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CENTER FOR HUMAN SERVICES RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY State University of New York

Evaluation of the City of Albany Summer Youth Employment Program

Evaluation of the City of Albany Summer Youth Employment Program

The City of Albany Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is designed to provide summer work and educational enrichment experiences to Albany residents ages 14-18. The goals of the program are to:

- Introduce and prepare youth for the world of work.
- Help youth identify career interests and attain skills and good work habits.
- Provide income to youth, which may also supplement family income.

The program runs five days a week for five weeks. Youth are assigned to one of over 100 worksites based on their skills, interests, and the needs of employers. Types of jobs include camp counselor, office work, landscaping, and maintenance. Youth are paid at an hourly rate.

Additionally, youth participating in the SYEP have the opportunity to attend an enrichment class each week. The "Friday Enrichment Program" offers a financial literacy workshop, a tour of SUNY Albany, a career exploration workshop, and a "Know Your Rights" workshop led by representatives from the Albany Police Department and the Center for Law and Justice. Together, the enrichment classes and the real-world experience of the worksites aim to provide youth with the educational and vocational skills needed to succeed in future employment.

In 2019, the Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) at the University at Albany conducted an evaluation of the SYEP. The evaluation consisted of two components:

- Analysis of academic outcomes of youth entering their freshman year of high school for the years 2008-2018. Youth participating in SYEP were compared with those who never participated in SYEP.
- Analysis of program implementation through surveys of youth and employers (worksites) participating in SYEP in 2019.

In this report, we present the findings from these analyses and provide recommendations for the future.

Methods

Analysis of Academic Outcomes – City School District of Albany Data

The goal of the City School District of Albany (CSDA) data analysis was to examine whether SYEP participation was associated with high school graduation. Part of this analysis was an examination of factors that might predispose students with certain characteristics to participate in SYEP.

We first analyzed data from 13,318 youth who entered high school as freshmen in the CSDA from 2008–2018 to identify trends in SYEP participation, including the student-level characteristics that are significantly associated with SYEP participation. Of these students, 3,467 (26%) had participated in SYEP at least once, and 1,809 (14%) had participated in SYEP more than once.

We then analyzed a smaller population of 3,533 students who had graduation data available.¹ Of these students included in the graduation rate analysis, 1,706 (48%) participated in SYEP at least once from 2011–2017, and 972 (28%) had participated in SYEP more than once. Graduation data were available through 2018, so SYEP participation was examined through 2017 (the previous summer).

Data obtained from the CSDA in addition to graduation status include: demographics (race/ethnicity, gender, zip code), grade point average, being an English language learner, receiving special education services, being economically disadvantaged (as defined by receiving free or reduced lunch), and living in three high-need neighborhoods: the South End, Arbor Hill, and West Hill.²

Youth and Employer Surveys

We developed surveys for youth and employers participating in SYEP in 2019. The purpose of the surveys was to understand the benefits of participating in SYEP, areas where SYEP may need to be changed, and how satisfied youth and employers were with their experience.

Surveys for youth included questions about their experience with SYEP, their attitudes about work and school, and any impact of SYEP on youths' ideas about their future. During the last two weeks of the program, SYEP coaches distributed surveys to over 1,000 youth at their worksites. Forty percent (n=442) of all surveys were returned.

Surveys for employers included questions about their experience working with youth and the support they received from SYEP coaches. Online surveys were distributed to the 102 employers participating in SYEP in 2019 upon conclusion of the program. Three subsequent reminders and a mailed hardcopy of the survey were sent to anyone who did not respond. Sixty-nine percent (n=70) of all surveys were returned.³

Findings

Here, we present the results of the graduation rate analysis and the results of the surveys of youth participating in SYEP in 2019. Findings from the surveys help us to understand the mechanisms through which SYEP impacts youths' educational achievement. Finally, we present the findings from the surveys of employers participating in SYEP in 2019.

Educational Achievement

Sample Characteristics

Prior to analyzing the relationship between SYEP participation and graduation rates, it is important to have a broader understanding of who does and does not participate in SYEP. Table 1 shows the demographics for CSDA students in the graduation rate analysis sample who did and did not participate in SYEP at least once for the years

¹ Students were eliminated from the total dataset of 13,318 if they did not have graduation data available because they were still enrolled in the CSDA or had transferred to a non-CSDA school or program (n=9,431) or if they did not have complete demographic information (n=357).

² These three neighborhoods are identified as "target neighborhoods" throughout the report.

³ An additional six surveys were returned with insufficient data for analysis or after analyses were completed and are therefore excluded.

2011–2017. Slightly more youth who participated in SYEP are female, Black, and experience economic disadvantage; their average GPA is about two points higher than youth who did not participate in SYEP. Similar percentages of SYEP and non-SYEP youth receive special education and ESL; similar percentages reside in one of the three target neighborhoods.

Table 1: Demographics of SYEP Participants and Non-Participants

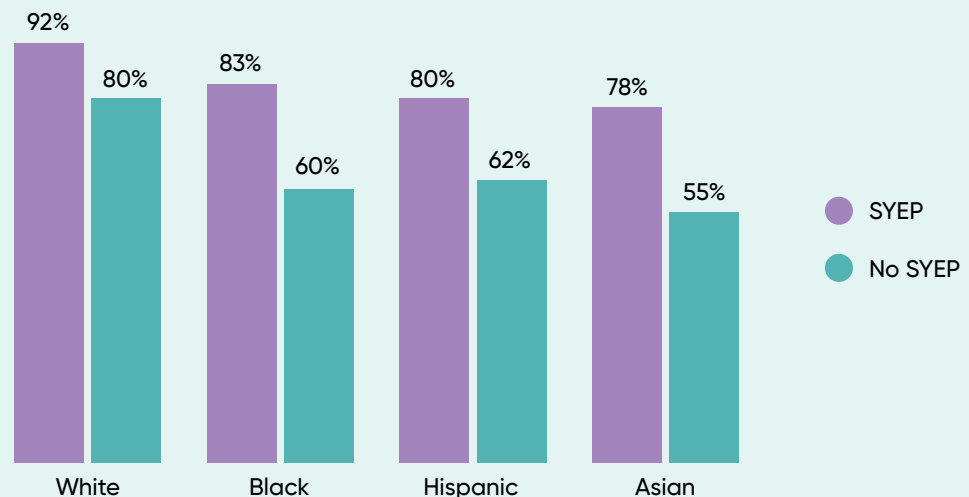
| Variable | SYEP Youth n=3,467 | Non-SYEP Youth n=9,851 |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Gender*** (n=13,318) | | |
| Female | 51% | 46% |
| Male | 49% | 54% |
| Race/Ethnicity*** (n=13,310) | | |
| Black | 69% | 48% |
| White | 14% | 25% |
| Hispanic | 10% | 17% |
| Asian | 5% | 8% |
| Multiracial | 2% | 2% |
| Reside in Target Neighborhood*** (n=13,166) | | |
| | 45% | 48% |
| Average GPA^o (n=7,004) | | |
| GPA*** | 75.5 | 73.3 |
| Risk factors | | |
| Special education (n=13,318) | 14% | 15% |
| English as a Second Language (ESL)*** (n=13,298) | 3% | 5% |
| Economic disadvantage*** (n=13,318) | 34% | 23% |

