

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 338

CE 082 691

AUTHOR Pines, Marion, Ed.  
 TITLE The 21st Century Challenge: Moving the Youth Agenda Forward. A Policy Study of the Levitan Youth Policy Network. Public Policy Issues Monograph.  
 INSTITUTION Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, MD. Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies.  
 SPONS AGENCY National Council on Employment Policy, Washington, DC.; Mott (C.S.) Foundation, Flint, MI.  
 REPORT NO Mono-00-02  
 PUB DATE 2000-11-00  
 NOTE 164p.; For a related work, "A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth," see ED 413 409.  
 AVAILABLE FROM Sar Levitan Center, Johns Hopkins University, 3400 N. Charles Street, Wyman Park Building, 5th Floor, Baltimore, Maryland 21218 (\$10). Tel: 410-516-7169; Fax: 410-516-4775; Web site: <http://www.levitan.org/index.html>.  
 PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Collected Works - General (020)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS At Risk Persons; Case Studies; Community Cooperation; Cooperative Planning; Coordination; Cultural Influences; Demography; Disabilities; Disadvantaged Youth; \*Education Work Relationship; Educational Needs; Educational Resources; Employment Opportunities; Ethnic Groups; Guidelines; Human Capital; Integrated Services; Job Training; Labor Force Development; Labor Market; Limited English Speaking; Minority Groups; Models; Needs Assessment; \*Out of School Youth; Partnerships in Education; Policy Formation; Population Trends; Postsecondary Education; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; \*Public Policy; School Business Relationship; Secondary Education; \*Systems Approach; Test Bias; Testing; Trend Analysis; Unemployment; Young Adults; \*Youth Employment; Youth Problems; \*Youth Programs  
 IDENTIFIERS Stakeholders

## ABSTRACT

This document contains nine papers devoted to the labor market problems faced by out-of-school and other disadvantaged young people in the United States and policy options and strategies for addressing those problems. The papers update the data on out-of-school young adults, review the lessons learned from past youth programs and policies, identify seven guiding principles for policy and practice in the youth field, and detail a model for creating a community-wide system built on collaborative partnerships among all relevant stakeholders. The following papers are included: "Confronting the Youth Demographic Challenge: Labor Market Prospects for Out-of-School Young Adults" (Andrew Sum, Neeta Fogg, Garth Mangum); "Human Capital Investments by People Matter" (Stephen L. Mangum, Judith W. Tansky); "High Stakes Testing: Opportunities and Risks for Students of Color, English-Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities" (Jay P. Heubert); "Using Educational Resources for Out-of-School Youth" (David Gruber); "Out of School and Unemployed: Principles for More Effective Policy and Programs" (Gary Walker); "The Power of Youth Popular Culture" (Ed de

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Jesus); "The Declaration of Inter-dependence" (Young Leaders Council, National Alumni Council of the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network); "Winning Support" (Dorothy Stoneman); and "Building a System to Serve Out-of-School Youth" (Marion Pines, William J. Spring). One paper contains a substantial bibliography. (MN)

ED 459 338

# The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge:

## Moving the Youth Agenda Forward

### A Policy Study of The Levitan Youth Policy Network

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Marion Pines, Editor

Sar Levitan  
Center for  
Social Policy Studies

Public Policy Issues  
Monograph 00-02

November 2000

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**The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge:  
Moving the Youth Agenda Forward**

**A Policy Study  
of the  
Levitan Youth Policy Network**

Marion Pines, Editor

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**Public Policy Issues Monograph 00-02**

**November 2000**

## *Sar A. Levitan*

The Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies at the Johns Hopkins University was organized in 1995 to commemorate and extend the works of Sar A. Levitan, public policy commentator extraordinaire who died in May 1994 after 44 years of selfless public service on the national scene.

