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**CHICAGO YOUTH BIZ EXPO SHOWCASED TOMORROW'S INDUSTRY TRAILBLAZERS**

*The expo inspired the next generation of business leaders through workshops, a young entrepreneur panel and exhibitors.*

**CHICAGO** – Today, the Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP), in partnership with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), held its second Chicago Youth Biz Expo at Malcolm X College. The free expo brought together more than 200 CPS high school students to celebrate entrepreneurship, leadership and the future of Chicago. Participants were Career and Technical Education students exploring pathways in business, innovation, and leadership. Students attended workshops, heard from a panel of young entrepreneurs during the keynote address, and interacted with exhibitors. The expo provided students with expert guidance on how to launch or grow a business in Chicago.

"The Chicago Youth Biz Expo was an opportunity for our young people to see themselves as future entrepreneurs and business leaders, I was proud to meet with many of Chicago's future leaders during today's event," said **Mayor Brandon Johnson**. "Events like this reflect the City's commitment to investing in young people and supporting the next generation of innovators who will help shape our city's future."

"We are proud to support the next generation of changemakers who are already redefining what it means to be a business leader in our communities," said **BACP Commissioner Ivan Capifali**. "The Chicago Youth Biz Expo offered students a glimpse into how the City is opening doors for them to innovate, create, and thrive."

The expo featured CPS sophomores, juniors, and seniors interested in embarking on their entrepreneurial journeys. Students engaged with more than 20 exhibitors, many of which offer support and resources to start and scale a business. Students also had the opportunity to take professional headshots at the expo - all part of elevating their professional online footprint.

"At CPS, we are deeply committed to connecting our students' learning to real-world opportunities," said **Interim Superintendent/CEO Dr. Macqueline King**. "The Chicago Youth Biz Expo helps our students see that entrepreneurship isn't just a dream - it's an achievable path they can start building today. We are grateful to our partners at BACP for helping our students develop the confidence and skills to become the city's next generation of business leaders."

The expo began with a welcome address followed by a keynote panel featuring three young entrepreneurs titled, “Young Innovators: Igniting the Entrepreneurial Spirit.” The panel of youth entrepreneurs shared their stories and strategies for launching and growing successful businesses. The panelists included:

- Ava Dorsey, Founder and CEO, Ava's Pet Palace
- Qiling Jiang, Founder and CEO, Kaizen Collective Apparel LLC
- Jaqueza Thomas, Founder, President & CEO Chicago Emerging Stars

Additionally, The Gray Matter Experience led a workshop titled, “Positive Self Concept.” In this interactive session, students evaluated and refined their digital presence to authentically showcase their strengths and values. Through self-reflection, hands-on activities and peer feedback, students gained tools to create a purposeful and professional online identity aligned with their business goals.

“It was an honor to lead a workshop at the Chicago Youth Business Expo and help unlock the potential of youth through entrepreneurship as a pathway for personal growth and community transformation,” said **Lu'Cretia Thomas of The Gray Matter Experience**. “At Gray Matter, we’re committed to connecting youth to the education, mentorship, and experiences that ignite ownership, possibility, and lasting change.”

BACP hosts Chicago Small Biz Expos 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).

**Chicago Public Schools (CPS)** is dedicated to providing a high-quality education to all students, beginning with the District’s free full-day preschool programming for four-year-old scholars and continuing through neighborhood, magnet and selective-enrollment elementary schools that provide a rigorous K-12 education with schools that specialize in the fine arts, world language and culture, dual language, STEM, International Baccalaureate (IB), classical programs, and more. The rising District-wide freshmen-on-track and high school graduation rates reflect the hard work of the CPS community, including families, staff, and students across 635 schools. CPS celebrates the diversity of its more than 315,00 students who cite nearly two hundred home languages. Learn more about CPS at [www.cps.edu](https://www.cps.edu) and connect with CPS on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

**Career and Technical Education (CTE)** programs provide CPS students with career-focused, experiential learning opportunities to explore industries and gain marketable skills while still in high school. Students apply academic knowledge in real work settings and can earn industry-recognized certifications to help them transition directly into jobs or college. Learn more about CTE pathways and programming at [cps.edu/academics/career-and-technical-education](https://cps.edu/academics/career-and-technical-education).

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