***statistically significant p<.001

^oGPA is for the last school year available

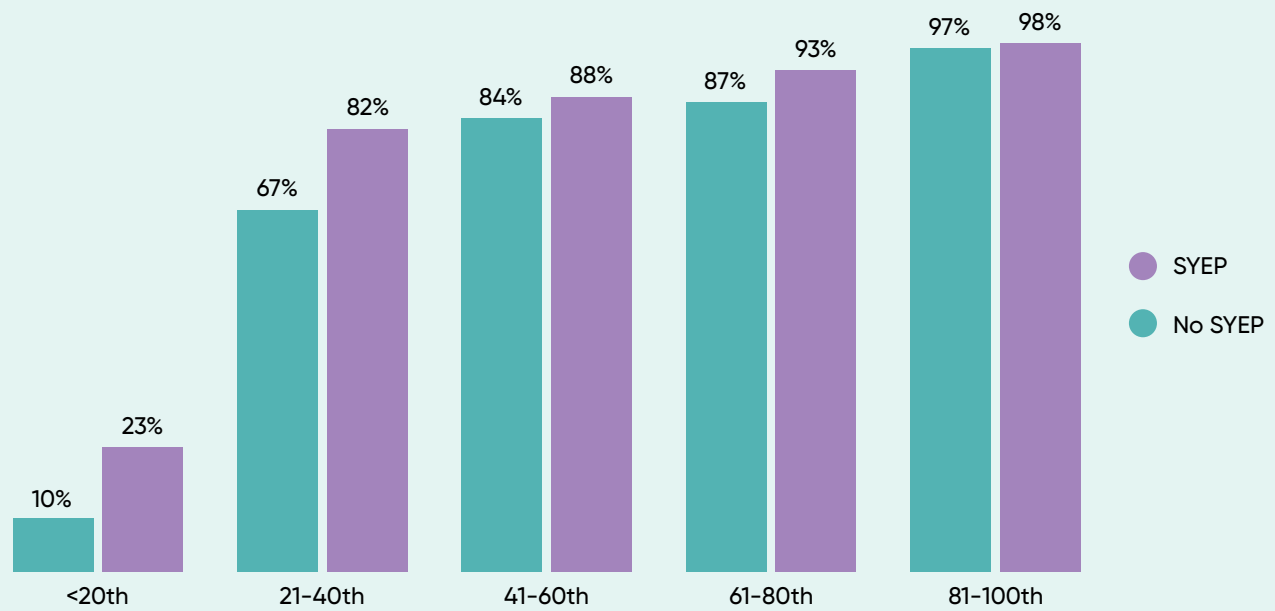
An analysis of graduation rates revealed that SYEP participants were 66% more likely than non-participants to graduate from high school, after adjusting for factors such as demographics and GPA. SYEP participation had a greater effect on graduation rates for non-white, non-Hispanic/Latino students (see **Figure 1**) and for students with GPAs in the lower 20% of CSDA students (see **Figure 2**).⁴

Figure 1. Average Graduation Rates of SYEP Participants and Non-Participants by Race/Ethnicity



⁴ The numbers in all figures are shown without adjusting for selection factors.

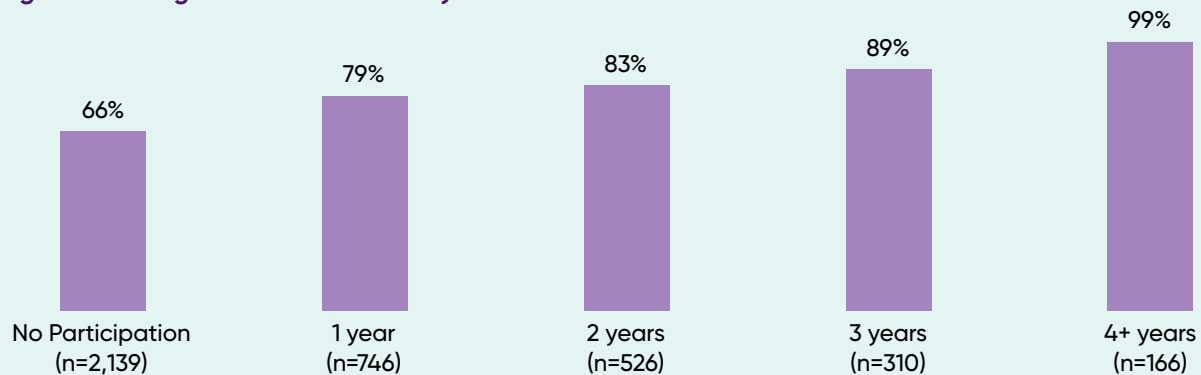
Figure 2. Average Graduation Rates of SYEP Participants and Non-Participants by GPA Percentile



Additionally, SYEP participation had a greater effect on graduation rates for students residing in the target neighborhoods. Further analysis revealed that students with low GPAs who live in one of the target neighborhoods were as likely to graduate as those with similar GPAs who do not live in a target neighborhood if they participated in SYEP.

Furthermore, graduation rates increased consistently with years of SYEP participation. Only 66% of students who never participated in SYEP graduated from the CSDA, compared to nearly all of the students who participated for four or more years (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Average Graduation Rates by Years in SYEP



Youth Survey

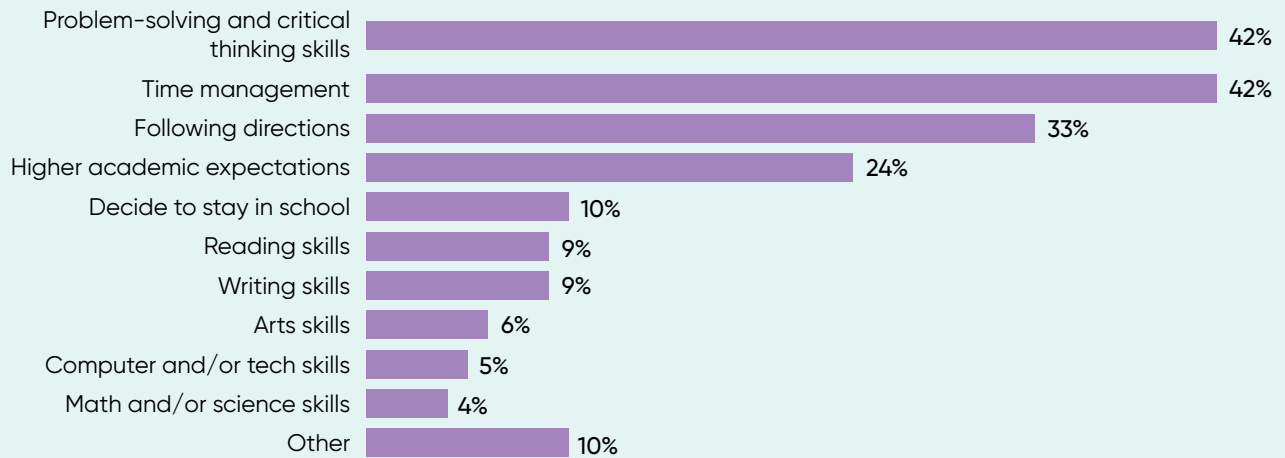
Sample Characteristics

The majority of survey respondents indicated that SYEP was their first work experience (see Appendix for a full description of the sample). Seventy-one percent of youth agreed or strongly agreed that there was a good fit between what their summer job offered them and what they were looking for in a job; youth who worked as camp counselors were significantly more likely than those in other positions to agree that their job was a good fit (80% of camp counselors versus 58% of those in other positions). The perception by youth of whether or not their job was a good fit affected the perceived impact of the SYEP as indicated in the analyses below.