Levitan came to Washington in 1950 after military service and completion of his Ph.D. in Economics at Columbia University to serve on the staff of the Korean era Wage Stabilization Board. He remained thereafter with the Legislative Reference Service, researching and enlightening at congressional request issues related to labor relations, employment and economic development. On loan from LRS, he served on the staff of Senator Eugene McCarthy's 1959 Select Committee on Unemployment, in 1960-61 as Deputy Director of the Presidential Railroad Commission and then as advisor to Senator Paul Douglas in the formulation of the Area Redevelopment Act, the start of the Kennedy New Frontier.

Aware that pioneer social policies would need friendly critics to keep their administrators focused, he obtained a grant from the Ford Foundation which the Foundation itself has described as the longest lasting and most productive in its history. For thirty years thereafter, he was to advocate, evaluate, criticize, or praise (wherever and whenever deserved) every significant legislative act, policy and program related to employment, education, training or poverty during those tumultuous years.

Levitan was not satisfied with a 36-page bibliography of books, monographs, articles, congressional testimony and speeches. When cancer ended his life just short of his eightieth birthday, he left the bulk of his life savings to the National Council on Employment Policy, an organization he had helped organize and then singlehandedly perpetuated, charging his closest friends to continue his life's crusade.

The NCEP in turn funded the Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, which is the sponsor of this publication series.

### *Mike Sviridoff*

As this book is going to press, we note with great sadness the death of our dear friend and colleague, Mitchell (Mike ) Sviridoff on October 21, 2000. Born in New Haven in 1918, he had an amazing career, starting as a local labor official in an aircraft parts manufacturing plant, moving on to become president of the Connecticut State Federation of Labor. Thereafter, he became nationally recognized for his design and administration of the New Haven anti-poverty agency, the Community Progress Administration, which became one of the models for Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. That record propelled him to New York City to try to replicate the New Haven model and he became the first director of that city's Human Resources Administration. Despite his lack of formal educational credentials ( which he often mischievously reported), he soon became Vice President for National Affairs for the Ford Foundation. He helped to spawn many distinguished social policy intermediaries such as the Manpower Demonstration and Research Corporation (MDRC), Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) and as the architect of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), he was able to serve as "midwife" and mentor to over 100 community development corporations across the nation. It was during his Ford Foundation service, that Mike became a close friend of Sar Levitan and the long time sponsor of Sar's Center for Social Policy Studies at George Washington University.

With his Ford service behind him, Mike was asked by Sar to join the Board of Directors of the National Council on Employment Policy which Sar chaired. After Sar's death, Mike urged Marion Pines, who became chair of the group, and the other board members to use Sar's legacy to create the Levitan Center at Johns Hopkins University. He suggested that the Center take on the formulation of a sorely needed national policy for out-of-school youth and recommended seeking the guidance of a network of the most knowledgeable youth policy experts in the nation to help carry out that mission. Those suggestions were acted upon and met with success beyond the most optimistic expectations.

This book is the most recent fruit of those suggestions and we are proud and grateful to dedicate it to Mike Sviridoff.

The National Council on Employment Policy

The Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies

The Levitan Youth Policy Network

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This monograph is published and distributed under a grant from the National Council on Employment Policy pursuant to a bequest from the estate of Sar A. and Brita Levitan. The responsibility for the findings and conclusions rests with the authors.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been three years since the original publication of “A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth”, a document that resulted from year-long discussions among the knowledgeable and passionate youth policy experts that constitute the Levitan Youth Policy Network. We wanted to put youth, particularly out-of-school and unemployed youth, back on the nation’s agenda. We wanted to let people know that in the midst of unprecedented prosperity, young people without educational credentials were falling between the cracks. We wanted to dispel the myth that “nothing works” by clearly stating what we had learned from research, experience and from youth, themselves, about what *does* work. And we hoped by that publication to jumpstart a system-building community planning process convened by local officials.

