



Blue Cross Blue Shield's Collaboration with Boston Public High Schools

In 2000, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, in partnership with community, business leaders and educators, identified improving the education of youth as a priority for the Commonwealth. The challenge is as compelling now as it was 15 years ago. According to the 2015 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) state results, nearly 40% percent of students failed to meet federal achievement standards. As a result, Blue Cross continues its ongoing dialogue and partnerships to help strengthen the schools.

Blue Cross has a significant partnership with the Private Industry Council (PIC) and the Mayor's Summer Jobs Campaign to provide summer employment to Boston public high school students. This program helps businesses develop the workforce they need and helps Boston area students gain access to career opportunities and higher incomes. In 2014, the Company employed 120 high school interns. Working with its network of community partners, 91 of these students were placed at nonprofit organizations throughout Boston, which helped to build capacity and get the important work of these organizations completed during the summer months. Early Investors Financial Literacy classes were also provided to the students as part of the program.

Early work experience is a critical factor in determining future success. Students who gain work experience during high school enjoy higher employment rates and earnings later in life. Additionally, these students stay in school, graduate from high school, and enroll in college at higher rates than do their peers. These benefits compound over a lifetime.

The summer job market for teens in both Massachusetts and the U.S. over the past five years has been quite depressed, with record low summer employment rates for the nation's teens being set in the recent years (2010-2012). Black and Hispanic teens, especially those residing in low income families and from high poverty neighborhoods, have experienced the greatest difficulties in finding employment in the summer. Lack of job opportunities reduces teens' exposure to the world of work and their ability to acquire both basic employability skills (attendance, team work, communicating with other workers and customers) and occupational skills. Being jobless all summer also increases their risk of social isolation (staying at home), hanging out on the street, and exposure to or participation in urban violence and delinquent behavior. Research findings indicate that meaningful employment opportunities can help reduce violent, risky, and adverse social behaviors among economically disadvantaged youth from Boston's high crime neighborhoods during the summer months and prepare them for future employment and academic experiences.¹

One of the biggest lessons learned from Blue Cross's partnerships has been around accommodating various levels of experiences of high school students in a corporate setting. Blue Cross used a couple of approaches to leverage the various degrees of experiences for a truly win/win opportunity for all parties—by identifying specific needs in various business areas to place the students (for example, for data centers and building moves, many students are placed in IT), and partnering with community partners to place the students at those organizations to build capability and nonprofit work understanding for the students and to build capacity at the organization for their important work. The partnership with PIC and the Mayor's Summer Jobs Campaign paves the way for Blue Cross to provide meaningful summer employment to those who need it most.

Early work experience is a critical factor in determining future success. Students who gain work experience during high school enjoy higher employment rates and earnings later in life.

¹ The Summer Employment Experiences and the Personal/ Social Behaviors of YVP Employment Program Participants and Those of a Comparison Group (Executive Summary)