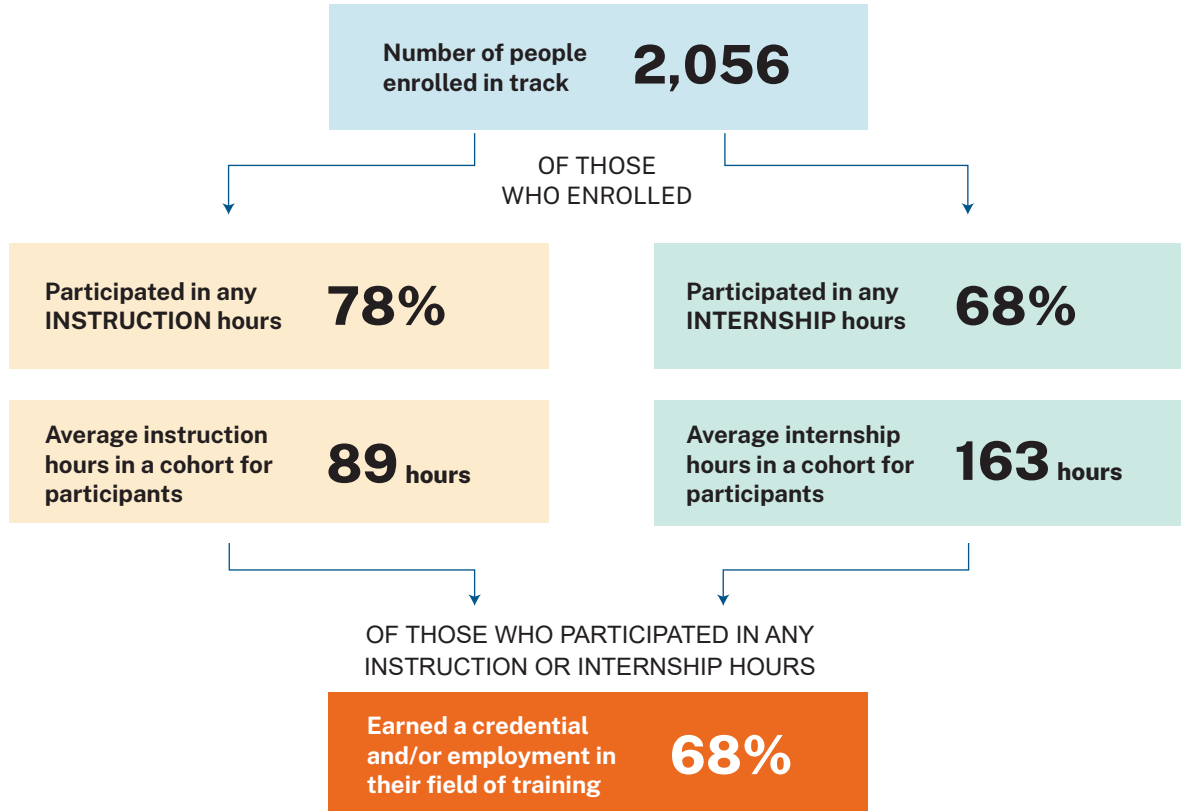
SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

Program Track 3: Advanced Training

The Advanced Training track enrolled about 2,000 participants during this period, as shown in Figure 6. Unlike Pre-HSE or HSE Prep, Advanced Training does not offer a specific number of training hours, as the length and intensity of the training varies by occupation. Nearly 80 percent of people enrolled in the track participated in some skills training and work-related instruction, attending an average of 89 hours of instruction during a cohort. More than two-thirds of individuals who enrolled in Advanced Training participated in an internship, averaging 163 hours of work experience during a cohort (the track offers up to 250 internship hours). On average, participants attended only one cohort, as individuals can enroll in the training for a particular occupation only once per provider.

About 68 percent of participants who took part in any instruction or internship met at least one target outcome for this track. Specifically, 56 percent earned a credential during the program, 34 percent gained employment in the field of training within three months of program completion, and 26 percent achieved both. The program did not track employment outside the field of training. Average wage for participants who gained employment in the months following the program was about \$18 an hour; construction, health care, and hospitality were the three most common sectors of employment.

