

CREDIT FOR LEARNING



Creating a path for career exploration and readiness

Student-centered, active, and engaging learning experiences that build on young people’s interests, while developing their skills and knowledge, are at the heart of high-quality afterschool programs. Young people of all ages can benefit from these experiences, however, adolescence is a critical time for exposure to these types of learning opportunities, when young people are discovering their interests and passions as they begin on their path toward adulthood.

Afterschool programs can provide older youth opportunities to find their inspiration and gain skills that will benefit them in and outside of the classroom while allowing them to earn school credits. Credit-for-learning programs in the afterschool space—which can range from students earning physical education credits through a local YMCA to taking part in a boat-building course for elective science credit—are a valuable resource that individualizes knowledge acquisition and complements school day lessons for middle and high school youth.

Overview

YouthForce NOLA provides career exploration and readiness opportunities to prepare high school students for high-wage, high-demand career pathways post-graduation. Working as a collaborative effort between schools and businesses, YouthForce NOLA connects students with opportunities for career exposure, workforce skills training, paid work experience, and opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials.

YouthForce partners with five third-party training providers that offer afterschool technical training programs to help students earn course credit, as well as employer-validated, industry-recognized credentials. Students earn the credentials after completing a rigorous program of study in job-specific skills. The YouthForce Internship program also helps students earn elective credits that count toward their graduation requirements in the afterschool space

A typical day for students

A typical day varies depending on the program students attend. Students attending a technical training provider program work toward earning credentials. A typical day might include watching an online module and completing an associated task, such as a specific coding technique, or taking part in a hands-on lesson, such as learning CPR. Toward the end of the program, students prepare

YouthForce NOLA

New Orleans, Louisiana

167

Average number of students served during the school year

85%*

Families with low incomes

**of students in New Orleans considered economically disadvantaged during the 2020-21 school year*

Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative

for professional credential examinations. In the internship program, students participate in training to build skills, such as leadership and communication, and then go to work at their internship sites.

Outcomes

In Spring 2021, 23 students earned course credit for afterschool internships. More than 40 students earned industry-based credentials in afterschool technical training in the 2020-2021 school year. YouthForce students describing how the program has helped them figure out their career path have shared, “I knew I liked science and math, but I didn’t know where I fit in. I didn’t know if I wanted to be an engineer or if I wanted to go into the medical field. I was really glad I got placed into the hospital because I got a chance to work with the kids and I got a chance to shadow [doctors]...I realized that I want to be a surgeon” and “...you want to be able to say ‘I know I like this and that’s what I want to do.’ When you get that firsthand experience...you know what you’re getting yourself into.

Program characteristics

YouthForce NOLA has two different tracks that enable students to earn high school credits in the afterschool space while gaining exposure to in-demand jobs and real-world work experience. Through the technical training provider program, students complete job-specific skills training at one of YouthForce’s five afterschool partner providers. For example, students can study carpentry at the New Orleans Technical Education Training Center (NOTEP) or video game and mobile app development at Operation Spark, an organization focused on providing a streamlined path to a career in software development. After successfully completing the program, students earn industry-recognized credentials that demonstrate to employers that they have the technical skills needed for a particular career path.

Seniors also have the opportunity to earn credits after school through YouthForce’s Internship program. The program has two parts—job skills training provided by YouthForce and a paid work experience component. The training consists of building skills, such as leadership and communication, and taking part in career development workshops to learn about such topics as interview skills, workplace behavior, and professional attire. During their internships, students are placed with an employer in one of YouthForce’s four skill clusters—business services, digital media/IT, health care, and skilled crafts—to gain direct work experience, career exposure, and an opportunity to build connections with industry professionals.

Regardless of the program, YouthForce NOLA acts as an intermediary to connect students with career development opportunities and ensure they receive high school credit at their schools. YouthForce facilitates connections between training providers and schools to support students’ enrollment in afterschool technical training and provides technical assistance to ensure students will earn credit for those courses. YouthForce also runs the internship program on behalf of schools and ensures students get paid soft skills training, placement with an employer, and high school credit.

The need for credit-for-learning opportunities

Credit for learning expands educational opportunities for youth, where young people can explore their interests and delve deeper into subject matter outside of the classroom. These programs provide diverse learning experiences, promote student engagement, and prepare students for life after graduation.

Boosting motivation and engagement

When students are interested in what they are learning and have the opportunity to experience and develop a sense of agency, it can increase their engagement and motivation to learn. Credit for learning employs this student-centered learning approach, where learning is tailored to students’ interests and needs, and students have ownership of their learning. This approach can be especially beneficial for older students, as school engagement has been found to decrease as students get older, or for youth who are disengaged from school.

