



D.C. POLICY
CENTER

PUBLIC HEARING

**B25-741, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR A NEW GENERATION
ACT OF 2024**

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

October 24th, 2024, 10am
Hearing Room 412 (Track B)
John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin
Director of the Education Policy Initiative
D.C. Policy Center

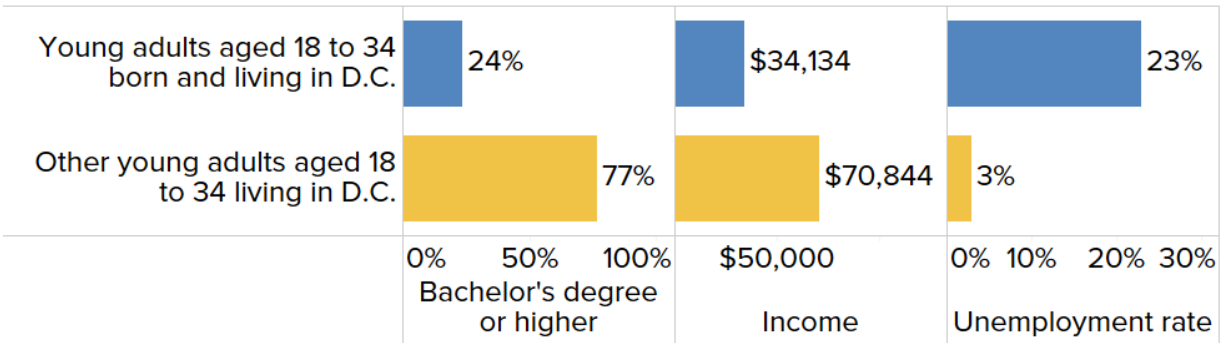
Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the

Whole. My name is Chelsea Coffin, and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing and vibrant economy in D.C. In my testimony, I will speak to the need to strengthen Career and Technical Education (CTE) and other work-based learning opportunities in D.C., the importance of requiring more robust reporting for CTE programs, and how initiatives like the Education Through Employment (ETE) Data System can support this work. My testimony is informed by our forthcoming research on how D.C.'s public school students build career assets, which will be published on November 13th.

Data from the American Community Survey (ACS) indicate low early career outcomes for D.C.'s public school alumni, underscoring the need to strengthen connections to CTE and work-based learning programs. For example, while D.C. lacks comprehensive data on high school alumni earnings, ACS data reveal that young adults aged 18 to 34 who were born and currently reside in D.C. earn an average of about \$34,000 annually—\$37,000 less than the \$71,000 earned by similarly-aged young adults who were not born in D.C. The unemployment rate for these young adults who are D.C. natives is 23 percent, compared to 3 percent for non-native residents in the same age group. Additionally, only 24 percent of D.C.-born residents of this group have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is 53 percentage points lower than similarly aged non-native D.C. residents.ⁱ

Figure 1.

Early career outcomes for longtime D.C. residents and peers who moved here after birth as young adults

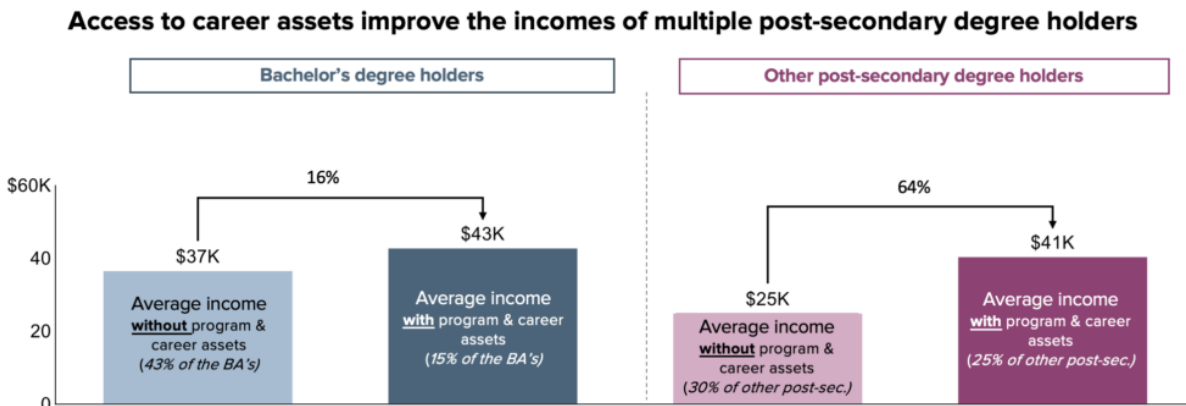


Source: IPUMS USA. 2023. 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates. Retrieved from <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>



These disparities highlight the importance of identifying strategies to improve early career outcomes for D.C.’s public school alumni and ensure they are better prepared for college and careers. A 2021 survey by CityWorks DC and Bain & Company of over a thousand alumni of District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools in D.C. found that gaining career assets (or the tools, skills, experiences, and competencies that help effectively navigate post-high school life) through CTE or other work-based learning during high school can boost earnings, by 16 percent for youth with a bachelor’s degree and 64 percent among other postsecondary degree holders (including associate’s and other certifications).ⁱⁱ

Figure 2.