Figure 6. Advanced Training Participation, 2020-2024



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

Benchmarking outcomes of the Advanced Training track is difficult because few occupational training programs serving opportunity youth have been rigorously evaluated. While sector-based training has demonstrated long-term benefits for low-wage adults, the evidence base for young people under 25 remains nascent.¹⁴

Transition from Pre-HSE and HSE Prep to Advanced Training

Participants who completed the Pre-HSE track often continued on to the HSE Prep track, but Pre-HSE and HSE Prep track completers did not typically move on to the Advanced Training track. Seven percent of HSE Prep participants went on to Advanced Training between 2020 and 2024, and only 3 percent of participants who started in Pre-HSE eventually continued to Advance Training. Interviews with program staff members suggest that several factors contributed to this limited progression, including:

- **Lack of interest, information, or access.** The occupational training options offered in a provider's Advanced Training track may not have fully aligned with the interests of that provider's HSE Prep participants. While participants can transition to an Advanced Training track at a different provider, information about other providers' offerings may not have been readily accessible; travel or logistical constraints can also make switching to another provider difficult.
- **Lack of awareness about the continuum of services.** Some providers emphasize the availability of the Advanced Training track when recruiting for Pre-HSE and HSE Prep, highlighting the full continuum of services and attracting young people who are interested in making the progression. However, this approach is not consistently used across providers.
- **Eligibility requirements.** Enrollment in an Advanced Training track often requires sector- or occupation-specific prerequisites that some HSE Prep graduates may not be prepared to meet. Typical prerequisites involve drug testing, vaccinations, driver's licenses, and physical or cognitive aptitude tests.

The low rate of progression to Advanced Training is noteworthy because Advance & Earn was created to give opportunity youth a clear path of progression—from basic skills to HSE credential to career-focused training—by consolidating and strengthening previously separate literacy and work experience programs. The data show that further changes are needed not only to help more participants move into high-value career pathways but also to ensure that the career pathways align with young people's interests, goals, and agency.

Participant Experiences

This section presents findings on how participants experience the core components of the Advance & Earn program and the implementation factors that shape those experiences, based on interviews with 40 participants and more than 50 staff members across tracks and providers. In addition to presenting information about the participant experience, this section also shares detailed information about program components that the research team learned about in the interviews.

Qualitative Data Considerations

It is important to note that young people who volunteered to participate in these interviews may have been more engaged with the program than other participants. In addition, the characteristics of the interview sample differed from the full sample of participants in some notable ways. For example, about 65 percent of young people in the interview sample identified as male, whereas 44 percent of those who enrolled between 2020 and 2024 identified as male. A much larger share of participants in the interview sample also had prior work experience before they enrolled in the program. Due to these differences, the findings below may not be representative of the general Advance & Earn population, but they still provide important insights into what participants may value in the program and where they may want improvements.

Outreach, Recruitment, and Intake for All Tracks

Important takeaways regarding outreach, recruitment, and intake are as follows:

- **Young people frequently cited personal recommendations from friends, family members, or program alumni as a major reason they chose to enroll.**

Advance & Earn providers rely primarily on word-of-mouth referrals from young people's friends and family and program alumni, as well as referrals from schools and other community-based organizations, to recruit for the program. Participants also described finding the program through web searches and social media. Providers vary in their use of on-the-ground outreach (such as discussing the program at community events) and in their use of social media. Providers also use different messaging in their outreach — with variation in whether they emphasize the academic or workforce components — reflecting broader questions about how to communicate the program's identity and value to prospective participants. As an indication that the variety of options is appealing to some participants, one HSE Prep participant shared, "I was doing my research on Google, and went through a lot of GED programs. This one spoke to me the most... they have different resources, like paid internships and [options to go into] construction or digital marketing."

