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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet is a four-step blueprint for a school-to-work system for getting students ready for work. Step one proposes that every school-to-work system be guided by the following principles: (1) encourage participants to attain high academic standards; (2) encourage students to stay in school; (3) link classroom curriculum to work-site experiences and emphasize lifelong learning; and (4) enhance students' prospects for employment. Step 2 ensures a career resource center in every high school to provide career counseling and information about careers. In step 3, the school-to-work system provides students with options that will help them learn and gain the skills needed to compete. The following options are suggested: youth apprenticeships, cooperative education, tech prep, school-based enterprises, career academies, vocational-technical schools, and vocational student organizations. Step 4 is to certify graduates in terms of what they have learned and to support them in the following ways: (1) be sure graduates know how to apply for employment; (2) offer job placement assistance; and (3) provide evaluation and follow-up to see whether graduates are getting and holding career-related jobs. A checklist of activities and a list of 12 sources for more information are provided. (CML)

Here is WHAT WE MUST DO *at school* TO GET *our* STUDENTS READY *for work.*

Blueprint for a School-to-Work System

GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE READY FOR WORK...

... should never be the sole thrust of school. But for many practical reasons, it is *terribly* important. More so today than ever before! Why? It's this simple. Every year in America, more than one million teens start high school. But as soon as they do, most can't wait to graduate. Far too many *don't*. Three out of ten quit school well before graduation. Fewer than half who finish go on to college.

Since the workplace is undergoing a dramatic restructuring, we must worry that young people will experience even more difficulty than before in finding work to sustain themselves and their families.

The problem is— too many of our students just don't see the *relevance* of school. Try as they might, they simply cannot connect long, dreary hours of books, assignments, drills and tests with what, for them, is the real world "out there." They long to move on to where "the action is"... make money...get on with their lives.

Seldom do fresh-from-school youngsters with limited academic and technical skills connect with anything but minimum-wage chore jobs. *Good* jobs often require some postsecondary training or, in that frustrating catch-22 sense, "...several years of work experience!"

Yet jobs *are* available— even for high-school graduates— that pay well and provide opportunities for growth, responsibility and personal fulfillment. In fact, the number of desirable work opportunities grows each year.

But employers look for candidates who have actual work experience, perform well on teams, know how to operate computers and sophisticated equipment, are able to solve problems and exercise personal initiative. What they generally find are young people who are sadly short on qualifications for all but the most menial jobs.

As a result, far too many of our youth are dead-ended before they even get started. Since the workplace is undergoing a dramatic restructuring, we must worry that they will experience even more difficulty than before in finding work to sustain themselves and their families. In the face of these changes, we cannot afford to have our schools continue teaching the same things the same way.

Parents, educators, employers—*anyone* concerned for the future of America—can find hope in our country's six National Education Goals. Included among them is the pledge that *all* citizens of working age— with the need or desire for employment— *will* have the skills needed to get, and hold, good jobs.

Today, thousands of communities are working to reach the National Education Goals because they understand that better schools and stronger communities are the key to their future. All of them have accepted the four-part challenge to become AMERICA 2000 communities. They are adopting the goals, developing their own community-wide strategies to reach those goals, devising report cards to monitor progress, and planning for at least one New American School. These communities know that reaching the goals will mean starting from scratch and reinventing almost every element of education.

More and more communities are changing how they help students prepare for the move from school into the workplace. For too long, students have not been prepared for the demands of the real world and have not been given enough help in making that difficult move.

That's why many communities are developing innovative ways to improve the transition from school to work, and why the U.S. Department of Education encourages more of these efforts.

We invite you to join this effort. First, see what we must do at school to help our students get ready for good jobs...for careers...for successful, productive lives. Then, do all you can to see these things happen in *your* schools...at *your* places of employment...and throughout *your* community.

Betsy Brand

Betsy Brand
Assistant Secretary
Office of Vocational and Adult Education

We know what makes schools effective.

Good schools are *safe* schools, free from drugs and violence.

Good schools are run by strong principals with specific goals that are promoted energetically among faculty, students and parents.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS (In Brief)

BY THE YEAR 2000...

