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## **NYC DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE YOUNG PEOPLE FREE PASSPORTS AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES**

**NEW YORK** — New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Commissioner Keith Howard announced today a passport and international student cultural exchange program that offers free passport support services for dozens of select young people aged 15-18 in DYCD-funded programs. The initiative will also provide young people opportunities to travel internationally next spring and summer. [Tucks Travels](#) has been selected as the nonprofit organization overseeing the passport component, and [Take Action Global \(TAG\)](#) will deliver the cultural exchange portion. Priority will be given to first-time travelers and families in underserved communities.

“Every young New Yorker deserves the opportunity to dream big and see themselves as part of a global community,” said **Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives Ana J. Almanzar**. “Removing the financial and administrative barriers to obtaining a passport will open doors to new educational, cultural, and professional opportunities for youth in New York City. This initiative ensures participants have the tools to explore the world and build a brighter future for themselves and our city.”

“DYCD is launching this passport and international exchange program to give young people in underserved neighborhoods the opportunity to see the world beyond their block. This program builds on DYCD’s previous work to send young people on a cultural exchange trip to Ghana, and our longtime collaboration with the Mayor’s Office of International Affairs on NYC Junior Ambassadors, which empowers young to become actively engaged with the United Nations and its mission of addressing the most pressing challenges in the world,” said **DYCD Commissioner Howard**.

“Thank you to Commissioner Aissata Camara, former Commissioner Edward Mermelstein, and former Deputy Commissioner Kristen Edgreen Kaufman of the Mayor’s Office of International Affairs for exposing DYCD to a global platform and international audience. Special thanks to former Deputy Commissioner Mark Stewart and NYPD Community Affairs, Chancellor Melissa Aviles-Ramos, and Executive Director Kim Yu of the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services (MOCS) for their commitment to New Yorkers and young people. None of this work would be possible without Take Action Global (TAG), Tucks Travels, and our participating community partners helping us make NYC youth truly a part of the global community.”

“A passport is more than a document; it is an invitation to possibility. My office is proud to be a partner in this initiative,” said **Aissata M.B. Camara, Commissioner for the NYC Mayor’s Office for International Affairs**. “For too many young New Yorkers, cost and access have limited their ability to see the world. This initiative changes that. By ensuring our youth can obtain passports and participate in international exchange, New York City is affirming that global opportunity should not be determined by zip code. We are preparing the next generation to lead, compete, and collaborate on a global stage and in doing so, strengthening New York City’s role as a crossroad of the world.”

“At NYC Public Schools, we believe every young person deserves access to opportunities that expand their horizons and prepare them to thrive in an interconnected world,” said **New York City Public Schools Chancellor Melissa Aviles-Ramos**. “This initiative to help students obtain passports and experience global travel opens doors to cultural understanding, academic growth, and lifelong curiosity. We are proud to partner with DYCD and our city agencies to ensure that students from underserved communities can see themselves as global citizens with limitless potential.”

Tucks Travels will work closely with DYCD-funded organizations to assist up to 110 students in completing and submitting their U.S. passport applications. The organization covers the full cost of the application process, charging participants no service or administrative fees. Each application averages \$179, which is paid directly by Tucks Travels to ensure affordability and equitable access for all families, regardless of income. The youth will be eligible to enroll in the cultural exchange initiative.

“We are so excited to partner with DYCD to help increase passport ownership for young New Yorkers. Travel is education, and we firmly believe international experiences are critical for child development. These experiences shape who we are, and broaden the scope of our dreams. Seeing is believing, and at Tucks Travels, we want to help every child have the opportunity to see the world,” said **Tucker Piner, founder and CEO, Tucks Travels**.

Take Action Global (TAG) will be responsible for delivery of DYCD’s cultural exchange initiative. The program will support over 140 young people, as well as educational chaperones and travel guides who will participate in a structured, three-phase journey. In addition to a five-to-seven-day immersive experience overseas, program modules include civic identity, global awareness, cultural programming, and storytelling.

“As our young people are becoming increasingly connected in a global world, hands-on learning experiences like travel are essential in preparing them for the future of life, work, and learning,” said **Dr. Riley Justis, chief operating officer, Take Action Global**. “Through meaningful cultural exchange, students gain perspective, confidence, and a deeper understanding of their place in the world.”

**Dr. Jennifer Williams, executive director, Take Action Global**, added, “Now is the time to bring future leaders beyond the walls of the classroom and into real-world experiences that help them see, feel, and understand what the world has to offer. This initiative creates opportunities for students across New York City to connect with global communities and imagine what’s possible for their own futures.”

“At Take Action Global, we are committed to providing real-world learning experiences for every student we serve,” said **Koen Timmers, executive director, Take Action Global**. “Through programs reaching over 23 million educators and students in over 180 counties, TAG brings a custom, phased approach to cultural learning, connecting New York City’s young people with global perspectives while bringing the world into their classrooms.”

Connecting young people in underserved communities to passports:

- Helps eliminate the barrier of not having government-issued identification by providing verified ID and greater access to education, travel, and civic opportunities.
- Enhances youth access to employment, internships, civic engagement, recreation, and cultural experiences.

- Fosters inclusion and opens new pathways for engagement, leadership, and opportunity. Youth with recognized credentials gain a stronger sense of confidence, empowerment, and global connection.
- Offers a safe and legitimate means for youth to engage with city services, communities around the world, and public spaces.
- Provides a standardized form of identification that streamlines participation across programs, reducing administrative barriers, and ensuring equitable access to all available opportunities.
- Serves as a foundation for lifelong mobility and achievement. It represents an investment in youth — demonstrating the city’s commitment to their development, empowerment, and future success.

Tucks Travels previously partnered with DYCD on a pilot program to help 25 young people in DYCD-funded programs in the Bronx obtain their passports.

“We were incredibly excited to partner with Tucks Travels on the passport initiative and provide this unique opportunity to our students,” said **Andrea Jerves, director of programs and development, HANAC, Inc.** “The ability to travel and utilize a passport provides opportunities that would be otherwise completely inaccessible to these young people, expanding their awareness of global learning pathways and future possibilities. Our SYEP programming strives to not only give students the work experience they need to advance their career aspirations, but also give them the means and access to tools that figuratively and literally expand their horizons.”

In 2023, Global Kids partnered with DYCD to give students an international leadership and cultural immersion experience in Ghana, where they explored historical and natural sites, participated in seminars and workshops on Ghanaian history and culture, and took part in mentorship and volunteer activities that enriched their understanding of local traditions and strengthened their professional and social networks.

“Global Kids applauds DYCD for launching the passport and international student cultural exchange program, an important step toward ensuring young people from underserved communities have access to global learning opportunities,” said **Dominique Jones, executive director, Global Kids.** “Through our own international experiences taking students to countries such as Ghana, we have seen firsthand how travel builds cultural understanding, confidence, and leadership. A passport is more than a travel document — it’s a gateway to new perspectives, and this initiative opens the door for more young people to step into their future as global citizens.”

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