- **Financial and material support was also a major factor influencing young people's participation.**

Most young people interviewed highlighted the importance of financial and material support — including stipends, transportation assistance, and food and pantry items — in motivating them to enroll and helping them stay engaged. An HSE prep participant said, "I've been looking for programs for a while. It's been hard because I'm not working... they pay me to go to school which makes it easier." Many young people enter the program facing significant financial pressures, including housing instability and immediate income needs, and staff members observed that financial support helps address the very barriers that led many program participants to disengage from school in the first place.

- **A structured orientation to discuss program expectations and services during the intake process helped sustain engagement.**

In the intake process, an applicant typically must fill out an application or online form, provide required documents, complete one or more academic or skills assessments relevant to the track, and meet with a program staff member to discuss participant needs and goals. Across providers, participants who were interviewed for this study found the program's intake process to be relatively easy to complete. Programs often conduct group orientations to set expectations and keep participants engaged during the time between intake and the beginning of services for the cohort. Participants said these orientations helped them gain clarity on expectations, assess whether the program would meet their needs, build relationships with staff members and peers, and strengthen their commitment to participation. As one participant explained, it helped in "getting our minds ready for class," which is important for young people who may not have been in an academic setting in some time.

Pre-HSE and HSE Prep Tracks

Important takeaways regarding the Pre-HSE and HSE Prep tracks are as follows:

- **Young people valued small class sizes, individualized academic support, and the ability to learn at their own pace.**

Students from both tracks typically attend the same classes together (with HSE Prep students attending fewer hours to allow for internship time), and teachers often rely on independent work to accommodate the wide range of skills in the classroom. Programs also offer tutoring from teachers on staff or from partner organizations to supplement classroom hours.

Participants interviewed for this study consistently praised the level of individualized support and one-on-one attention they received from teachers, which made for a more positive and comfortable learning environment than they had experienced in the past. Many participants drew a contrast to their experiences in high school: they felt their high school teachers moved on without ensuring that all students grasped the material, while their Advance & Earn teachers were patient and supported students learning at their own pace. For example, one HSE participant noted, “The academic part is really good. If you weren’t comfortable reading out loud, they didn’t make you. They cater to each student’s needs. If you pull a teacher to the side and say — ‘I need help with this’ — they will study one on one with you.” This sentiment was echoed in many interviews.

- **Overall levels of satisfaction with academic instruction often varied by provider, and even by cohort, primarily due to differences in teachers’ skill levels and instructional approaches.**

The Pre-HSE and HSE Prep tracks generally have two academic instructors, one for math and science and one for language arts and social studies. Both staff members and participants emphasized the importance of hiring teachers with experience in nontraditional classrooms — those who can balance accountability with flexibility while creating a warm, nonjudgmental environment where participants can thrive. However, it was often challenging for programs to find instructors with this kind and level of experience; during the study visits, two programs were relying on teachers from a New York City Public Schools high school credential program due to staff turnover and recruitment challenges. Difficulty hiring qualified instructors presumably contributed to differences in satisfaction levels reported by participants across programs.

Advance & Earn teachers generally develop their own curriculum based on their assessment of student needs, using a mix of instructional approaches such as presentations, group work, guided practice, and games. Participants across providers described varied experiences with staffing consistency and instructional quality that shaped their engagement, with some noting differences even between instructors at the same organization.

[The program instructors] make you believe in your abilities. I’ve been out of school for a long time, didn’t have much confidence. Now I think I can do things and try different things.

—Pre-HSE participant

Participants also reported varying approaches to GED test preparation. Access to preparation materials, practice tests, scheduling assistance, travel support, and help securing testing accommodations for students with disabilities differed across providers. Some programs take a sequential approach, with students focusing on one subject at a time and testing on a rolling basis as they feel ready. Others encourage students to take the test even before they feel fully prepared, as a way to build familiarity and confidence. As one provider explained, the goal is “to break the illusion that this task is impossible.”

- **Participants in the HSE Prep track wished for more flexibility in the program to balance their academic needs and internship commitment.**

Some HSE Prep participants, particularly those who are older, stated that their priority was to obtain their HSE credential as quickly as possible, and for them, the internship was not a priority. Program staff members often felt that the allocated academic hours for HSE Prep participants (six hours a week) were insufficient for participants to pass all four GED sections within the 20-week timeframe, especially for those who had been out of high school for a few years. Staff members noted these students may have needed more guidance on study habits within the GED sections. Many staff members also said that the shift in focus from academics to internships for Pre-HSE students who transitioned into the HSE Prep track led to disengagement from academic classes.

