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INAUGURAL CHICAGO YOUTH BUSINESS EXPO INSPIRED NEXT GENERATION OF BUSINESS LEADERS

The expo provided a supportive environment for entrepreneurial aspirations.

CHICAGO – Today, the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP), in partnership with Chicago Public Schools, held the first-ever Chicago Youth Business Expo at Kennedy-King College. The free expo provided over 225 high school students with the opportunity to hear inspirational stories during the keynote panel and learn valuable information on starting their own business while engaging with their peers. It also featured the opportunity to network one-on-one with exhibitors, attend a workshop with industry experts and peers sharing their knowledge and experiences, and professional headshots to use for marketing purposes. The students left the expo with actionable strategies and practical tips to implement directly to their current or future business in Chicago.

“The Chicago Youth Business Expo provided students an opportunity to see themselves, see their futures, and visualize themselves as entrepreneurs and business owners in their communities,” said **Mayor Brandon Johnson**. “The inaugural Chicago Youth Business Expo provided the perfect setting for shaping the next generation to lead our city and build a better, stronger, safer Chicago for us all.”

“BACP has hosted Small Business Expos for over a decade and the opportunity to deliver an expo with the goal of inspiring young future business owners was monumental,” said **BACP Commissioner Kenneth J. Meyer**. “We want young entrepreneurs to use BACP and its partners as a resource for starting and growing their business in Chicago. The expo was a glimpse into how the City is creating opportunities for the youth to create and innovate.”

“Encouraging youth to explore entrepreneurship cultivates a mindset of creativity and innovation,” said **Pedro Martinez, CEO, Chicago Public Schools**. “Entrepreneurship encourages youth to become leaders and change-makers in their communities. The Chicago Youth Business Expo is one of the ways CPS is helping students to pursue their own entrepreneurial dreams.”

The expo began with a welcome address followed by a keynote panel featuring three young entrepreneurs titled, “Youth on the Rise: NextGen of Business Owners.” The dynamic panel aimed at showcasing the entrepreneurial spirit and innovation of young business leaders in our community. The panelists included:

- Eden Wilson, a CPS high school student and Special Education Classroom Assistant, as well as a 2x founder, keynote speaker, award-winning tech ambassador, course creator, 2023 SXSW EDU Student Startup Competition Finalist, and the owner of Lemonerdy.

- Jaurice Winston, Chicago West Side Native Manager of Co-LLAB and Male Mogul Initiative (MMI) graduate. Jaurice is also a clothing brand owner, teaches entrepreneurship at alternative high schools across Chicago, and recently just became a real estate investor closing on his first investment property.
- Joshua Marin, Founder and Owner of Fix Your Kicks. Joshua opened his first shoe repair shop at the age of 19. Now, with 3 he stores offers leather refurbishing, sole replacement, heel repair, deep cleans and more. Joshua proudly proclaims he can turn customer’s sneaker from “beaters into heaters.”

Additionally, The Gray Matter Experience presented a workshop titled, “Perfect Pitch: Targeting Audiences with Innovative Solutions.” Students unleashed their creativity as they dove into the world of entrepreneurship. In the interactive workshop, students collaborated to concoct ingenious business pitches from unexpected combinations of everyday items. From brainstorming to market research, they were introduced to the strategy of tailoring a business idea to engage a target audience. They also learned the art of persuasive marketing.

“It was an honor to present the workshop at the first-ever Chicago Youth Business Expo and to shine a spotlight on the incredible talent and innovation of our young entrepreneurs,” said **Corinne Durette, Program Director of the Gray Matter Experience**. “It’s important for students to see representation in the business sector. That is why The Gray Matter Experience works to inspire, educate, and empower the next generation of Black changemakers. By presenting the workshop, we were able to bridge the entrepreneurial knowledge gap and drive positive change.”

The expo featured CPS students in their sophomore, junior, and senior year in high school who have an interest in embarking on their entrepreneurial journeys with passion and creativity. Students had a chance to interact with 20+ exhibitors, many of which offer support and resources to start and scale a business.

The upcoming expo is sponsored by Western Union, Wintrust Bank, and CIBC Bank USA and in partnership with Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Treasurer’s Office.

The BACP Small Business Expos occur multiple times a year at different citywide locations and online. These free events are open to the public and offer business resources such as City of Chicago business licensing consultants, tax clinic, financial advisors, workshops, professional headshots, networking and more. For upcoming expos, visit [Chicago.gov/BizExpo](https://chicago.gov/BizExpo).

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