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Support for youth employment is vital for Miami and our students



BY MARIA ALONSO

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For students in Miami-Dade County and across Florida, another summer is in the history books, and school is back in session. This coming year, as they focus on classwork and extra-curricular activities, our region's high schoolers and college students should consider turning some of their remaining attention beyond the classroom and outside of their schools — and possibly outside of

their comfort zones. Simply put, it's never too early for students to prepare for employment and to learn about the jobs they might like to try next summer and beyond. At the same time, it's never too early for the community to support them in this critical effort.

What does it take to get students to work, and what does it mean to prepare them for a productive future, where they can pursue careers that are engaging and rewarding? What does it take to teach our youth the importance of earning a wage, contributing to a team, and building real-world skills? Above all, it takes support and commitment from government leaders, nonprofit experts and business organizations, along with a willingness to forge new kinds of partnerships to get the job of youth employment in gear.

In Miami, this kind of broad support is growing quickly. On the employment front, a number of forward-thinking nonprofits and government agencies are at work, offering critical guidance and tools to students to encourage and help them find summer jobs and after-school work. The task is especially important given the number of young people in our community who face serious socio-economic challenges. Organizations like City Year, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Junior Achievement and many more are addressing with specialized programming and resources the unique challenges facing at-risk youth. These services, both in-school and out-of-school, include career guidance and planning, leadership development, life skills training, and direct assistance finding work and internship experiences.

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The close of summer also marks the culmination of one of our company's most celebrated initiatives – the Bank of America Student Leaders program. This is a great example of what can be achieved through dynamic partnerships that benefit both students, the organizations who aim to help them and the community at large. Each year the program connects community-minded high school juniors and seniors with paid internships at local nonprofits including the Boys & Girls Clubs here in Miami. The experience provides insights into how nonprofits operate and the challenges they face while helping students develop work and team-building skills on the job. In exchange, the students offer their time, energy and enthusiasm.

In addition to adding a summer internship to add to their resumes, the work at the Boys and Girls Clubs gives the Student Leaders the opportunity to educate and mentor children of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and gain a better understanding of how cross-sector collaboration creates community impact. Their internship culminates in a week-long trip to Washington D.C., where more than 200 students from across the country participate together in a service learning project, meet with members of Congress, learn about ways to tackle poverty, discuss pathways to leadership, and participate in a series of workshops to build better money habits. All in all, they are not only learning career skills but also how they can become more engaged and impactful citizens – all key elements of thriving communities.

Another focus is making sure today's youth are prepared for the job skills they'll need tomorrow. Nationally, Bank of America has earmarked \$40 million to connect 100,000 teens and young adults with the skills and employment experiences needed for 21st century jobs. Here in South Florida there are many organizations with a similar mission. Notably, the Talent Development Network, formed in partnership between the Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the Miami Foundation and six local universities, is making great strides toward connecting students with internships at top employers in fast-growing career fields. Earlier this year, the organization hit a milestone, reaching a two-year goal of posting 200 internships within only eight months of the program launch date.

Organizations we partner with, including Year Up and Educate Tomorrow, are also doing great work to prepare tomorrow's leaders by connecting them with employment, access, training and other critical resources.

The goal on a broad level, of course, is to strengthen tomorrow's workforce, which will help our community grow both economically and culturally. But on a more personal level, it is about connecting young people with more fulfilling, higher-paying jobs in the long run, improving their circumstances and outlook.

Miami's economy has rebounded tremendously after the Great Recession. Vital new companies have launched and new jobs are offering opportunity across the region. In the future, as our growth continues, we will need more skilled, trained individuals to help contribute in multiple industries, from technology and trade to hospitality and financial services, and of course our critical nonprofit sector. As we embark on another school year, now is a good time for businesses to consider what they can offer to help give young people the high level skills they need to succeed so we can continue to build a strong workforce now and into the future.

Maria Alonso is market manager, Miami, Bank of America.



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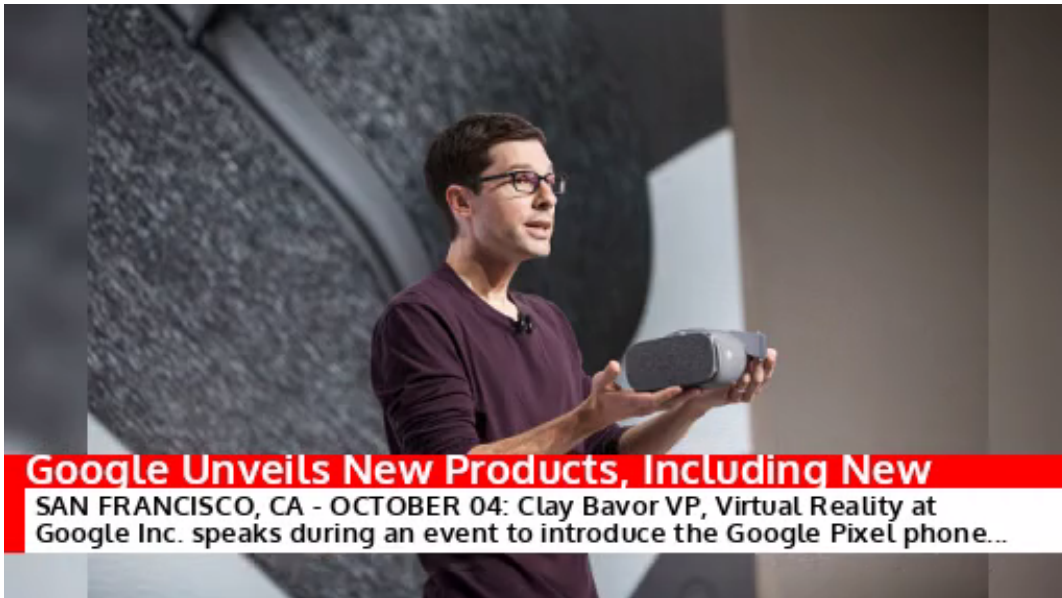
After school part-time jobs are a great experience in preparing students for the world of work. Not only does work put a few dollars in their pocket, but it keeps them out of trouble. There should be a renewal of Dade-Partners and work experience classes that will reach out and provide jobs to high school students.

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