A challenge of modifying the track so students spend more time on academics is that, in the current model, students receive a stipend only for internship hours, not classroom hours. Some HSE Prep participants noted that their main goal in attending the program was attaining their high school credential but that they completed the internship to ensure they were paid for their time. Some staff members suggested that the program could introduce more flexible internship options—like reduced hours or different formats for gaining work-readiness experience—and pair this with incentives for classroom attendance, to better support participants whose primary goal is earning an HSE credential.

- **HSE Prep participants reported a higher degree of satisfaction with their internship when they were matched with a strong worksite supervisor who provided mentorship, and when they felt well prepared for their placement by the program staff.**

For HSE Prep track internships, participants are typically placed in entry-level positions—often in the retail or food service sectors or as basic administrative support—that do not require prior work experience and are intended to help interns build transferable workplace skills. In many cases, these placements either did not align with participants' career interests or were redundant with their prior work experience. Only about a third of the participants interviewed said they had a direct role in selecting their internship.

Even so, many participants found value in the experience, particularly when they developed a relationship with a supportive supervisor at the internship site. Participants described these relationships as a source of mentorship, encouragement, and practical guidance that shaped their overall

satisfaction, even when the work itself felt less relevant to their goals or redundant with their experience. Most interviewees appreciated the opportunity to earn wages, gain confidence, and refine their career interests. Many also cited the benefits of developing general work-readiness skills, such as communication and organization, as well as industry-specific skills they could apply in the future.

Approaches to preparing young people for internship placements varied across providers. Some providers were more directly involved in connecting young people with their supervisors before the internship began, communicating about job duties and expectations, and helping supervisors learn about their interns. Participants who experienced such introductions credited this process for increasing both their satisfaction and the quality of their performance.

Advanced Training Track

Important takeaways regarding the Advanced Training track are as follows:

- **Participant experiences in occupation-specific training varied widely by their chosen sector and occupation.**

Advanced Training participants receive training for specific occupations and credentials before they are placed in internships. This training is typically designed to integrate classroom instruction with hands-on learning, allowing participants to apply skills learned in the classroom, use tools, and operate equipment. Advance & Earn providers typically contract with partner organizations to offer training that is aligned with in-demand jobs and sectors.

The amount of time participants spend in training can vary widely due to differences in requirements across occupations and credentials. Participants interviewed for the study generally reported positive experiences with their training, but there were variations in experiences and satisfaction across training types and providers. Some participants wished for deeper experiential learning, noting that classroom instruction for some of the occupations lacked sufficient practice opportunities or that job-specific skills had to be learned with employers during internships.

Interviews also revealed variations in how providers and their training partners deliver work-readiness support to prepare students for their internships. In some cases, training partners deliver work-readiness training and job placement services; in other cases, these components are delivered separately by program providers. Participants who received sector-specific guidance about workplace norms, industry trends, and career advancement reported feeling more prepared to navigate their education and employment options after the program, compared with participants who received more generalized work-readiness guidance from a program provider.

- **Compared with internships offered in the HSE Prep track, Advanced Training internships were generally more aligned with participants' career interests. They were also more effective in helping participants define or refine their future goals and more directly led to employment or further education.**

Participants said that the internships provided opportunities to apply and expand skills learned in the classroom, with interviewees citing sector-relevant experiences such as using construction tools, creating 3D graphics, using spreadsheet software, performing sound engineering, taking patient vitals, and participating in food preparation. An Advanced Training participant in the culinary track shared, "I like the fact that they give us knife kits, our chef's coat... [and the instructors] make you feel involved," illustrating how the internships helped the students picture themselves in the field, building on the classroom lessons. They also found value in practicing softer skills, such as working in a professional environment and with a team. Similar to the HSE Prep track, participants said that supportive coworkers and supervisors at the internship sites, along with individualized support from program staff members to prepare for their placements, increased the value of their internships.