Perceived Impact on Academics. The majority of youth (81%) agreed or strongly agreed that their experience in SYEP has encouraged them to do well in school. Those from the target neighborhoods were significantly more likely than their peers in other neighborhoods to agree with this statement (86% versus 77%).

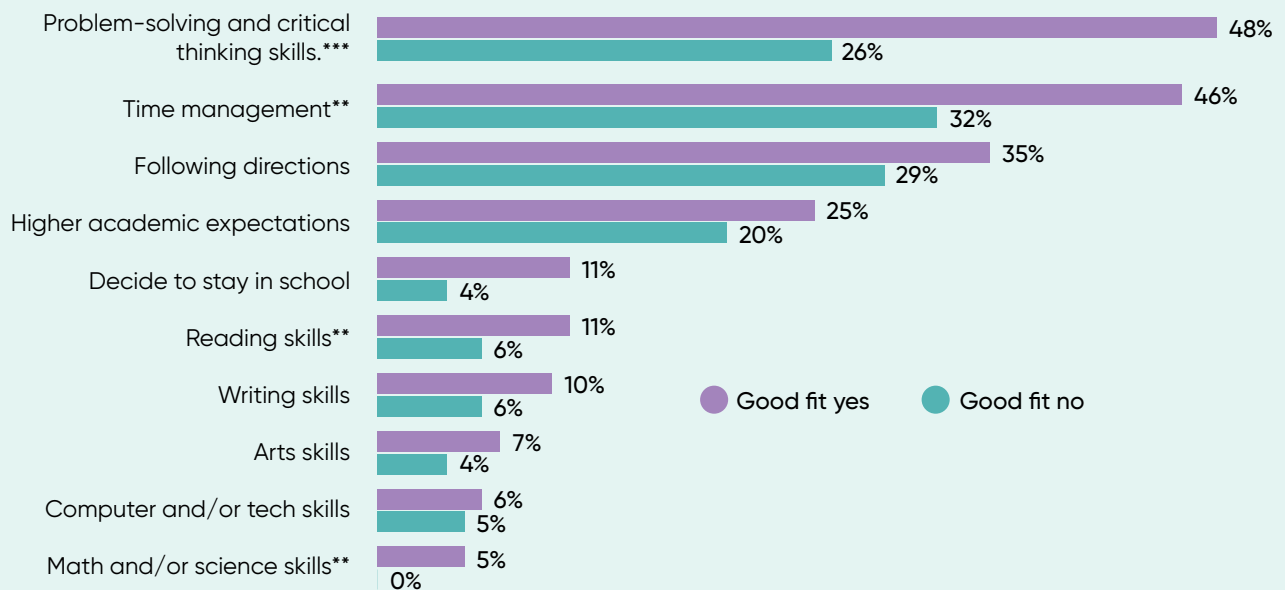
The majority of youth (79%) reported that SYEP helped them with at least one academic skill, most commonly problem-solving and critical thinking skills, time management, and following directions (see **Figure 4**). Nearly one-quarter indicated that the program helped them have higher academic expectations for themselves. One in ten said the program helped them decide to stay in school.

Figure 4. Academic Skills in which SYEP Helped Participants



Reports that SYEP had improved certain skills were related to perceptions of the job being a “good fit.” In particular, youth who agreed that their job had been a good fit were dramatically more likely to report that SYEP participation helped them strengthen their problem-solving and critical thinking skills (see **Figure 5**).

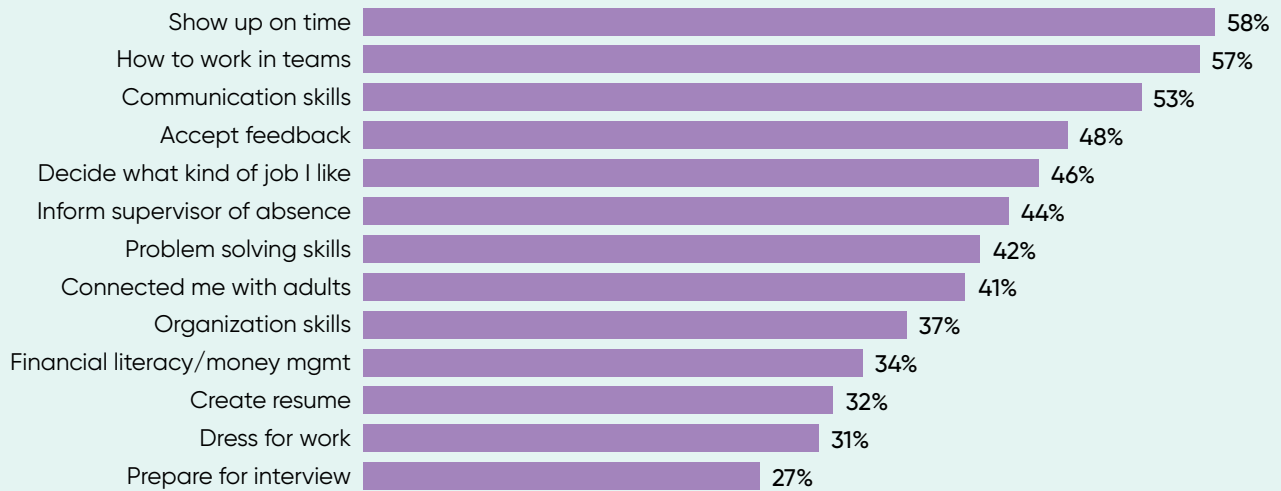
Figure 5. Academic Skills in which SYEP Helped Participants, by Perceptions of “Good Fit”



