

# The PWC Bridge Project:

Building sustainability and connection in times of uncertainty

## Context and Necessity

At PWC we work hard to improve the lives and futures of the youth most at-risk in the our community. Unfortunately, school failure, disengagement, life obstacles, and traumatic experiences are no stranger to our clients. This is why missing months of school in the midst of this tragic global emergency poses a very real threat to our students, specifically; they are left in a very vulnerable position with their graduation, stability, and visions for the future hang in the balance. The likelihood of recidivistic behavioral patterns or emotional and academic backsliding due to lack of engagement in school and with the community becomes more and more likely the longer this pandemic and consequent separations persist. Our clients are predominantly seniors and juniors, in one of the most transitional and pivotal periods of their lives so far: the months before they begin adult life. Thus, we feel it is our charge as an organization to provide the support that we hope will assist in sustaining a necessary belief in themselves and a continued hopefulness about tomorrow.

We are creating an expanded curriculum around the essential goals that drive our programs: entrepreneurial education, financial literacy, and sustainability. We are adapting and exploring new approaches and exercising new creativity in order to allow the essential goals of the project that is/was already underway to thrive, despite (and in some ways because of) the crisis. For example, before the pandemic, our students were prepared to begin the final phase of of the year in our Green Jobs Eco-Friendly Carwash program: training at Corporate Fleet Auto sales. Now, instead of jumping into training, they will delve much more deeply into experiential learning activities accessible virtually or face-to-face.

## What is Bridge?

The PWC Bridge Project connects entrepreneurial education, financial literacy, and sustainability through authentic and meaningful investment in youth.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
FINANCIAL LITERACY  
SUSTAINABILITY

## Adapting and strengthening in a crisis

Covid19 and the shutdown that happened almost overnight left us little time to prepare ourselves for the fundamental changes we would have to make, and certainly no time to prepare our clients emotionally or logistically. Since our closure, we have been working tirelessly to ensure our students who are receiving counseling experience no interruption in mental health services and that our adjunct instructors remain in contact with students, delivering content that is useful and engaging.

Curriculum will ensure peer-peer, staff/mentor-peer, and peer-community connections and build transferable skills and insights into every aspect of getting a brand new business off the ground in this historical time in our world and our economy. Ultimately, a year from now, at the culmination of the project, students will have taken part in all parts of a real micro-business in the community.

### Experiential learning from a Distance

In order to engage our clients remotely, we know content needs to be engaging and relevant. Ours is a user-friendly, content-rich curriculum with filmed lessons, planned simulations, and activities which embed authentic opportunities for feedback and collaboration. And it is just... fun. This is integral because our students often struggle with sustained engagement in the classroom, so we will need to be even more strategic with distance learning modules. To make this work and work well,



we have recruited credentialed teachers in our community and members of our board to identify the most important learning we want to accomplish and the best strategies for ensuring student interest.



### Entrusting youth with fair access to the right Information

At PWC, the majority of our student population attends our local continuation high school, many are or have been in the foster system, many have relationships with and within the juvenile justice system. Many are from families very new to our country. While life skills of all varieties are important, we have perceived there to be a blatant deficit in financial literacy and a total absence of support in this area at the school site. Thus, a very important piece of the Bridge program lies in our commitment to skill-building in this vital domain. We plan to utilize all of the myriad resources available to us, drawing from established and proven curricula like Wells Fargo's comprehensive *Hands-on Banking*, by collaborating with the Junior Achievement organization that is newly involved at the comprehensive high school site, and by assisting University of California masters students in piloting a new financial



### SPOTLIGHT ON SIMULATION: FINANCIAL LITERACY

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH KNOWLEDGE MATTERS INC. THE PWC BRIDGE PROJECT WILL INCLUDE A **FINANCIAL LITERACY SIMULATION COMPETITION**, PARTICIPATING STUDENT TEAMS WILL WALK IN THE SHOES OF A SIMULATED PERSON, MAKING ALL OF THEIR PERSONAL FINANCE DECISIONS. THEY WILL OPEN BANK ACCOUNTS, SET UP ONLINE BANKING, PAY BILLS, APPLY FOR LINES OF CREDIT, AND MONITOR THEIR SCORE. STUDENTS WILL FILE SIMULATED TAXES, DECIDE ON A CAREER PATH, HOUSING, CREATE ITEMIZED MONTHLY BUDGETS, DETERMINE SCHEDULING NEEDS, AND MORE. THE WINNERS WILL BE DETERMINED BY EACH TEAM'S PERSON'S NET WORTH AFTER RUNNING THE SIMULATION FOR 5 SIMULATED YEARS.



literacy mobile app in real-time. We hope to create a cohesive and enjoyable battery of activities that will not only ensure that our students are informed, but also require them to become financial advisers in their community and/or their families. Being informed about how to build credit and wealth or how to manage debt is crucial knowledge to have in any period in history, but all the more so in this very uncertain time for the economy. Our goal is demystify this confounding part of adult life by arming students with vital financial understandings.

## **Exciting Outcomes and deliverables**

Ultimately, we want young people to enact the role of entrepreneurs and to work hard to create real-world, actionable artifacts including all of the branding, marketing, planning, and operational protocols for the micro-business (to be open circa early 2021). We envision students being assigned focus “departments” or areas of specialty within the business. Ultimately, (once the world returns to normalcy) they will actually shadow and/or interview experts in their focus area or field (members of the local business community). Student leaders in Bridge will then be the managers who open a completely student-run car wash business that will operate within our community with a focus on environmentally responsible practices. Beginning during the quarantine, student leaders in Bridge will learn through professional business simulations and case study analyses. What makes this the epitome of true project-based learning is the authenticity and real-world application of knowledge; eventually, they will get to test their skills by running a business in actuality. Working on every aspect from the beginning, they will conduct the market research, design the logo and pitch branding ideas, create the marketing and promotional plan, draft employee handbooks and management protocols and more.

Students will feel true ownership and authentic voice throughout the process and pride in the work they put into preparing for the business; this will make it all the more meaningful when it becomes a reality. The carwash is not only real-world experience, it is also an actual employment opportunity as well. We want young people who show this level of sustained commitment to self-improvement, responsibility, and growth to know we believe their time is indeed valuable. We want to maintain the engagement and the commitment we already have from our students and to create a lasting, dynamic bridge to maintain vital connections with the young people who need it now more than ever.