However, in a few fields, internships introduced complications. Participants interested in some occupations — for example, that of certified nursing assistant (CNA) — cannot be placed in an internship without first obtaining their license, which can be a barrier to internship placement during the program period. Meanwhile, students who do pass their CNA licensing exam often quickly secure jobs and therefore do not need to participate in the internship. However, Advanced Training participants are not paid for their training time, only for the internship component, so those participants did not receive any payment for their time in the program. Participants and staff members at providers offering training in sectors that are either broader or require further education — like digital marketing or digital media — reported more difficulty finding job placements in the field after the program, compared with participants and providers in other sectors.

Other Forms of Support Across Tracks

Important takeaways regarding support across tracks are as follows:

- **Participants valued their relationships with program staff members and felt that the program helped them navigate challenges.**

In discussing experiences with program staff members, participants interviewed for the study reported being treated with respect and without judgment, feeling valued as individuals, and having a sense of belonging. Interviewees said staff members were "like a family," that they "love everyone in the building," and that "everyone here knows everyone." They felt that staff members' reliability in supporting them helped foster these relationships. All providers offer comprehensive support — largely coordinated by case managers — to meet any immediate and emerging needs that can negatively affect engage-

The people here make you feel like you have a team behind you. I feel like I had moral support, when other people see you and see the potential in you it makes you feel different and special.

— Advanced Training participant

ment. This includes guidance on navigating public benefits for housing, healthcare, and food assistance; accessing clothing, hygiene supplies, and children's supplies; and providing financial or other types of assistance with emergencies, either directly or through connections to other services. One participant reflected, "[The staff members] really care. If you don't have food, they will provide that for you, help you get shelter, take care of you." The consistent and frequent check-ins by case managers were seen as vital for engagement and prompt resolution of issues.

Providers vary in their staffing structure, which can shape participant experiences. For example, some have licensed social workers on staff or mental health clinics at the program site to make internal referrals for mental health counseling, while some refer students out to external providers for mental health services. Participants valued having staff members with backgrounds similar to their own. One participant noted, "[The staff] come from where we came from. They were brought up how we are brought up living in the projects and stuff like that. So, they understand the way we come from and how we grew up and what we seen and what we experience as youth."

- **Across all three program tracks, participants desired more structured and comprehensive guidance in career exploration and navigation.**

While all providers offer some guidance in exploring careers and navigating pathways for employment in different sectors, participants wanted more extensive assistance in these areas. Participants, including those in the Advanced Training track, often emphasized that their goals today may not reflect their long-term career goals. Many young people make training choices based on short-term financial needs and the availability of free training options while trying to figure out what they want to do in the future and determine their long-term strategy. Providers advise participants based on what may be a short-term interest in the industry aligned with their advanced training offerings, rather than supporting wider career exploration.

Implementation Challenges

Program staff members interviewed across provider organizations emphasized the following challenges to implementing Advance & Earn as designed.

- **Hiring and retaining qualified staff**

Advance & Earn providers face significant challenges in hiring and retaining qualified staff members, particularly academic instructors and licensed case managers. Staff members attributed this problem largely to the providers' inability to offer competitive salaries compared with organizations such as the New York City Public Schools, leading to high turnover and long vacancies. Heavy workloads also make it difficult to retain staff; case managers in particular reported feeling overwhelmed by the many responsibilities of the position which include addressing students' mental health challenges, providing work-readiness skill development, and assisting academic instructors

with classroom management, leading to burnout and high turnover.¹⁵ Participants also emphasized that staff turnover and quality can affect their engagement and the quality of services.

- **Engaging young people with complex needs who are facing systemic barriers**

Program staff members often emphasized the complex and multifaceted nature of challenges affecting participants' motivation and engagement. They consistently reported that the population served by Advance & Earn faces significant personal barriers that often interfere with education and employment goals; these barriers include housing and food insecurity, parenting responsibilities without family support, and, increasingly, mental health challenges. While staff members strive to meet program participants' day-to-day needs, they are limited in their ability to mitigate systemic barriers. For example, participants who are parents face childcare issues due to rejections of voucher assistance, limited childcare slots for children under two years of age, and inconvenient day care hours — issues that affect engagement but cannot be solved by program staff.

