

The Future of Work and Health: School to Work Pipelines

On May 14, 2019, 60 Chicagoans of the public health community came together at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health for “On The Table” conversations around the Future of Work in Chicago. Participants composed memos on the Future of Work to Mayor Lightfoot to let her know what issues we want her to prioritize for action.

Describe the Topic: School to Work Pipelines

Specific Groups Discussed: All students in the City of Chicago

Neighborhoods/Communities of Focus: All neighborhoods

Who was at the table: Nadine Peacock, UIC School of Public Health; Barbara Gottesman, UIC Institute for Health Research and Policy; Melissa Martin, Health & Medicine Policy Research Group; Nora Ramos, UIC Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement; Anmol Sanghera, UIC Institute for Health Research and Policy; Kathryn Duke, UIC Department of Disability and Human Development; Rooshey Hasnain, UIC Department of Disability and Human Development and Rehabilitation Sciences.

Views and opinions represented in this document are those of individuals not the organizations.

What about the topic or issue should be a priority for the mayor?

The high school graduation rate in Chicago has shown steady increases since 2011, going from 56.9% in that year to a high of 78.2% in 2018 (an increase of 21%). There is also positive news on the jobs front, with the March 2019 unemployment rate in Chicago hitting a low of 3.7%. These overall numbers however disguise disturbingly persistent inequities. Though graduation and employment statistics have improved among all groups, our city to date has not been able to eliminate or substantially reduce the racial/ethnic divide. The numbers are particularly worrisome for African American males, only 64.7% of whom graduate from high school in 5 years. Black males are also less likely to attend and persist in college, and black Chicagoans have a stunningly high unemployment rate of over 14%. Statistics for disabled persons are also daunting, with high school graduation rates and unemployment rates substantially worse than those for persons without disabilities.

Addressing these inequities will require coordinated efforts across multiple sectors. Our table chose to focus on school to work pipelines. These include traditional college pipeline programs, but also other types of vocational training in technology, health and the trades, including paid summer internships and apprenticeships. The earlier in a child's life career exploration can start, the more effective our efforts are likely to be; however, we must not ignore particularly vulnerable groups like teens who have failed to complete high school, 18-25 year old's who have a high school diploma but inadequate skills for the job market, persons with disabilities, and immigrants and refugees.

We recommend that Mayor Lightfoot:

1. Create a clearing house for information on pipeline and career exploration programs. (Examples discussed include [Build Chicago](#), [After School Matters](#), and [CTE \(Career and Technical Education\)](#), as well as a small or pilot programs such as the [Schuler Scholar Program](#) and UIC's [Early Outreach Program](#).) Conduct a systematic scan, and catalogue programs with information on: cost, location, capacity; requirements (e.g. test scores, GPA); whether

applicants are holistically reviewed; who is targeted (e.g. vulnerable, “gifted/talented”); whether the program has been formally evaluated; and the extent to which the program emphasizes in-demand careers.

2. Promote/replicate/fund programs shown to be promising/effective; develop information systems that help link users with appropriate programs; establish linkages with businesses, community organizations, and academic institutions.
3. Establish career exploration activities/curricula in all Chicago schools, with a focus on informing both youth and families. Include leadership, effective communication and conflict management as essential work skills. Expand CTE model to all schools. Make career resources available to persons with disabilities, those out of school, and those in alternative/transitional settings. When reaching out to families, be sure to be sensitive to culture, language, time availability.
4. Build mentorship components into pipeline programs (e.g. mentoring by peers and “near-peers”, employers, educators, community members, civil servants, etc.)
5. Create a task force to assure that the above ideas are effectively executed.

How does the issue connect to the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability and transformation?

Though Chicago has a large number of high-quality career and education pipeline programs, more equitable and inclusive systems need to be developed to enhance transparency and assure that those most in need have access to the programs. When we inspire and motivate all Chicago’s young people and expose them to a wide variety of skills important in the workplace, we can transform our city into a place where all are allowed to reach their potential.

How could the ideas and suggestions presented in this memo help make the Chicago region better for all Chicagoans?

We believe that if the mayor follows through on these suggestions, we will see a city that stands out as a model for how to fully value all of its young people, and create a healthy, prosperous workforce that reflects the makeup of our city.