1. ***All* children in America will start school *ready to learn.***
2. **The high school graduation rate will increase to *at least 90 percent.***
3. **American students will be *competent in the core subjects.***
4. **U.S. students will be *first in the world in science and mathematics* achievement.**
5. **Every adult American will be literate and *possess the skills necessary to compete in a world economy.***
6. **Every school will be *safe and free of drugs.***

Good schools provide students with a solid grounding in core subjects such as mathematics, science, English, history and geography.

In the best schools, teachers and administrators work hard to involve parents in their children's education, and hold themselves accountable for *results* which are shared with parents on a regular basis.

Above all, the most effective schools have *high expectations* and standards for students— the underlying assumption is that *every* student can learn.

But even with all of these characteristics, there is still something missing. Schools need to have a strategy in place that recognizes that students learn in different ways, that they need to see the connection between what they are learning and the value it holds in their lives.

A School-to-Work system is a new essential— one that will help reduce dropout rates, counter the decline of qualified, capable workers and help all students— including the large majority who do not go on to four-year colleges— to plan... enthusiastically...for their own futures.

Every School-to-Work system should be guided by four basic principles:

1.
HIGH STANDARDS

All should be designed to encourage participants to attain high academic standards.

2.
STAY IN SCHOOL

All should be designed to encourage young people to stay in school and become productive, self-reliant citizens.

3.
LINK WORK AND LEARNING

All should link classroom curriculum to work-site experiences and emphasize lifelong learning.

4.
EMPLOYMENT AND CAREERS

All should enhance students' prospects for employment... on a path that provides significant opportunity for continued education,a broadening of personal horizons, and on-going career development.

It is important, in all of this, to keep priorities straight. During teen years the emphasis should be on *learning*, not on working. Part-time jobs should not detract from lessons and skill-building. Getting paid should never supersede the importance of acquiring knowledge and experiencing new, lifelong career possibilities.

STEP 2

Provide CAREER INFORMATION

One thing all schools should do—is help students become familiar with and sort through various career options.

If there is a key to forging the connection between school and work, it lies in providing career counseling throughout the school years. Yet career guidance is one of the most neglected areas in American schools today. While counselors assist students in the selection of classes, few can link these to the broad range of career possibilities. Rather than specializing—as college advisors, class schedulers or remedial programmers—*all* high school counselors should become *career* counselors. And, each should work with a mix of students—some college-bound, some planning for specialized vocational training, others unsure.

Starting in the earliest grades, classroom lessons should incorporate information about careers. Language, math, science should be taught with an emphasis on how people really *use* this knowledge on a daily basis.

Every high school should have its own Career Resource Center with printed, computerized and video information about the world of work. The *Career Information Delivery System (CIDS)*, an electronic data base which is available to school districts throughout the United States, is filled with accurate, up-to-date local and national information about employment possibilities— including job descriptions, typical wages and benefits, labor market demand and skill standards. CIDS lists places that offer the training required for various jobs and notes sources of financial aid. It serves more than seven million people annually at more than 18,000 sites.

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And while no *test* should ever dictate one's career direction, career-interest inventories and aptitude assessment profiles are available that enable counselors to introduce students to promising vocational options and guide them in directions best suited to their interests and abilities.

Students, in turn, need access to these same tools as they develop their own personal career portfolios to use as road maps for their futures. These folders— complete with notations of skills, hobbies, talents and personal goals, as well as lists of classes relating to short-term interests or long-term possibilities— should accompany them from one grade to another and from school to school. Included, too, should be records of work experiences, extra-curricular activities, training programs and significant accomplishments... *anything* that clarifies interests, preferences and job or career possibilities. Students should be encouraged to review and update these files regularly.

Since young people change their minds many times, their early interests must not lock them to particular occupational directions and exclude them from others. But what *is* important is that, somewhere along the way, they begin to develop *some* career-related focus.

STEP 3

Offer A VARIETY OF LEARNING OPTIONS

With regard to school, students need to know they have solid options that will qualify them to go to work directly out of school *or* move on to higher levels of education and training.

For years, the nation's secondary school agenda has been characterized by an either/or split between academics and vocational education. College-bound students were guided to courses needed to meet college or university entrance requirements. Vocational students took courses to prepare for a variety of technical careers, but the reputation of these programs suffered because challenging academic subject matter was not included. And the largest group of students, unsure of their direction, was left to drift along on what educators refer to as "the general track" consisting of watered-down academic and vocational courses offering little preparation for either further academic study or the world of work.