- **Engaging employers in internship and job development**

As with many community-based providers, Advance & Earn providers face a variety of challenges related to employer engagement, which negatively affect their ability to secure internships and job placements for participants. These challenges stem from employer expectations, administrative hurdles, and the nature of available opportunities. Many staff members said that employers do not fully understand the needs and challenges of the program's target population and reported struggling to balance employer expectations with what young people want and need. Providers also face significant competition from other training and workforce programs in the city. Programs often work with numerous small, local businesses, each taking only a few interns, meaning staff members must manage and maintain relationships with a large volume of individual employers, which is a significant capacity challenge. Building strong, lasting relationships with larger corporations or chains can take considerable time and capacity.

- **Need for centralized support and coordination**

Many staff members felt that the Advanced & Earn program could be implemented more efficiently and successfully with a more centralized, coordinated effort across providers and city agencies, specifically in terms of recruitment, program services, and employer engagement. Currently, each provider develops its own academic and work-readiness materials, identifies internship sites and establishes employer partnerships, and conducts outreach and recruitment. This approach can result in a lack of standardized practices and consistent branding across different Advance & Earn programs and can lead to competition among providers rather than cohesion and collaboration. Staff members consistently spoke about the need for greater collaboration across city agencies and DYCD programs and for a centralized approach to youth and employer outreach.

Looking Forward

Findings from the implementation study of Advance & Earn are aligned with existing evidence that young people who are not working or in school are a heterogeneous group with diverse skills, needs, and experiences and require a continuum of comprehensive services to meet them where they are. The study offers lessons for both the program and the larger field.

Program Evolution

Advance & Earn was established to offer a continuum of services to opportunity youth looking to reach academic milestones, gain work experience and credentials, or both. The findings highlight the need for:

- Giving service providers more discretion and flexibility to align academic instruction and work experience opportunities with individual participants' skills and needs;
- Providing young people with more extensive resources and advising for career exploration and navigation, and strengthening support to help participants transition to college, employment, or further training;
- Developing strategies for partnering with and engaging employers that take into account the resources and coordination necessary to create meaningful work experiences and relationships;
- Increasing service coordination and collaboration across Advance & Earn providers and public agencies that operate education and employment programs for opportunity youth;
- Addressing staffing challenges and strengthening provider capacity to help participants navigate systemic barriers such as housing, childcare, and mental health services;
- Improving data collection systems and approaches to assess participant engagement in different program components and their outcomes; and
- Offering specialized training and peer learning opportunities for staff, particularly around trauma-informed practices and crisis management, and involving frontline staff in program design decisions.

The associated New York City agencies and Advance & Earn providers continue to look for ways to improve the services they offer. Based on findings from this study and other ongoing discussions, DYCD is discussing changes to the program tracks. The Pre-HSE and HSE Prep tracks could potentially be merged into one academic track and allow participants to focus more on the goal of receiving a high school equivalency credential. On the Advanced Training side, there will be a renewed focus on offering training aligned to employer skill demands and career interests of young people,

providing supportive work experiences, and improving how young people in academic tracks can more easily transition to Advanced Training.

Lessons for the Field

Conversations with young people and program staff members also highlighted broader lessons for practitioners, funders, and policymakers focused on building career pathways for opportunity youth, as described below.

- There is a strong need for “bridge” programs — like the Pre-HSE track in Advance & Earn — that help young people with no high school credential and low academic skills gain the skills and credentials necessary to enter high-value career pathways. These efforts must also have a strong focus on supporting young people in navigating career options, making informed choices about training and education programs, and successfully managing transitions.
- Career pathways initiatives for young people must be rooted in developmental needs of the target audience, including the need for exploration and experimentation to learn about different fields and gain awareness of personal preferences. They must also help participants develop skills to navigate an ever-evolving economic landscape, rather than limiting an individual’s career focus to one specific sector. This is particularly important as artificial intelligence brings rapid shifts in the labor market.
- Strong employer engagement is a core component of a career pathways approach, and evidence suggests that it may be the most challenging and resource-intensive component to implement. Education and workforce training providers for young people need to be capable of engaging a large number of employers to improve the availability and quality of work-based learning for young people.

