

ACCELERATING LEARNING

Tips on How Schools Can Pay Students



With an influx of highly flexible federal and state COVID relief resources, school districts and youth-serving organizations can increase the number and types of paid learning experiences they offer to students.

Why hire and stipend students this summer—and beyond?

Employing high school students has long been a best practice in and out of school, for a variety of compelling reasons. Done well, it:

- Builds students' knowledge, skills, and resumes;
- Deepens students' connection to the school community and expands their social networks;
- Incentivizes the participation of older students—who need to work when not in class—and puts cash directly into the hands of communities; and
- Meets demand for entry-level staff, especially in youth-serving programs where students are well suited to relate to other young people and meet them where they are.

In the past, the greatest challenge for both schools and community partners interested in providing meaningful paid experiences was finding enough flexible money to support student stipends or wages—as, historically, both public and private funding to pay students directly has been very limited and restrictive. This is no longer the case.

Paid roles students can play

Schools and their partners should think expansively about the types of activities for which they can hire and compensate students. Examples include:

- Internships with local businesses and industry partners
- Design thinking, community service, and employer projects
- Internships with the school district or community-based organizations
- Mentoring, tutoring, and supervision of younger children
- Enrolling in community college classes

How to compensate high school students

Stipends or wages

Schools and community partners compensate students by providing either stipends, which are one-time lump sums, or by paying students hourly wages. There is no hard and fast rule defining when to pay by stipend versus hourly wage. Stipends can be simpler, with less paperwork and tracking, and often cover fewer hours and a broader array of activities. Hourly pay is often used in situations where there is a more traditional employee-employer relationship and a greater number of hours involved.

Requirements

Regardless of payment method, schools and community partners that hire students must complete a few basic requirements. These include:

- Students submit a completed worker permit
- If compensation exceeds \$600, students submit a W-9 tax form to the IRS
- Applications and agreement forms, developed by the program/school, are completed by students and also often the supervisors/employers

Arrangements

Depending on unique local needs and assets, arrangements for student employment often work in two ways.

School districts may stipend and/or hire students as district employees. Most school districts already have policies and processes in place to hire student employees. Often the funding comes through school/district budgets, and activities are overseen by a school district employee.

External partners, such as a community-based organization, a company, or a community foundation working in collaboration with the school district, may also stipend and/or hire students. Working through external partners in this way is often a more flexible way to pay students; activities are overseen by the external partner, and this option can allow for compensation for undocumented students.

Advice from practitioners

Link to learning goals. Paid experiences should connect to student learning goals and/or career pathways to make both earning and learning as relevant as possible. This is the best-case scenario. Schools and their community partners often have culminating events that allow students to present and share their experiences and demonstrate mastery students have gained.

Be youth centered. Programs should embed social-emotional learning and skill building, and they should integrate student choice and interests. When designing, start with the students you want to most engage and build the experiences around their interests and needs.

Prioritize equitable access. School districts, site leaders, community partners, and employers should intentionally design and structure programs, outreach, and engagement to meet the needs of a wide range of students, not just the overachievers. This includes active outreach and support for more disconnected students and making sure language needs are addressed.

Provide training and a supportive advisor/supervisor. Programs need to prepare students for success by building in time and space for orientation, mentoring, skill development, supportive services, reflection, and community-building. Ideally, staff are matched with students with whom they already have a strong connection and aligned interests.

Build and deepen partnerships. Having diverse and meaningful social networks is essential to long-term success at work and in life. Likewise, partnerships with local government, community-based organizations, and local employers expand the value, reach, and breadth of paid opportunities for all students who want them.



The Linked Learning Alliance leads a coalition of educators, employers, and community organizers who are advancing equity and excellence in education through Linked Learning, an approach proven to help more students stay in school, graduate on time, and develop skills employers seek for the future. [linkedlearning.org](https://www.linkedlearning.org)



Partnership for Children & Youth (PCY) is an advocacy and capacity-building organization championing high-quality, equitable learning opportunities for underserved youth in California. PCY trains school and community-based educators, facilitates relationships between schools and community-based organizations, and advocates for effective public policies and resources. For over 20 years, PCY has led research, training, policy, and advocacy to improve access and quality of expanded learning opportunities across the state. [partnerforchildren.org](https://www.partnerforchildren.org)