* p <= 0.05 & p > 0.01, ** p <= 0.01 & p > 0.001, *** p <= 0.001

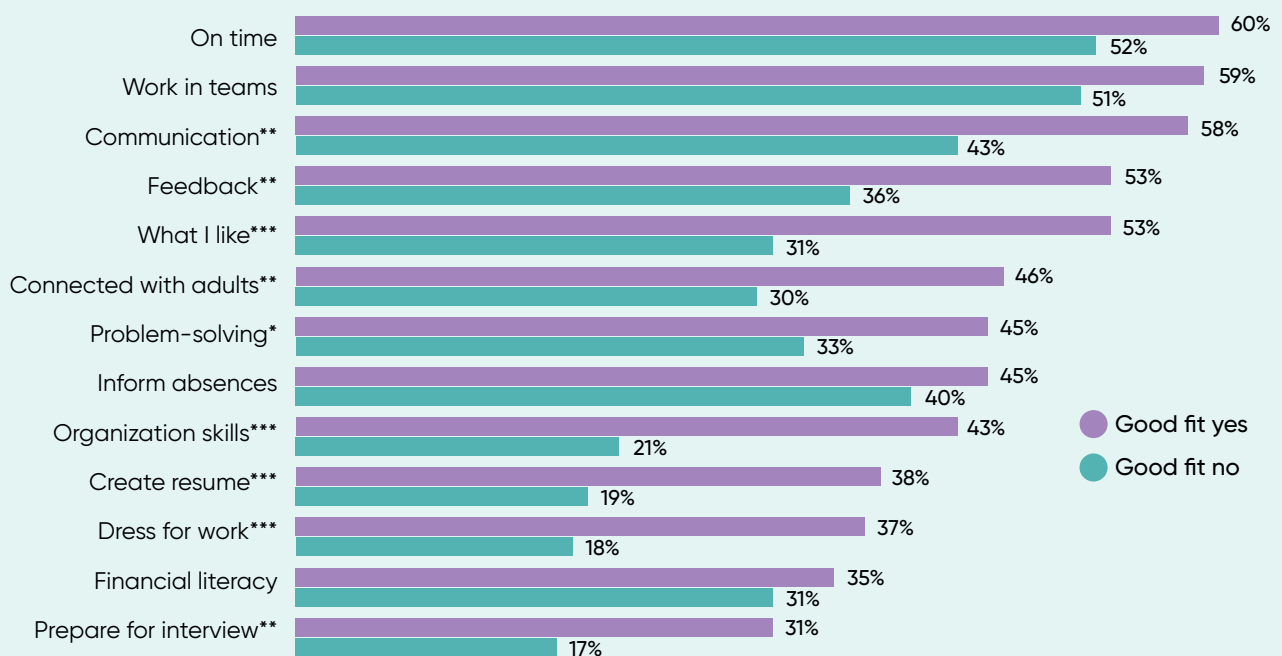
Perceived Impact on Future Employability. Ninety-four percent of respondents reported at least one way in which SYEP helped them prepare for future employment, including teaching them to show up on time, how to work in teams, and communication skills (see **Figure 6**). The median number of future employment skills that SYEP helped respondents with was five.

Figure 6. Skills with which SYEP Helped Youth Prepare for Future Employment



Youth who agreed that their summer job was a good fit were also significantly more likely than those who disagreed to report that SYEP helped them in the following ways: taught them communication skills, taught them how to accept and respond to feedback, helped them decide what kind of job they liked, taught them problem-solving skills, connected them with adults, taught them organization skills, helped them create a resume, taught them how to dress for work, and taught them how to prepare for a job interview (see **Figure 7**).

Figure 7. Skills with which SYEP Helped Youth Prepare for Future Employment, by Perceptions of Summer Job Being a “Good Fit”

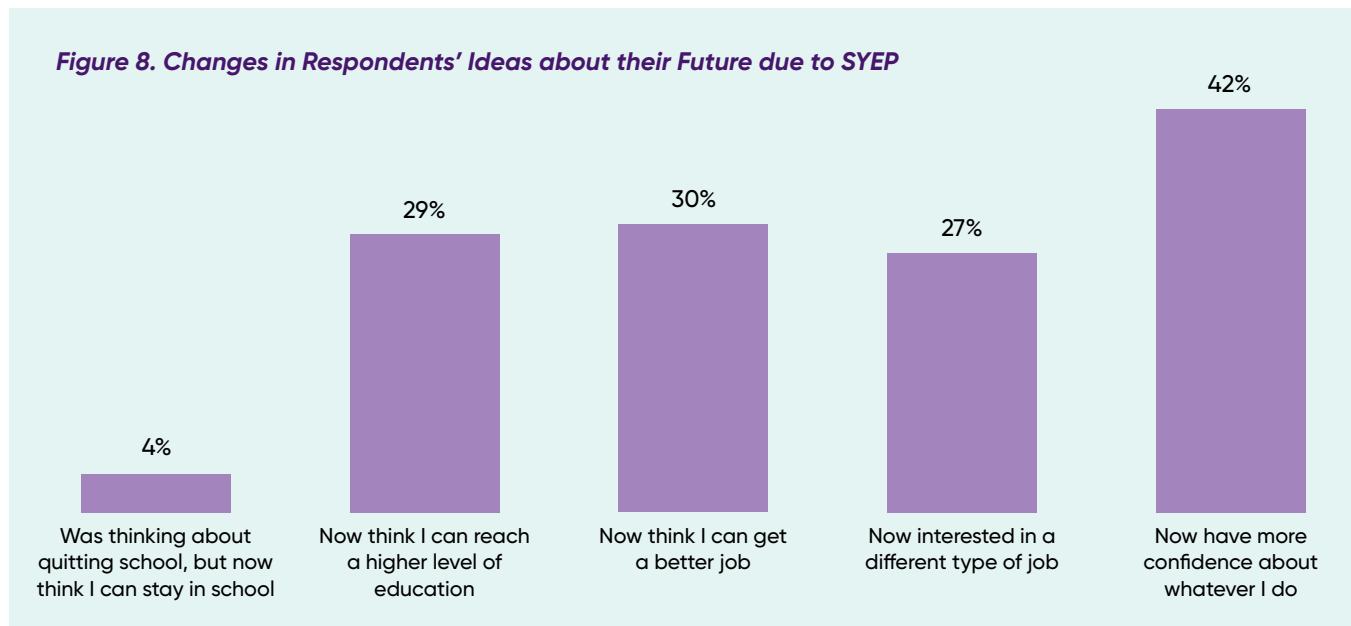


* p <= 0.05 & p > 0.01, ** p <= 0.01 & p > 0.001, *** p <= 0.001

Three-quarters of the respondents reported that their experience in SYEP had made them think about different careers; 86% reported that their experience helped them prepare for a future job. Ninety-one percent agreed that through their participation in SYEP, they gained skills that may be needed in future jobs. These responses did not significantly vary by living in a target neighborhood.

