

New York City's Advance & Earn Program

Key Findings from an Implementation Study

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Approximately one in seven young people in New York City between the ages of 16 and 24 are not in school or not working. Launched in 2020, Advance & Earn helps these young people reconnect to education and employment through comprehensive services and support, offering opportunities to build skills, earn credentials, and gain work experience. The program is implemented by community-based service providers across seven program locations in the city. 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).

Study Overview

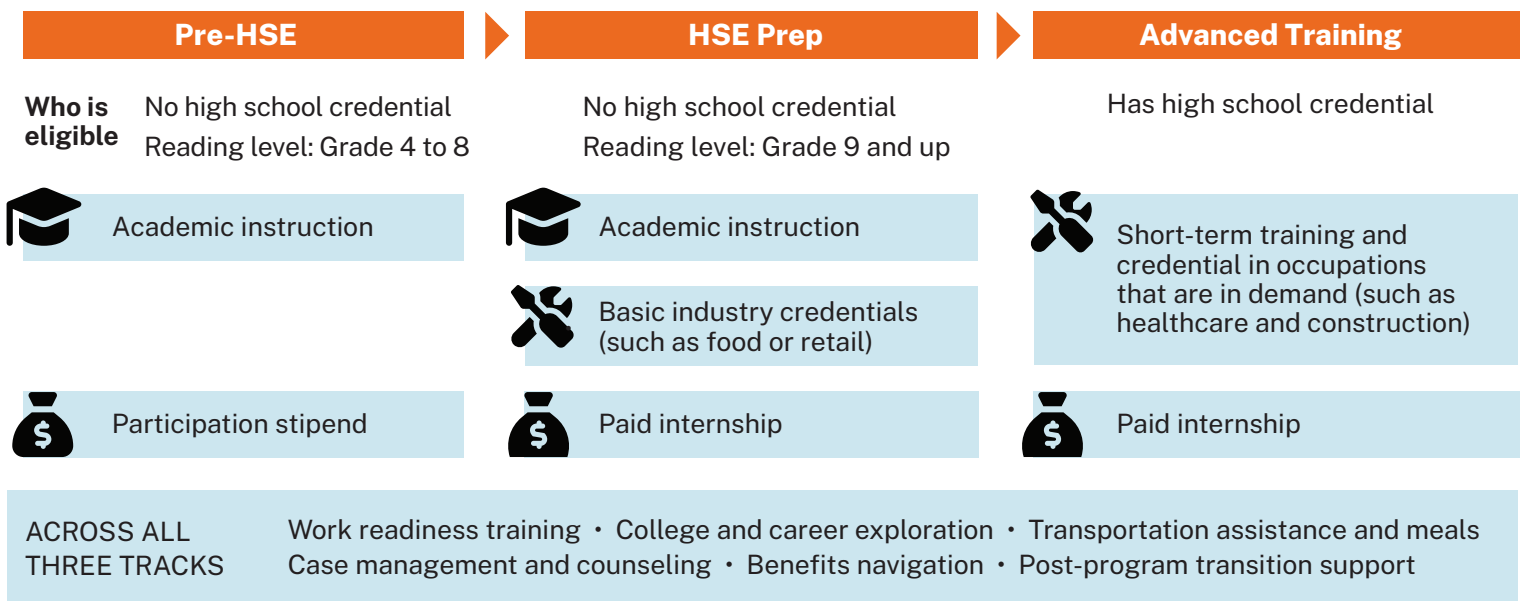
City agencies overseeing Advance & Earn partnered with MDRC in 2024 to study participant experiences and program implementation, with the goal of identifying what was working well and where improvements were needed. The study analyzed administrative data from 10 cohorts from 2020 to 2024, and conducted interviews with nearly 50 staff members and 40 participants between October 2024 and January 2025. A separate advisory group of program participants and alumni helped shape the study design, providing input on data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings.

Who Participated in the Program

From 2020 to 2024, Advance & Earn served nearly 3,900 young people. The average participant was 20 years old. Nearly half of the participants were Black and about 40 percent were Hispanic or Latino, reflecting the overrepresentation of these demographic groups among the program's target population. Only 25 percent had ever had a job. Many participants struggled with academic engagement and habits, program staff members said, due to interrupted schooling at an early age or prolonged disconnection from high school. Participants also faced challenges related to poverty, food and housing insecurity, mental health issues linked to trauma and crisis experiences, and parenting and childcare challenges.

What the Program Offers

Advance & Earn builds on lessons from previous city-funded programs by integrating academic and workforce services into a unified pathway that supports young people from basic skills development through high school equivalency (HSE) attainment to entry into in-demand occupations. The program meets young people where they are through three tracks — each with distinct services delivered in 20-week cohorts — with the opportunity to advance across tracks.



Participation and In-Program Outcomes

Administrative data provide only a partial picture of participant progress: many important participant gains — such as increased confidence, work readiness, and stability — or outcomes achieved outside the program period are not captured.

Pre-HSE	HSE Prep	Advanced Training
1,098 enrolled	1,086 enrolled	2,056 enrolled
PARTICIPATION FOR THOSE WHO ENROLLED		
95% Participated in instruction*	96% Participated in instruction*	80% Participated in instruction*
	66% Participated in internships	68% Participated in internships
KEY OUTCOMES FOR THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED		
28% Advanced literacy score to qualify for HSE Prep	34% Attained HSE credential	68% Earned a credential and/or employment in their field

*Academic and work-readiness instruction for Pre-HSE and HSE Prep; occupational training and readiness for Advanced Training.

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using program data collected between 2020 and 2024.

Implementation Lessons

PARTICIPANTS valued their relationships with staff members, and described the program environment as supportive and nonjudgemental. Small class sizes, one-on-one support, and the opportunity for self-paced learning contrasted with their past school experiences, they said. Stipends and assistance with transportation and meals were crucial for engagement. For many with no prior jobs, internships offered valuable first work experience, though alignment with career goals varied by track. HSE Prep internships were typically in entry-level roles in retail, food service, or administrative work, while Advanced Training placements more often matched participants' aspirations. Supervisor support strongly shaped participant satisfaction across tracks.

PROGRAM PROVIDERS partner with employers and community organizations to support young people navigating complex personal and systemic challenges, while helping them build skills, confidence, and work experience. Amid staffing challenges and evolving participant needs, providers often adapt in real time — blending and tailoring services to meet evolving conditions on the ground. Providers highlighted the need for more centralized guidance, shared tools, and coordinated systems to promote consistency and support cross-site learning.

Looking Forward

Findings from the study highlight both program strengths and opportunities for improvement.

- Participants identified needs for greater flexibility in balancing academics with internships, more comprehensive career exploration and transition support, and more consistent instructional quality across providers.
- Between 2020 and 2024, only a small share of Pre-HSE and HSE Prep participants transitioned into Advanced Training — suggesting a need for stronger supports to build awareness of the full continuum of services, help participants navigate their options, and pursue pathways aligned with their goals.
- Providers emphasized the need to improve: (a) hiring and retention of skilled program staff members; (b) capacity to address systemic barriers like housing and childcare that affect engagement; (c) approaches to building effective employer partnerships at scale; and (d) coordination across providers to enable consistent practices and collaboration.

City agencies and program providers continue to look for ways to improve the Advance & Earn program. Pre-HSE and HSE Prep may be merged into a single academic track, with greater flexibility around internship participation, to better support young people in preparing for their HSE credential. For Advanced Training, 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.



For a complete discussion of this study and its findings, see [“Advancing Opportunities for New York City’s Young People Through the Advance & Earn Program,”](#) available from the MDRC website.