Notes and References

1. Measure of America calculations using U.S. Census Bureau ACS Microdata (2019-2023). See Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council, “Disconnected Youth” (website: <https://data2go.nyc/2025>).
2. Kristen Lewis and Rebecca Gluskin, *Two Futures: The Economic Case for Keeping Youth on Track* (Measure of America, 2018); Clive R. Belfield, Henry M. Levin, and Rachel Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* (Corporation for National and Community Service and White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012).
3. Disconnected Youth Task Force, *Connecting Our Future: 2020 Disconnected Youth Task Force Report* (New York City Mayor’s Office of Youth Employment, 2021).
4. Dan Bloom and Cynthia Miller, “Helping Young People Move Up: Findings from Three New Studies of Youth Employment Programs” (MDRC, 2018); Disconnected Youth Task Force (2021).
5. For more information on the Young Adult Literacy Program and the Young Adult Internship Program, see Michelle S. Manno, Edith Yang, and Michael Bangser, *Engaging Disconnected Young People in Education and Work: Findings from the Project Rise Implementation Evaluation* (MDRC, 2015) and Melanie Skemer, Arielle Sherman, Sonya Williams, and Danielle Cummings, *Reengaging New York City’s Disconnected Youth Through Work: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Young Adult Internship Program* (MDRC, 2017).
6. Between 2020 and 2023, a cohort for each program track served up to 25 young people at each provider. As of 2023, the program expanded the capacity of the Advanced Training track to serve between 50 and 75 young people in each cohort at a provider.
7. Prior to January 2022, New York State used the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) test as the HSE credential exam.
8. New York City’s minimum wage was \$15 an hour in 2020, at the start of Advance & Earn. It increased to \$16 an hour in 2024 and \$16.50 in 2025. See New York State, “New York State’s Minimum Wage” (website: <https://www.ny.gov/new-york-states-minimum-wage/new-york-states-minimum-wage>, 2025).
9. The study was not designed to assess longer-term, post-program outcomes targeted by the Advance & Earn model.
10. Participatory approaches to research and evaluation are rooted in the idea that intentionally engaging affected groups in the research process can lead to better, more accurate insights about the topics being studied. See Kyla Wasserman, Niko Leiva, and Louisa Treskon, “Strengthening Research Through Participatory Methods: Partnering with Young People to Study Persistence and Engagement in the Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential Initiative” (MDRC, 2021).
11. As of 2021, about 40 percent of opportunity youth in New York City were Hispanic and 29 percent were Black. See JobsFirstNYC and Community Service Society, “Reversing Nearly a Decade of Positive Trends: The Lingering Impact of the Pandemic on Young Adults Who Are Out of School and Out of Work in New York City” (JobsFirstNYC and Community Service Society, 2023).
12. Manno et al. (2015).
13. Skemer et al. (2017).
14. Farhana Hossain, Greg Keough, and Gabriel Rhoads, *Building Career Pathways for Young People: An Assessment of Evidence and Opportunities* (Project Evident, 2025).
15. As of fall 2025, salaries for Advance & Earn instructors range from \$48,000 to \$55,000, while the salary for a first-year New York City public school teacher with a bachelor’s degree is \$69,000.

Response from the New York City Agencies that Commissioned the Study

Over 106,000 New Yorkers aged 16 to 24 were out of school and out of work in 2023. Often referred to as “opportunity youth” or “disconnected youth,” these young people disproportionately come from low-income families and communities of color. A 2025 report from JobsFirstNYC found that while the number of opportunity youth in NYC has declined to pre-pandemic lows, it remains disproportionately high in some neighborhoods.¹

Opportunity youth face acute challenges accessing education, training, and work — all of which are critical for economic mobility. Research has shown that opportunity youth are more likely to need comprehensive supports to overcome barriers such as skills deficiencies, mental health challenges, housing instability, lack of childcare, and impacts of trauma and poverty.