Improving college and career readiness

Credit for learning provides youth the chance to engage in real-world learning experiences and learn about potential career paths while earning school credit. In these hands-on and applied learning contexts, students can develop skills that employers value, such as problem solving and collaboration, be mentored by and build connections with industry professionals, and complete internships or apprenticeships.

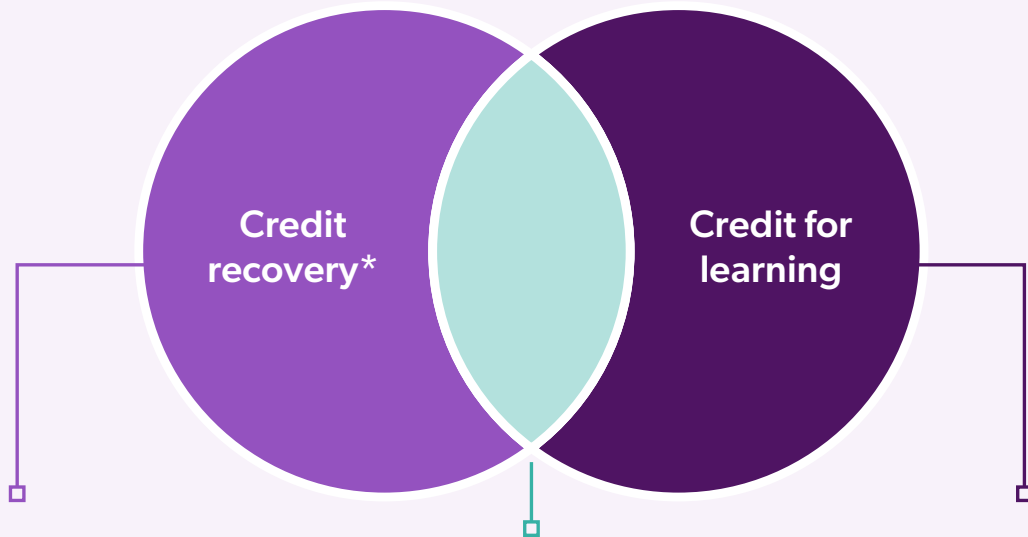
Addressing opportunity gaps

Research shows that students attending high-poverty schools too often lack access to the same learning opportunities as students attending low-poverty schools. Credit for learning can address equity issues present in the education system, broadening access to learning opportunities that schools may be unable to provide.

Read [Credit for Learning: Making Learning Outside of School Count](#) to learn more.

Credit recovery vs. Credit for learning

While the underlying intention of **credit recovery** and **credit for learning** differ from one another, there are overlapping strategies between the two credit earning opportunities.



- Intended for students who are **falling behind academically** or **at-risk of not graduating on time**.
- Provides opportunities to earn credits outside of the school day that count toward graduation requirements.
- Intended for students interested in **earning additional credits** toward graduation, or students looking to **further personalize their education or pursue an interest**.
- Students can **redo coursework in a class they have failed** or **retake the class** in an alternative manner, such as in summer school, during afterschool or weekend classes, or online.
- Can take place in afterschool and summer programs.
- Students can **earn credits for various activities and experiences outside of the classroom**, such as community service projects, internships or apprenticeships, independent studies, and student-led projects.

*U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Issue Brief: Credit Recovery. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/high-school/credit-recovery.pdf>

Program history

YouthForce NOLA began in 2015 on the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, as an initiative to prepare and connect a talented and skilled workforce to economic opportunity. From the start, YouthForce NOLA was a collaborative effort between civic, education, and business leaders to connect students with opportunities for workforce development and prepare them for careers after high school. More recently, YouthForce supported the expansion of technical training provider programming and internship opportunities in the afterschool space with funding from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. The funding enables more students to take part in career exploration and preparation opportunities. Today, YouthForce NOLA partners with more than 150 employers and serves 90 percent of New Orleans' open enrollment high schools.

Recommendations

for creating a path for career exploration and readiness:

- ▶ Build relationships and plan collaboratively with schools. Schools are essential partners for ensuring course credit and can be critical in scheduling, logistics, and additional operations considerations.
- ▶ Leverage afterschool time for career development and technical training. Doing so allows students to explore their interests so they can make informed choices post-graduation. Moreover, it allows for the application of academic skills and technical skill building in real-world settings.