College-prep has been viewed for too long as the only meaningful option. But it does not take into account students who are interested in pursuing a variety of technical careers— or who learn by doing.

It's time to stop viewing school in this limited sense. All students can master challenging academic material,

but most need to learn math, science or history in context—in a real-world setting, where the principles and ideas are applied to everyday problems and solutions.

The goal is to provide students with options that will help them learn and gain the skills needed to compete in our changing world.

Communities around the country are experimenting with programs that provide challenging academics, allow students to learn in context and give them the opportunity to explore and prepare for careers. The successful ones depend on collaboration among academic and vocational teachers, students, parents, employers and community leaders.

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Consider the many additional options:

TECH-PREP

Tech-Prep combines academic studies with job-related learning within a plan that usually links the final two years of high school with two additional years of college. People from industry join high school and community college teachers to develop curriculum, teach lessons and monitor students in school and at the work site. The carefully sequenced curriculum integrates high-level math, science, language and social studies with enough occupational training to qualify them for technically demanding employment positions or advanced schooling.

In many programs, students progress at their own speed. After mastering basic competencies, they can move on to college-level courses even while still in high school. Sometimes they receive wages for on-the-job time. Diplomas are awarded upon completion of the high school half of the program. Associate degrees and certification in various occupational fields are granted upon completion of the final half of their studies.

With the help of federal dollars for qualified programs, Tech-Prep is one of the fastest growing curriculum innovations in the United States today.

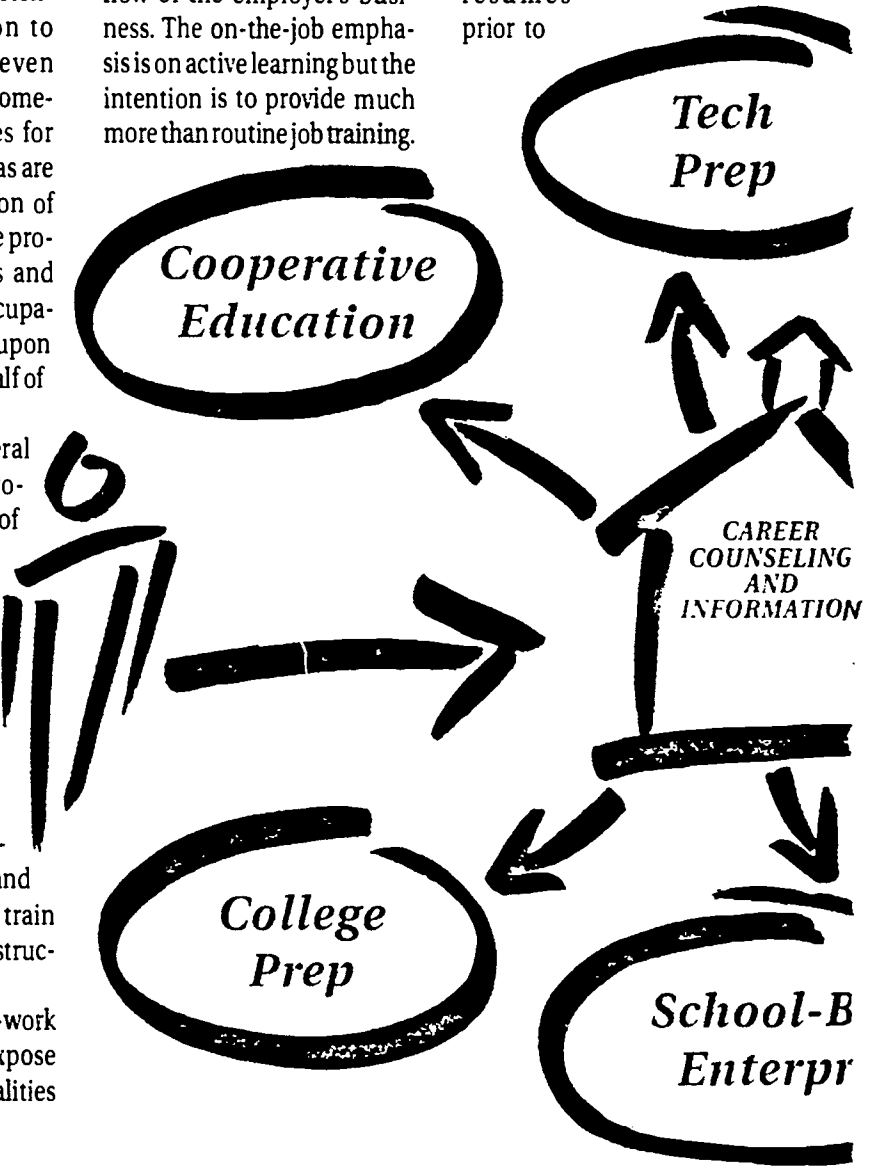
YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS

Youth Apprenticeships represent a new twist to the long standing partnership between business and labor unions seeking to train skilled workers in the construction and metal trades.

This newest school-to-work option is designed to expose students to work-day realities in areas such as health care, banking, insurance, law, hospitality and retailing— while they are still in high school. Employers or labor/management groups play a major role in setting up these programs. Participants spend part of each school week at their respective work sites, the rest back in the classroom.

Students are generally treated as regular employees, with work assignments that contribute to the main-line flow of the employer's business. The on-the-job emphasis is on active learning but the intention is to provide much more than routine job training. Students see the need for strong writing, speaking and reasoning abilities, and for knowing mathematical, technical and scientific principles. Their job-site employee-mentors help them develop the social skills and work attitudes so necessary for success in any employment situation.

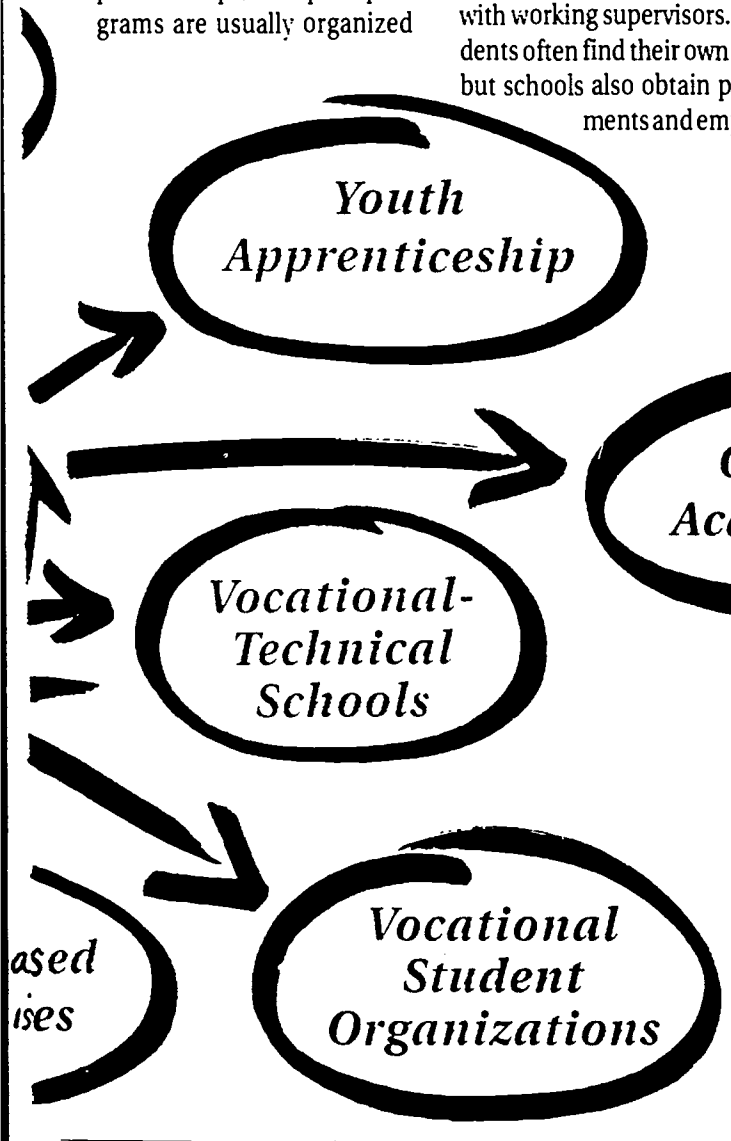
These temporary employment connections give students a chance to try out actual working situations and gain actual job references for their resumes prior to



graduation. They receive high school diplomas and the particular certificates of mastery which qualify them for direct employment out of high school. Many go on to community colleges to obtain associate degrees in their respective fields.