Launched in February 2020, Advance & Earn was designed to address these challenges by providing a continuum of education and employment services. The Advance & Earn Program model was developed after careful assessment of the [Young Adult Literacy Program](#) (YALP) and Intern and Earn (formerly [Young Adult Internship Program](#), or YAIP). NYC Opportunity invested in and evaluated those programs, and found that they were not having the intended impact on employment and education outcomes for participants. We used the findings that emerged — in combination with lessons from other research — to inform our decision to end YALP and YAIP in 2019 and 2020, respectively, and design a new program through extensive stakeholder engagement.

The Advance & Earn program built on evidence and best practices by more closely integrating academic and workforce services under one program. Advance & Earn has three tracks — Pre-HSE, HSE Prep, and Advanced Training — offering literacy instruction, high school equivalency (HSE) test preparation, employer-recognized training, industry credentials, and paid internships. Participants receive individualized case management and comprehensive wraparound support services to help them stay on a track toward postsecondary education and career success.

This report summarizes the findings from an implementation evaluation conducted by MDRC. The Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity), the New York City Young Men’s Initiative (YMI), and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) commissioned this study to assess program implementation and explore how participants navigate the program’s skill attainment and advancement pathways. We also sought to better understand best practices and lessons learned, and to identify areas where additional support or adjustments to the program delivery and model may be needed.

¹JobsFirstNYC, “Economic Mobility for New York City’s Young Adults: Where Progress Meets Persistent Barriers” (website: <https://jobsfirstnyc.org/latest/economic-mobility-for-new-york-citys-young-adults-where-progress-meets-persistent-barriers/>, 2025).

MDRC analyzed administrative data from Advance & Earn's first 10 cohorts between 2020 and 2024, and conducted interviews with nearly 50 staff members and 40 participants between October 2024 and January 2025. The study incorporated participatory strategies to ensure that youth program participant voices were centered, and the evaluation reflected the insights and experiences of those closest to the program. MDRC convened a youth advisory committee consisting of current and former Advance & Earn participants who helped to shape the evaluation. MDRC also conducted focus groups with frontline staff to inform the evaluation design and data analysis.

The study highlights several strengths of the Advance & Earn program:

- Advance & Earn successfully engages young people who are at high risk of disconnection. At enrollment, 75 percent of participants had no prior work experience, and all pre-HSE participants tested below a ninth-grade reading level.
- The program supports meaningful outcomes in credential attainment, employment, internship placement, and academic progression.
- Financial support — stipends, transportation, and meals — is crucial for engagement, addressing barriers that initially led to school disconnection.

The study also identifies areas where the program could be strengthened:

- Participants expressed a need for greater flexibility to balance academic needs and internship commitments, and for more comprehensive career exploration and transition support.
- Few pre-HSE and HSE Preparation participants transitioned to Advanced Training, possibly indicating young people enrolling in those tracks were more focused on achieving their high school equivalency than on the program being a bridge to advanced training options. Additional supports are needed both to help participants progress and to ensure pathways align with their interests and goals.
- Providers emphasized the need to improve approaches to building and scaling effective employer partnerships, staffing, and capacity to address systemic barriers like housing and childcare that affect engagement.

Looking ahead, we are committed to using the findings from this evaluation to strengthen the Advance & Earn program. NYC Opportunity, DYCD, and YMI are carefully considering the programmatic recommendations presented in this brief and commit to working with providers to implement near-term program improvements within existing provider contracts. With support from Advance & Earn's technical assistance providers, we will continue to work to strengthen employer partnerships, improve staffing capacity, and address barriers to engagement. For Advanced Training, this includes a renewed focus on aligning training to employer skill demands and career interests of young people, providing supportive work experiences, and improving pathways for Pre-HSE and HSE Prep participants to transition to Advanced Training.

We will also use these findings and recommendations to explore more structural changes to the program, including ways to integrate the program's Pre-HSE and HSE Prep tracks and enable greater flexibility around internship participation to better support young people in preparing for their HSE credential. Looking ahead, we remain committed to sharing our lessons learned from this work as part of our efforts to improve services for this community more broadly.

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