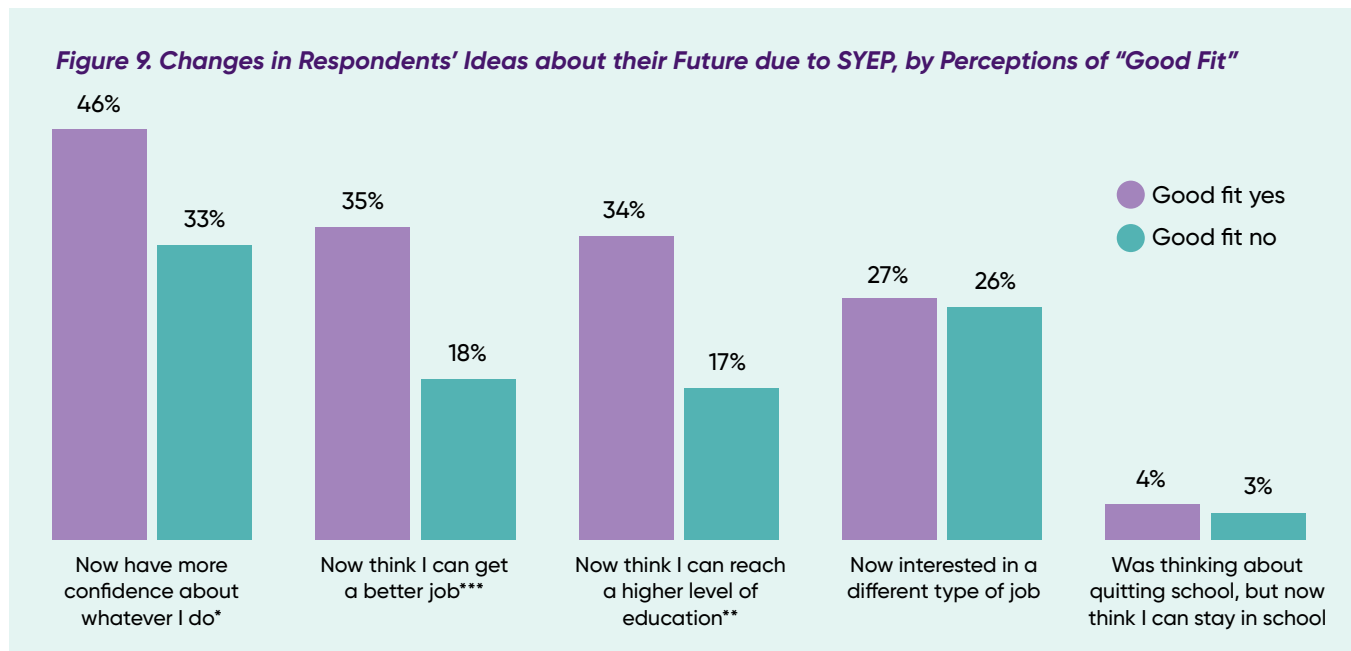
When asked how their ideas about the future changed because of SYEP, 42% of youth reported that they now have more confidence in whatever they do (see **Figure 8**). Between one-quarter and one-third reported that they now think they can reach a higher level of education, that they now think they can get a better job, and that they are now interested in a different type of job. Increases in confidence were significantly more likely to be reported by SYEP participants whose grades were As and Bs (45%) compared with those whose grades were Cs or lower (32%).

Figure 8. Changes in Respondents' Ideas about their Future due to SYEP



Youth perceptions about their future were also related to whether or not they perceived their SYEP job as a good fit. Youth who felt their job was a good fit were significantly more likely to report that they now think they can reach a higher level of education or get a better job (see **Figure 9**).

Figure 9. Changes in Respondents' Ideas about their Future due to SYEP, by Perceptions of "Good Fit"



* p <= 0.05 & p > 0.01, ** p <= 0.01 & p > 0.001, *** p <= 0.001

Friday Enrichment

Youth participating in SYEP have the opportunity to attend an enrichment class each week. The “Friday Enrichment Program” offers a financial literacy workshop, a tour of SUNY Albany, a career exploration workshop, and a “Know Your Rights” workshop led by representatives from the Albany Police Department and the Center for Law and Justice. Camp counselors (constituting almost half of respondents) did not generally participate in Friday Enrichment and are excluded from these analyses.⁵

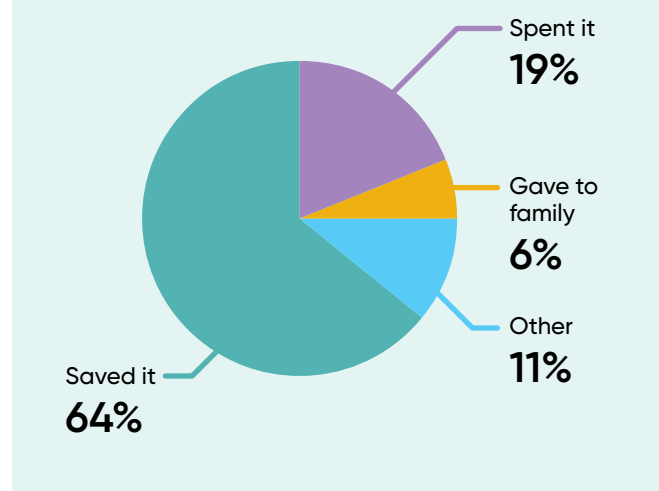
Two-thirds of the youth who participated agreed or strongly agreed that they learned a lot from the Friday Enrichment programs (67%), and that the Friday Enrichment programs gave them knowledge and/or skills that will help prepare them for future work (68%).

Youth living in the target neighborhoods were significantly more likely than youth in other neighborhoods to agree that they learned a lot from the Friday Enrichment programs (77% versus 57%) and that the programs gave them knowledge or skills that would help them prepare for future work (76% versus 61%).

Earnings from SYEP

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of youth reported that they saved the money they earned from working with SYEP, while 19% reported spending it (see **Figure 10**). Youth from the target neighborhoods were significantly less likely to report saving their money (57% versus 71%), and more likely to report “other” (16% versus 5%). The data do not allow for a more detailed understanding of what “other” means.

Figure 10. What SYEP Participants did with Money Earned



Overall satisfaction

Ninety-four percent of the youth reported that they were satisfied with the work experience they gained from their summer job and 95% were satisfied with their participation in SYEP. Eighty-five percent said they wanted to participate in SYEP next summer – 51% of these wanted to participate in the same job, while 49% wanted to participate at a different job. Of those who wanted to participate next summer, camp counselors were significantly more likely than other participants to report that they wanted to participate in the same job (60% versus 44%).

Of the 15% who said they did not want to participate in SYEP next summer, 65% said this was because they expected to have a better job, while 18% said they would be 19 next summer and not eligible to participate; 10% expect to be in school; 8% did not expect to be living in Albany. Only 8% said they did not want to participate again because they did not have a good experience.⁶

⁵ Camp counselors were required to be at work on Fridays and were therefore not available to participate in the Enrichment programs.

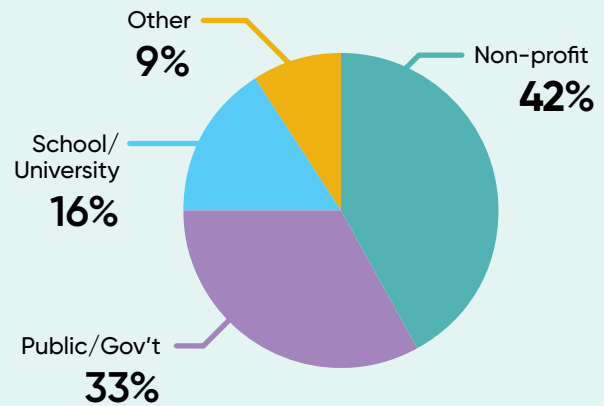
⁶ These responses are not mutually exclusive; respondents were allowed indicate all responses that applied.