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

Cooperative Education is another well regarded approach that links school with actual on-the-job experience. While similar in many ways to apprenticeships, Co-op Ed programs are usually organized and administered by schools rather than by employers or labor-management groups. Students who enroll in this program receive one or two introductory courses before being placed in temporary jobs related to personal career choices; teachers and employers work together to ensure that the participants learn and perform job tasks in accordance with their mutual expectations. Schools will generally make accommodations for teachers to have opportunities to visit students' job sites and review their progress with working supervisors. Students often find their own jobs, but schools also obtain placements and employers frequently come forward with listings of part-time openings.



SCHOOL-BASED ENTERPRISES

School-Based Enterprises are individual or sequenced high school courses set up as actual student-run businesses. Sandwich shops, bookstores, print shops, child care centers, plant nurseries... even auto repair service centers or construction programs in which students build boats, houses or other items which are then sold... are among the more notable examples. Students study the business side of their operations as they develop particular occupational skills. Profits generated by these enterprises are funnelled back into the program or paid to them as wages. These student-run programs usually generate a sense of pride and responsibility among participants and the community.

CAREER ACADEMIES

Career Academies are special focus programs in which academic and vocational instructors collaborate around a single theme. Most are schools-within-schools, but often these programs encompass the entire school. Military academies and parochial and private prep schools are long-familiar versions of the focus school concept, but the trend now is to the popular magnet programs organized around various career aspirations. Most are operated at the high school level, but special focus programs are also being introduced at elementary and junior high schools.

Often assisted by advisory boards made up of qualified representatives of the featured career theme, individual schools develop concentrated programs in the arts, commerce, science and technology, electronics, languages and environmental science.

These programs engender a tremendous sense of community among students, teachers and outside instructors who share a core of common values and enthusiasm for the academy theme. Because students work with the same teachers over the course of the extended program, instructors become more directly involved with their students' individual progress...and success.

These special focus schools are favored among parents, students and employers because they teach *particular* things extremely well.

VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

Vocational-Technical Schools are specialized schools. Today they generally offer high-quality technology education which combines hands-on skill-building with substantive courses that *open*, rather than foreclose, learning options. Graduates come away with marketable employment skills *and* levels of academic qualifi-

cation which allow them to choose among high-demand careers or pursue additional education. Today's vocational-technical programs generally include actual state-of-the-art work experience along with classroom training. Because of close connections with local businesses, these schools have great success in helping graduates connect with desirable employment opportunities.

VOCATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Vocational Student Organizations (VSOs) present well over a million students each year with entrepreneurial insights into a wide range of career options. In addition to sharpening particular vocational skills, these clubs provide focused leadership training. VSOs are sanctioned by national organizations; their non-credit programs are structured to fit junior high through post secondary school contexts. Local groups gain tremendous momentum when business and industry advisors become involved. The more familiar of these organiztions introduce young people to career perspectives in marketing, health care, business, technical occupations, and agriculture.

STEP 4

Diplomas mark the successful completion of high school. But just as colleges require transcripts and aptitude tests as prerequisites for enrollment, so do employers want a definite indication of a student's readiness for work. **Certifying** graduates in terms of the particulars of what they have learned and what they are able to do is a more effective way to acknowledge their abilities relative to various employment opportunities.

For certification to be meaningful, schools should first learn what employers require of graduates in the way of job-related qualification.

For certification to be meaningful, schools should first learn what employers require of graduates in the way of job-related qualification. They can then tailor classes accordingly and, when students complete programs and demonstrate specific capabilities, can award Certificates of Competence or Letters of Qualification in various career categories.

Students, in turn, should learn how to **apply for employment**...how to identify prospective employers, develop resumes and present themselves appropriately at job interviews. Classes that help them connect with desirable jobs should be part of every school-to-work agenda.

One more element that ensures the transition from school to desirable employment—is **job placement assistance**. To fulfill this requirement, someone should contact employers, list jobs, screen candidates and send them off to interviews. High schools should coordinate placement services with one another and with local community colleges to avoid burdening employers with an army of competing job developers. Many contract with local employment agencies or with community-based organizations.

