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### Albany's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Improves Graduation Rates Among At-Risk Youth

Center for Human Services Research, University at Albany

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# Albany's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Improves Graduation Rates Among At-Risk Youth

The City of Albany's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is designed to provide summer work experiences to Albany residents ages 14-18. The goals of the program are to prepare youth for the world of work, help them identify career interests and develop skills, and provide them with income. The program runs five days a week for five weeks.

The goal of the following analysis was to gain a better understanding if participation in SYEP has an impact on graduation rates for youth in the City of Albany School District (CSDA), particularly those at elevated risk of dropping out of high school.

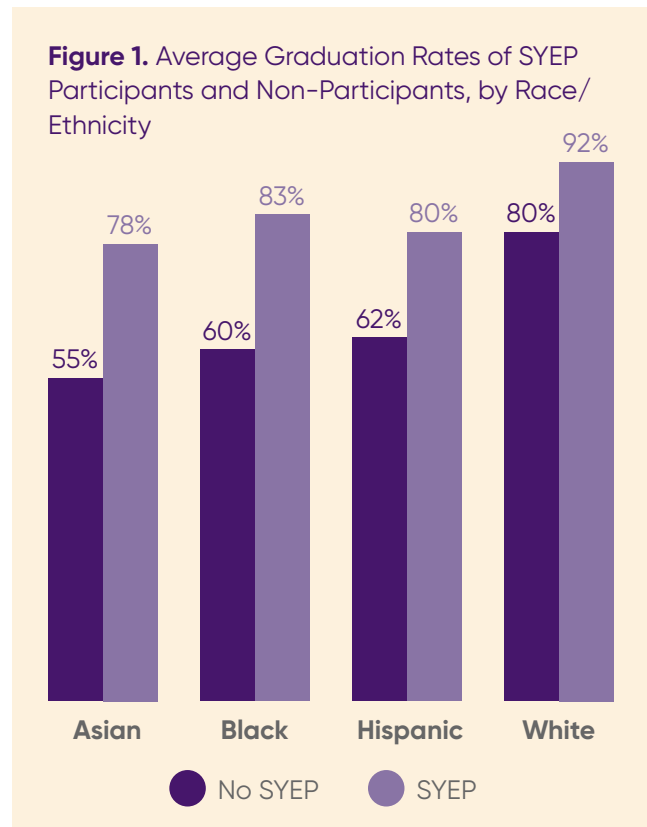
The study sample consisted of 3,533 youth who entered high school as a freshman in the CSDA between 2008 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> Of these youth, 1,706 (48%) participated at least once in SYEP between 2011-2017.

Analyses were conducted to examine the factors associated with graduation versus leaving school, and how the influence of these factors on graduation was affected by participation in SYEP.

**SYEP participation was found to be significantly associated with the likelihood of graduation.** SYEP participants were 66% more likely to graduate from high school than non-participants. This effect was independent of other factors that are known to influence graduation rates, such as gender, race/ethnicity, Grade Point Average (GPA), being an English language learner, receiving special

education services, receiving free or reduced lunch, or living in an impoverished neighborhood<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, SYEP participation had a greater effect on graduation for non-white or Hispanic/Latino students than for non-Hispanic white students (See Figure 1), and a greater effect for students with GPAs in the bottom 20% of CSDA students (See Figure 2).



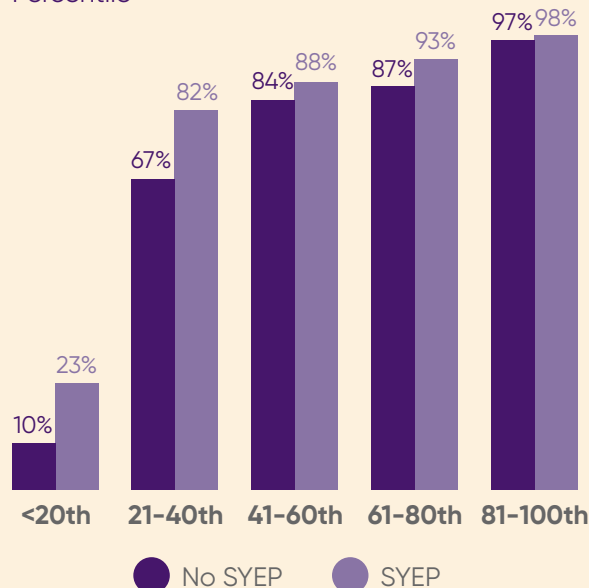
<sup>1</sup> Youth were eliminated from a total dataset of 13,318 if they were still enrolled in CSDA or if they transferred to a non-CSDA school or program (n=9,431) or if they did not have complete demographic information (n=357).

<sup>2</sup> Arbor Hill, West Hill, and the South End (approximated in the data by zip codes 12202, 12206, 12207, and 12210).

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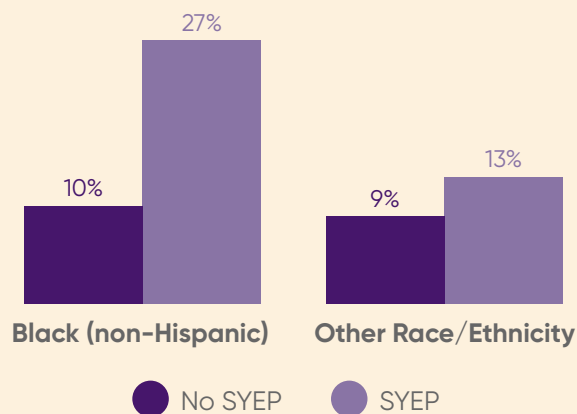
Research Brief  
August 2019

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



Finally, the benefit of SYEP to the youth with the lowest GPAs was also more pronounced among African-American youth and those living in impoverished zip codes. Among students with the lowest 20% of GPAs, SYEP participation boosted non-Hispanic Black youth significantly above their non-Black peers in terms of graduation rates (see Figure 3). Furthermore, students with low GPAs who lived in impoverished neighborhoods were as likely to graduate as those with similar GPAs in non-impoverished neighborhoods if they participated in SYEP.

**Figure 3.** Differences in Graduation Rates, Students below 20th Percentile for GPA, by SYEP Participation and Race/Ethnicity



These findings suggest that participation in SYEP not only increases the likelihood of graduation, but imparts the most benefit to certain groups of students who have a higher risk of leaving school before graduating – students of color, those with low GPAs, and those residing in impoverished neighborhoods.

The findings in this research brief are from a larger study of the Summer Youth Employment Program completed by the Center for Human Services Research in the summer of 2019. A full report of the study findings will be available Fall 2019.

## About the Center for Human Services Research

The Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) is a research department at the University at Albany. CHSR has over 20 years of experience conducting evaluation research, designing information systems and informing program and policy development for a broad range of agencies serving vulnerable populations. Rigorous research and evaluation methods, strong relationships with project partners, and timely, accurate and objective information are hallmarks of CHSR's work. For more information about CHSR please visit [www.albany.edu/chsr](http://www.albany.edu/chsr).



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