



Syracuse Say Yes to Education:

Ensuring Opportunity for a Diverse, New Generation

Unlocking the potential of the vast, untapped resource of urban youth in America and positioning them to be full participants in the global economy is one of the most pressing problems facing the nation today. The key to success in ensuring that kind of opportunity is igniting cross-sector collaboration and innovative action. The Syracuse Say Yes to Education and Economic Development Demonstration Program will do precisely that by employing a proven model in a groundbreaking new project that will transform the fortunes of Syracuse City School District (SCSD) students, and along with them the fortunes of the city, itself.

Building on a track record of remarkable success in several urban schools in Harlem (NY), Philadelphia (PA), Hartford (CT), and Cambridge (MA), a coalition of partners catalyzed by the Say Yes to Education Foundation and Syracuse University is undertaking a precedent setting project to dramatically alter the life course of students in an entire urban school district (SCSD) by dramatically increasing the rate at which they go to college.

The proven Say Yes to Education model has demonstrated that the persistent and well documented "achievement gap" between urban and suburban kids is not an accurate measure of students' abilities or potential but in reality is an "opportunity" or "access" gap. Too many urban students have not had the opportunity to take full advantage of the academic and social experiences and supports that their more privileged peers are afforded and that lead to success in higher education. This gap shows up not only in grades, but also in standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, access to curriculum and quality instruction, high school graduation rates, college admission, and college-completion rates.

A Proven Model

Say Yes to Education has successfully bridged this achievement gap at the level of a school building by implementing comprehensive and integrated support systems that address four major types of obstacles to post-secondary access for low-income students that have been identified by research: academic, social-emotional, health, and financial. Now, Syracuse Say Yes to Education will scale up this success to the level of an entire school district--the first program of this scale in the nation.

Syracuse Say Yes to Education will tackle the obstacles head-on, providing SCSD students with the scaffolding of support and opportunities already afforded to their more privileged peers. The district, in partnership with Say Yes to Education and Syracuse University, has committed to launch and sustain a system-wide process that provides the following objective and high-quality assessments and supports for every participating student. Initiatives include:

- Student diagnostic testing and ongoing monitoring to identify strengths as well as weaknesses and effectively manage academic and social-emotional supports
- Individual student growth plans (conducted annually and monitored regularly)
- Tutoring (small-group and one-on-one)

- Research-based, school-wide academic and social-emotional programming of the caliber that suburban and affluent families value for their own children. (e.g., International Baccalaureate and PATHS programs)
- Inclusive settings, curriculum, and support for students with disabilities and English language learners
- Classroom and school climate that nurtures, enriches, and assumes competence
- After-school program
- Summer school program
- Counseling and family engagement (including 1 social worker for every 200 students in each participating school)
- Mentoring
- Financial aid and college selection counseling

The Promise: Syracuse Say Yes Higher Education Compact

The cornerstone of this unique program eliminates the most significant financial obstacle faced by low-income families: the high cost of a quality post-secondary education. The Syracuse Say Yes program combines the comprehensive academic, social-emotional, and health supports that are critical to enabling every child to achieve his or her potential with the promise of a full college education.

Say Yes and SU have recruited an unprecedented network of 23 private institutions that will provide the promise of a free college education to Syracuse City School students under the initiative. In addition, Say Yes and SU have raised the necessary funds to support of one year of costs for students to attend a SUNY /CUNY school. This will bridge the gap while the partnership and its supporters pursue legislation to formally enter SUNY /CUNY as a Compact partner.

Overall, these scholarships are offered when a child is in elementary school and they are complemented by the comprehensive set of supports that Say Yes provides.

Making History

Say Yes to Education Syracuse will provide not only a powerful model for urban school district reform, but a step-by-step roadmap for stimulating urban economic prosperity. The dramatically stronger schools, stronger linkages to an array of post-secondary institutions, and stronger workforce resulting from this project will create a powerful tool to undergird growth of existing companies in Syracuse, incubate new ones, and attract companies considering relocation.

Syracuse Say Yes to Education, the only program of its kind and scale in the nation, will make history, innovatively linking the chain between the public, private, and non-profit sectors to rejuvenate an older industrial city by building a sustainable model for developing its most precious asset, its people and, ultimately, positioning its economy to compete successfully in the global arena.