People + Planet

Reimagining Pathways for Students Everywhere

Steelcase partners with SuitUp to open doors for students and help them get career ready.

Read 4 minutes

By changing the narrative from asking students, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” to showing them what they can be when they grow up, SuitUp provides students a space to explore and learn about world brands from corporate volunteers. A nonprofit organization based in New York City, SuitUp connects companies and schools to increase career awareness and preparedness for students in underserved communities through innovative business competitions, helping them “see the corporate world as part of ‘their world’ and know that job titles, such as CEO, CFO, VP of Marketing, etc. are now in their grasp.”

Steelcase recently partnered with SuitUp in a virtual business competition with students from Syracuse STEM @ Blodgett Middle and Henry Clay School. The challenge –design a new and innovative learning space that promotes positivity, health and wellbeing. Students could create the space however they chose, incorporating furniture, interior décor, and even spaces designated for specific activities.

The competition kicked off with a brainstorming session, and students were asked to envision their perfect school. “Let’s make a space that makes you feel good – so that you leave the school feeling better than when you got there” said one student.

They were then divided into teams and paired with Steelcase volunteers who coached and mentored the students throughout the weeklong challenge. Steelcase employees taught SuitUp students hard skills like KPIs and profit margin, but also life skills like teamwork and leadership. Steelcase participation was driven and coordinated by the Steelcase New York/New Jersey Change Corp team. The Change Corp is a network of 25 Steelcase employee-led teams around the world focused on making global impact in local communities through equity centered design.

“In a world that’s working so hard for equity, Steelcase demonstrated that their commitment is more than words. It’s actions. We are thrilled to call Steelcase a partner as we work together to ensure that all students, regardless of race or socio-economic status, have the access and opportunity to pursue the college and career of their choosing,” says Lauren Reilly, SuitUp Executive Director.

From designing wellness rooms for selfcare to a garden aimed at feeding both the soul and the community, students approached the challenge with creativity and innovation, while also learning about design, marketing and strategy. The competition concluded with a pitch day, when students presented their concepts to a group of Steelcase volunteer judges.

“I learned that it’s good to be a part of a team and hear different perspectives. It pushes you to be open to others and reflect on your own ideas. Everyone is different. Having many ideas can be better than just your own,” said one student.

When asked about their favorite part of the Steelcase competition, another student said, “Getting to create this product was inspiring because we also included how we felt during the pandemic and how we want to change people’s lives.”

Learn more about SuitUp and their vision to align the incentives of schools and corporations to ensure that all students have access and awareness to pursue the college and career of their choosing.

If you have an idea on how to make talent pipelines more equitable, sign up for the next Steelcase Social Innovation Lab challenge.