Finally, no school-to-work system is complete without **evaluation and follow-up**—to determine if students are gaining academic *and* vocational skills...if they are getting *and holding* career-related jobs with real opportunities for advancement. This assessment process should monitor student drop-out rates, and should measure such factors as attendance, punctuality and positive attitudes— all of which are important considerations in the world of work. To do this effectively, schools should keep in touch with students well after graduation. Some follow all students, graduates and dropouts alike; others maintain contact with only a sampling of their graduates.

Schools that publish this tracking data in "report cards" to parents, and in course catalogs, encourage students to choose among programs on the basis of academic achievement scores, job or college placement records, completion or graduation rates, or job earnings after graduation. By knowing how prior graduates have done, students and parents can make better choices about which schools to attend and which courses to take.

Here's WHAT YOU CAN DO

Start by comparing what is available at your school with the elements of a high quality School-to-Work system. Effective School-to-Work systems have most of the following components:

- ✓ Specific goals...endorsed and supported by parents and the employer community;
- ✓ A strong grounding in core subjects— mathematics, science, English, history and geography;
- ✓ High expectations for students combined with a belief that *all* children can learn and succeed;
- ✓ Direct and active involvement of local employers in career guidance, curriculum development, work-site teaching, skills certification and job placement;
- ✓ *All* school counselors trained and qualified to provide career guidance;
- ✓ At every grade level, lessons that show how what is taught applies to the world of work;
- ✓ A Career Resource Center with up-to-date information about wide-ranging career opportunities;
- ✓ Proper and frequent use of vocational interest and aptitude tests;
- ✓ A commitment to encourage all students to develop personal career plans;
- ✓ Competency-based programs which allow students to progress at their own speed and graduate when they demonstrate a mastery of required job skills;
- ✓ Focus Schools (or schools-within-schools) with particular missions or career-vocation themes;
- ✓ A Tech-Prep program that connects high school courses with two-year college technical training;
- ✓ Other career-related learning options— youth apprenticeships, cooperative education, school-based enterprises, vocational student organizations;
- ✓ Certification of students based on demonstrated competencies relative to skill standards endorsed by employers;
- ✓ Job placement services which connect students with part-time, summer or full-time job opportunities; and,
- ✓ On-going monitoring and evaluation of students' success in moving on to meaningful employment or additional education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

• *America's Choice: High Skills Or Low Wages!* Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. National Center on Education and the Economy, 39 State Street, Suite 500, Rochester, NY, 14614, phone: 716-546-7620; fax: 716-546-3145.

• Career Information Delivery System (CIDS), computerized data base of job-related information. National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee. Washington, D.C., 202-653-5665.

• *Combining School And Work: Options in High School and Two-Year Colleges.* Office of Vocational and Adult Education. U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 20202-7100. 1991. 202-205-5451.

• *Hands and Minds: Redefining Success in Vocational Technical Education,* Education Writers Association and William T. Grant Foundation, Commission on Youth and America's Future, Washington, D.C., 1992. 202-429-9680.

• Hull, Dan and Parnell, Dale. *Tech Prep Associate Degree: A Win/Win Experience.* The Center For Occupational Research and Development, Waco, Texas. 1991. 1-800-231-3015.

• *Portraits of Excellence: The Secretary's Awards for Outstanding Vocational-Technical Education Programs.* Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U. S. Department of Education. 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202-7100. October, 1992. 202-205-5451.

• *Real Jobs for Real People. An Employer's Guide to Youth Apprenticeship,* National Alliance of Business. 1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. 202-289-2917.

• Rosenbaum, James E. et al., *Youth Apprenticeship in America: Guidelines for Building an Effective System.* William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Youth and America's Future, Washington, D.C. 1992.

• *School-to-Work Connections: Formulas for Success.* U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Office of Work-Based Learning, 200 Constitution Avenue N.W. N-5626, Washington, D.C. 20210, 202-219-5281.

• *Vocational Education for The 21st Century.* National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, September, 1992, 803-656-2599.

• Youth Apprenticeships, Office of Work-Based Learning, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue N.W., Room N-4649, Washington, D.C., 20210, 202-535-5281.

For additional information about developing a School-to-Work system in your community, contact:

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