Employer Surveys

Characteristics of Organizations

Most of the 102 employers who participated in SYEP in the summer of 2019 had participated before; nearly three quarters (73%) had participated five or more times. **Figure 11** shows the types of organizations the employers represent. The number of youth that each organization employed varied from one, to more than fifteen; 34% of the organizations employed 2-5 youth, and 31% employed 6-15 youth. Most employers (79%) indicated they received the number of youth they expected. Forty-seven percent identified specific youth they wanted to work with; nearly all employers (94%) received some or all of these youth. Nearly all of the employers (97%) felt they were well or very well prepared to work with the youth; this is not surprising given that most employers had participated in SYEP before.

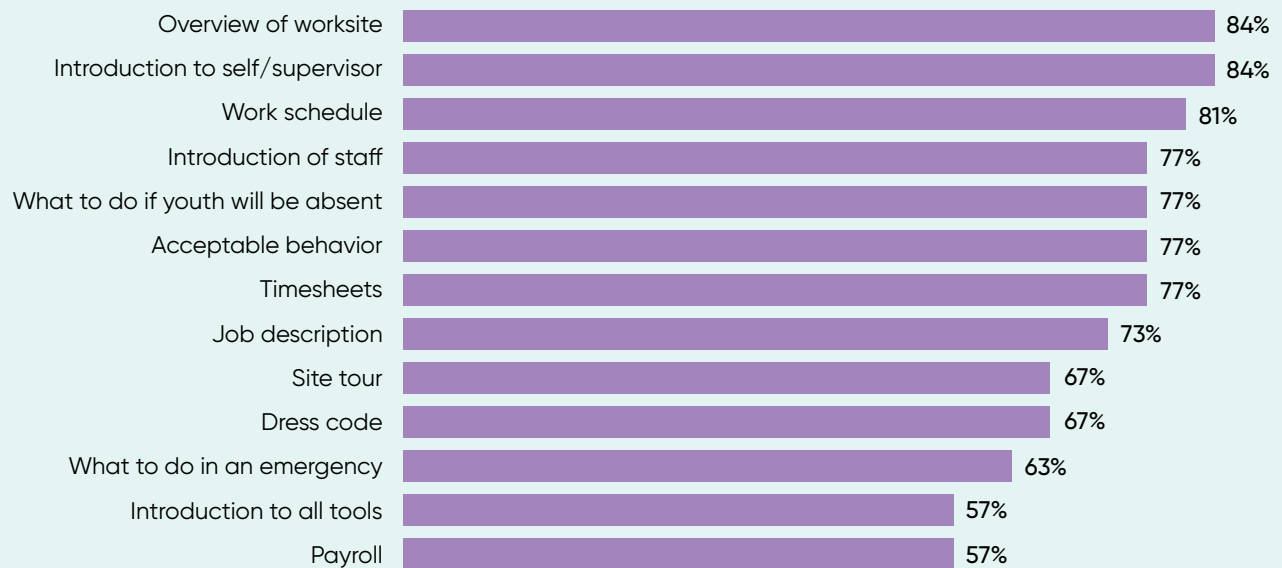
Figure 11. Type of Organization Represented



Orientation to Worksite

Employers are required by their worksite agreement with SYEP to provide an orientation to youth, including, for example, an overview of the worksite, a job description, the work schedule, acceptable behavior, and what to do if youth will be absent. **Figure 12** shows the percentage of employers who report providing each of these components.

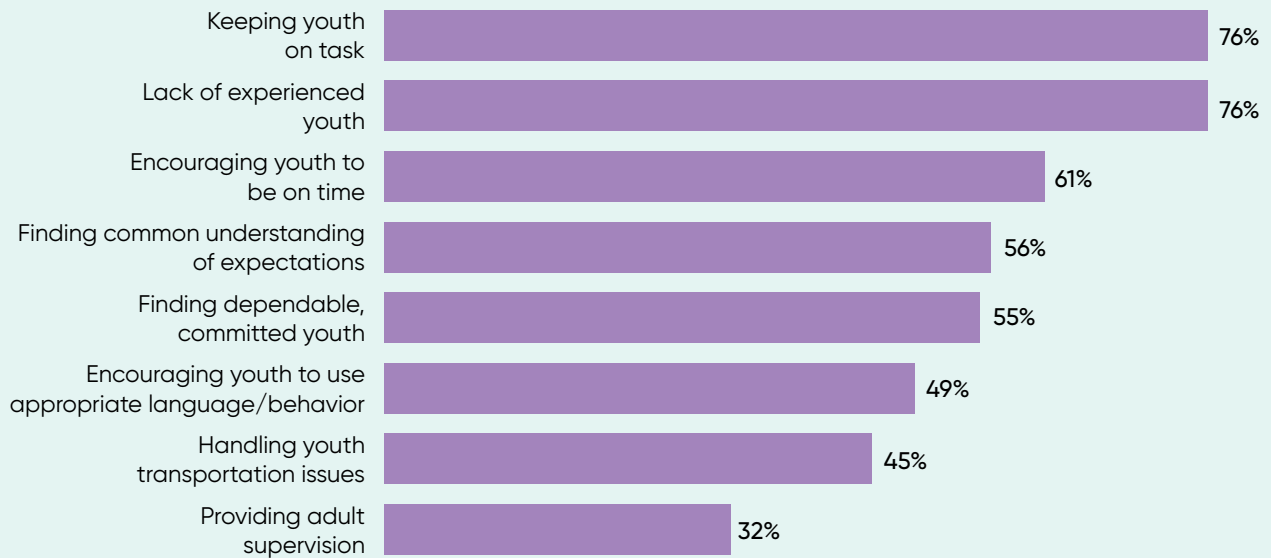
Figure 12. Did your Worksite Orientation Include...



Working with Youth

Employers indicated some challenges with participation in SYEP, including keeping youth on task; youths' lack of experience; encouraging youth to be on time; finding a common understanding of expectations; finding dependable, committed youth; and encouraging youth to use appropriate language and behavior (see **Figure 13**).⁷ These findings are not surprising given that nearly half the youth had not worked for pay before this summer.

⁷ There were no statistically significant differences between the challenges indicated and the number of years an organization has participated in SYEP, the number of youth an organization employed, and whether or not an organization identified specific youth to engage.

Figure 13. Challenges to Employing Youth

In spite of these challenges, most employers positively endorsed statements about youths' behavior. It may be that employers worked to address the challenges they cited, or that youth exceeded what may have been relatively moderate expectations. More than 90% of employers agreed or strongly agreed that a majority of youth:

- Understood the responsibilities of participating in this worksite.
- Were engaged with the worksite.
- Reported to work at the appropriate time and place.
- Dressed appropriately.
- Had a positive attitude.
- Accepted feedback from supervisors.
- Completed tasks appropriately.
- Worked well with others.
- Asked appropriate questions.
- Behaved in a professional manner at the worksite.