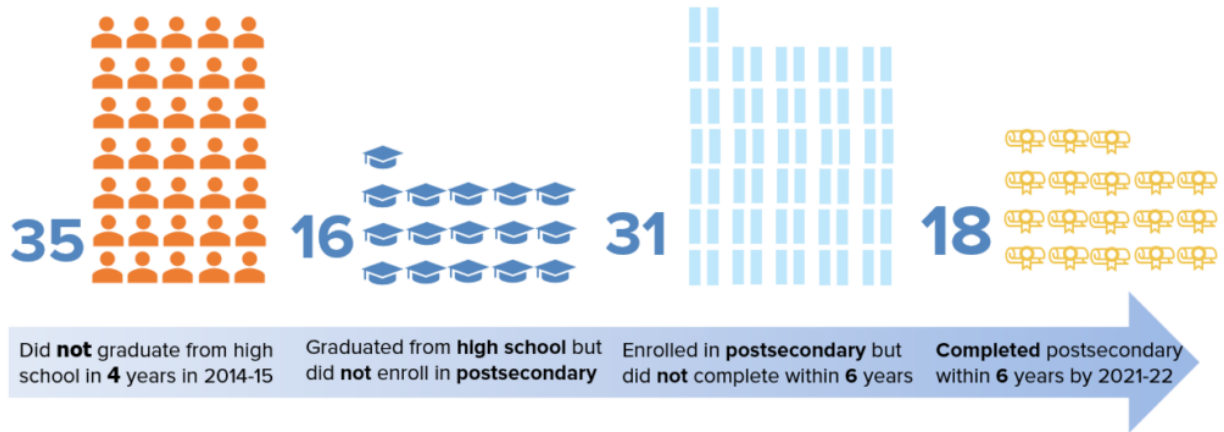
Source: Bain & Company Early Career Outcomes Survey March 2021 (N=1199); estimates represented for alumni employed full-time or part-time (who completed a BA N=448) and who completed Other post-secondary programs and had complete data (n=130).

There is increased interest and investment in programs that can help improve college and career outcomes. But there is limited information on what works and whether existing programs are balanced and accessible. Our forthcoming research found that while D.C.'s public school students have opportunities to explore and prepare for a career, they have relatively fewer ways of launching a career after graduating high school, even in careers that do not require a postsecondary degree (and three-quarters of public school alumni are likely to choose a pathway that does not involve a bachelor's degree, Figure 1). In addition, students are not always aware of existing programs, cannot always fit them in their schedule, and do not always have the right incentive to take advantage of these programs. This bill can help to make these programs more relevant to young people by linking participation in them to graduation requirements and by requiring strong communication to families and students through counselors, for example.

We can only know if these programs are working if we have more detailed reporting, and more information on actual student outcomes. The bill has significant reporting requirements but not any allowance to collect indicators to measure program effectiveness. D.C. needs to better follow alumni through the work of the ETE Data System and other initiatives. While D.C.'s public school students spend fifteen years preparing for what comes next, the city only currently monitors postsecondary degree completion at the systems levelⁱⁱⁱ—and this shows that 18 out of a cohort of 100 9th graders will complete a postsecondary degree within six years of high school graduation (see Figure 3).^{iv} It is critical to track the other 82 percent of alumni, and create a better longitudinal data system like ETE that connects data across agencies and schools to show a picture that no single entity has—for example, to show who enrolls in CTE courses, obtains industry-recognized credentials or certifications, and is then employed after graduation as outlined in this bill.

Figure 3.

Out of every **100** students in D.C.'s 2011-12 ninth grade cohort...



Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2023. "High school & college milestones: A cohort-based illustration of DC's trends." Retrieved from: <https://osse.dc.gov/publication/dc-trends-2011-12-cohort-high-school-and-college-milestones>



Strong data from the ETE can support research by OSSE, the DC Education Research Collaborative, and others like the D.C. Policy Center to find out what's working and improve approaches to ensure all of D.C.'s alumni have a strong start to their early careers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I welcome any questions you may have.

ⁱ Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Chen, A., Cooper, G., Richards, S., Rodgers, R., and Schouweiler, M. IPUMS USA: Version 15.0 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0>

ⁱⁱ Calma, E. 2021. *D.C. high school alumni reflections on their early career outcomes*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/early-career-brief/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Coffin, C. and Rubin, J. 2021. *Measuring early career outcomes in D.C.* D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/measuring-outcomes/>

^{iv} Coffin, C. and Mason, H. 2024. *State of D.C. Schools, 2022-23: Challenges to pandemic recovery in a new normal*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/state-of-dc-schools-2022-23/>