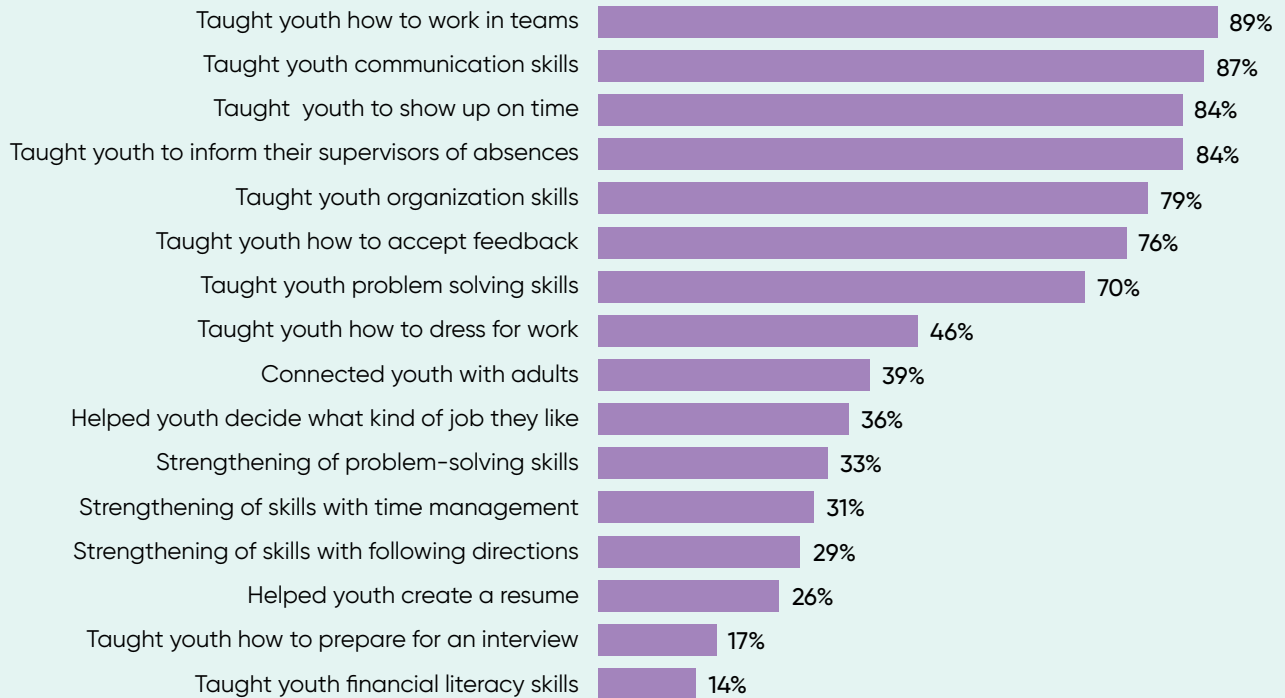
About 80% of employers agreed or strongly agreed that youth called when late or absent and that youth showed initiative.⁸

⁸ There were no statistically significant differences between endorsements of youths' behavior and the number of years an organization has participated in SYEP, the number of youth an organization employed, and whether or not an organization identified specific youth to engage.

Preparation for Future Employment

Consistent with the notion that employers may have addressed any challenges they identified, 84% indicated that their worksite taught youth to show up on time and to inform their supervisor of any absences. **Figure 14** shows the percentage of employers who believe their worksite provided specific skills to youth.

Figure 14. Did your Worksite Provide the Following Skills?



More than 75% of employers thought their worksite taught youth communication and organization skills, how to work in teams, how to show up on time and inform their supervisor of any absences, and how to accept feedback from supervisors; recall that smaller but relatively high percentages of youth also endorsed these statements. These indicators speak to the goals of SYEP to prepare youth for the world of work, and to help youth attain skills and good work habits. Employers generally seem to believe they are fulfilling these goals. Skills such as resume development, interview preparation, and financial literacy may be provided by the Friday Enrichment Program more so than the worksites.

Overall Satisfaction

Although there were some challenges, employers generally felt positively about working with the youth. It is therefore initially surprising that 71% of employers indicated they would not hire the youth after SYEP ends. However, over 50% reported this is because the youth are too young.⁹ The age of the youth may speak to the earlier finding of youths’ lack of experience being a challenge for employers.

About 95% of the employers indicated they would participate in SYEP again, and would encourage other organizations to participate. This speaks to a positive experience with the program and the youth involved.

However, it is notable that about one-third of employers felt they were given little or no information necessary to plan a high-quality program. About one quarter of employers indicated that questions or concerns they had were not addressed by SYEP coaches appropriately or efficiently.

⁹ About 30% indicated this is because the organization could not afford it; 14% indicated other reasons.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This evaluation sought to determine the value of SYEP for participating youth and employers. We analyzed data from the City School District of Albany, and surveys of youth and employers participating in SYEP in 2019. Findings revealed positive impacts of SYEP in a number of areas, including graduation rates and skill development for future employment; findings also suggest the importance of the Friday Enrichment Program in preparing youth for future employment.

Impact of SYEP

Graduation rates

- SYEP participants were more likely than non-participants to graduate from high school.
- SYEP participation had a greater effect on graduation rates for non-white, non-Hispanic/Latino students, for students with GPAs in the lower 20% of CSDA students, and for students residing in target neighborhoods.
- Graduation rates increased with years of SYEP participation.

Skill Development and Job Preparation

- A majority of youth reported that SYEP had helped them with at least one academic skill, most commonly problem-solving and critical thinking skills, time management, and following directions.
- Nearly all youth reported at least one way in which SYEP helped them prepare for future employment; youth reported gaining a median of 5 employment-related skills.
- Most employers felt their worksite taught youth skills, most commonly working as a team, communication skills, and showing up on time.
- Youth who felt their summer job was a good fit were significantly more likely than others to report that:
 - » SYEP helped them with skill development.
 - » Because of SYEP, they now think they can reach a higher level of education or get a better job.

Friday Enrichment Program

- Two-thirds of youth indicated that they learned a lot from Friday Enrichment.
- Two-thirds of youth indicated that Friday Enrichment gave them knowledge and/or skills that will help prepare them for future work.
- Youth who reported learning a lot from Friday Enrichment were significantly more likely to say that SYEP helped them prepare for future employment.

The goals of SYEP are to:

- Introduce and prepare youth for the world of work.
- Help youth identify career interests and attain skills and good work habits.
- Provide income to youth, which may also supplement family income.

Findings indicate that SYEP is achieving its goals of introducing and preparing youth for the world of work, and helping youth attain skills and good work habits. While SYEP provides income to youth, the data do not allow for an in-depth understanding of how youth use their earnings (e.g., save or spend on basic necessities).

While the findings speak to the benefits of SYEP, they also indicate some areas for improvement, in both programming and further evaluation.

Recommendations

For Future SYEP Sessions

- Continue to promote SYEP participation among youth who reside in high-need communities and are experiencing academic challenges.
- Solicit additional information about youths' interests and what they are looking for in a job to best match youth with a worksite ("good fit").
- Consider a means of offering the Friday Enrichment program to youth at all placements (e.g., camp counselors).
- Implement more consistent and responsive means of communication with the employers to address worksite challenges.

For Further Evaluation

- Conduct focus groups or interviews with youth and employers to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of job roles and responsibilities, skill attainment, and impact of SYEP participation on academics.
- Develop more rigorous procedures of survey data collection to increase response rates among youth.
- Conduct a pre-post survey to more clearly discern the impact of SYEP participation and any changes in youths' attitudes and behaviors over the course of their employment.
- Establish a data sharing agreement with SYEP to obtain youth application information.

Appendix A

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The demographics of youth participating in SYEP in 2019 are consistent with those participating in earlier years; over half the youth are female, Black, and reside in a target neighborhood (see **Table 1A**). Also consistent with earlier years, 48% of youth had participated in SYEP before.

Table 1A. Survey Respondent Characteristics

| Variable | SYEP Youth n=442 |
|--|---------------------|
| Gender | n=441 |
| Female | 56% |
| Male | 42% |
| Race/Ethnicity | n=441 |
| Black | 59% |
| White | 12% |
| Hispanic | 9% |
| Asian | 6% |
| Multiracial | 9% |
| Reside in Target Neighborhood | n=421 |
| | 53% |
| Employment History | n=437 |
| Never worked for pay | 46% |
| Previously worked only in SYEP | 40% |
| Previously worked only non-SYEP job | 6% |
| Previously worked for SYEP and worked a non-SYEP job | 8% |
| School Year Activities | n=442 |
| Organized sports | 46% |
| Part-time job | 14% |
| Afterschool programs or clubs | 39% |
| Receive tutoring | 11% |
| Currently in Summer School | n=439 |
| Yes | 16% |
| No | 84% |
| Grades | n=389 |
| As and Bs | 76% |
| Cs, Ds, and Fs | 24% |

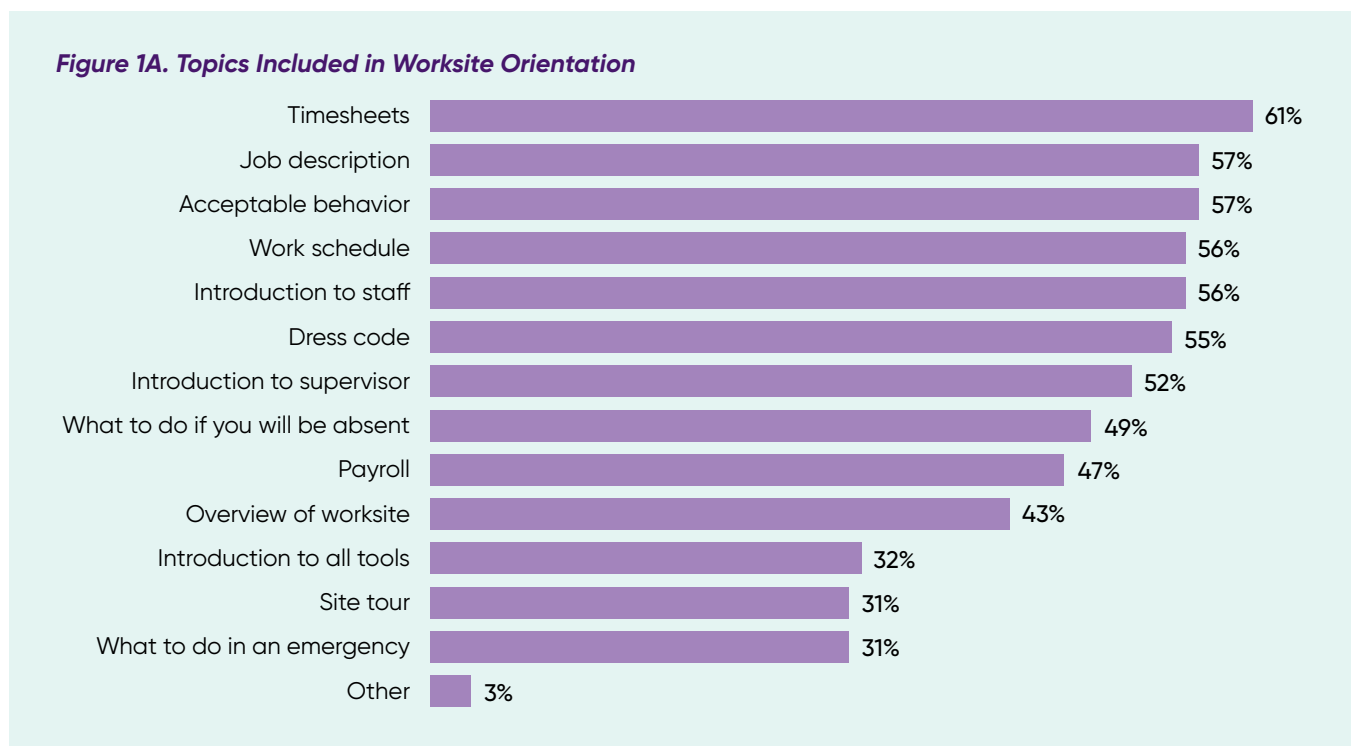
Youth living in a target neighborhood are at greater risk of poor academic and employment outcomes. Among survey respondents, those in the target neighborhoods were also more likely to report that their grades in school were mostly Cs, Ds, or Fs (29% versus 18% of those in non-target neighborhoods).

Work Experience in 2019 SYEP

The most common SYEP position reported was camp counselor (47% of respondents). Youth from the targeted neighborhoods were somewhat more likely to be placed as camp counselors than youth from other neighborhoods (55% versus 47%). The second-most common SYEP position was working in maintenance (16%). All of the other categories of employment were very small. Eight percent of survey respondents did not report what type of position they had.¹⁰

Seventy-one percent of youth agreed or strongly agreed that there was a good fit between what their summer job offered them and what they were looking for in a job; youth who worked as camp counselors were significantly more likely than those in other positions to agree that their job was a good fit (80% of camp counselors versus 58% of those in other positions).

Most respondents reported at least some degree of worksite orientation, including timesheets, job description, discussion of acceptable behavior, work schedule, introduction of staff, dress code, and an introduction to the supervisor (all over 50%) (see **Figure 1A**). Fewer respondents (less than one-third) reported that their orientation included an introduction to all tools, equipment, and safety-related issues; a site tour; or what to do in an emergency.



Twelve percent of youth said their workplace orientation did not include any of these things. The median number of topics covered in the workplace orientation was seven.

Attitudes Towards Work and Education

Respondents overwhelmingly reported that education was a high priority, with 100% reporting that it was important or very important to graduate from high school, and 93% reporting that it was important or very important to go to college and to graduate from college. The majority reported plans to go to college after high school (68%); 18% reported that they did not have a plan yet, and 9% reported that they planned to work full-time (see **Figure 2A**). This did not significantly vary by living in a target neighborhood.

¹⁰ This distribution may reflect that of survey respondents more so than that of all SYEP youth (recall that 40% of youth responded to the survey).

Post-secondary plans were significantly related to self-reported grades, however. Seventy-six percent of students with As and Bs planned to go to college, while 15% did not have a plan; comparatively, only 46% of those with Cs, Ds, or Fs planned to go to college, and 28% indicated they did not have a plan. The students with Cs, Ds, or Fs were more likely to report that they planned to work full-time after graduation compared to their peers with better grades (20% versus 6%).

Figure 2A. Plans Right After High School