Some progress has been made and we like to think that “Generation of Challenge” played a meaningful role in that progress. We saw our “principles that work” incorporated into the new Workforce Investment Act. We saw our recommendation for local stakeholder policy teams translated into the new legislatively mandated Youth Councils. We were pleased that our recommendation for neighborhood based “homerooms” became a requirement for all Youth Opportunity Grantees. And with the assistance of the Department of Labor, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the DeWitt Wallace- Reader’s Digest Fund, we were able to assist hundreds of urban teams around the country, energized by the book’s call to action, to start on a serious system-building planning process.

But we still have a long way to go, and that is why we offer this new publication in the effort to keep moving this urgent youth agenda forward. Some distinguished new authors have joined our original group, all with updated information and new perspectives. We are deeply in their debt for taking the time and effort from over scheduled lives to share their wisdom.

Pulling this all together has been a labor of love, but make no mistake, it was labor! Without the editorial assistance and wisdom of Garth Mangum, Cliff Johnson, Andy Sum and the passionate prodding of Dorothy Stoneman, this book would not have happened. They helped review the chapters, made suggestions to the authors and contributed immeasurably to the overall spirit of this collaborative endeavor. Cliff, in his new capacity as Director of the Institute for Youth, Education and Families at the National League of Cities, made a special effort to document the progress being made in some of the major cities around the country, and these are included as profiles in the last

chapter of the book. These profiles add a vibrant reality to our rhetoric and we thank Cliff Johnson for that good idea and for following up on it as well.

We want to extend special kudos and deep gratitude to The Mott Foundation for their new support for extending the range and influence of the Levitan Youth Policy Network and for wide dissemination of this document.

And on a personal note, I want to thank Jennifer Osborne, my assistant at the Levitan Center at Johns Hopkins University for helping me keep track of the authors and their chapters and for putting the whole manuscript into camera-ready form.

As we said three years ago, we trust our joint efforts will provide policymakers and practitioners with food for thought and will continue to spur continued positive action in an area too long in public neglect.

Marion Pines, Director  
Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies,  
Johns Hopkins University

## INTRODUCTION

How often does public policy fail to take warning from obvious signals of coming stress? In late 1945 and throughout 1946, at the end of the Second World War, “Johnny came marching home again” to civilian life and to marriages delayed by depression as well as war. There was stress in creating enough housing for the marriage boom of 1946, which in turn led to a predictable consequence, a baby boom which began in 1947. Yet little notice was taken of the schooling implications until the elementary school buildings and available teachers were overwhelmed, beginning in 1952. The same scene was repeated as the baby boom youth “surprised” policy-makers as they hit the secondary schools in turn at the end of the 1950s. There was equal surprise and unpreparedness in the nation’s job markets when those who did not complete high school began looking for jobs in 1963, as high school completers did two years later in 1965. The Neighborhood Youth Corps, the Job Corps and youth programs of the Manpower Development and Training Act had to be invented in 1964 to absorb “surplus” youth.

The nation was unprepared for but relieved by the “baby bust” shrinkage of the 1960s and early 1970s which would affect school enrollments in the 1970s and 1980s and the numbers of young adults and new labor market entrants into the 1990s. It was equally predictable that those baby boomers would begin marrying in the late 1960s and producing children in the 1970s and 1980s. Less predictable was the fact that many would not bother to marry before giving birth, and that so many marriages would fracture, contributing to a feminization of poverty. And, even though each parent, on the average, would have fewer children, there were so many potential parents that another baby boom was almost inevitable.

According to pattern, the “baby boom II” expansion of school enrollments was predictable but unpredicted. Fortunately, the overall impact was less dramatic this time. Schools were again crowded and teachers were in short supply, but the swollen classrooms were largely handled at the state and local level without national outcry. There was even a national school-to-work reform initiative, encouraging states and

local school districts to take action to re-engage youth in learning and ease the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

What was overlooked was that, like 1963, many of those grandchildren of the post-World War II parents would also leave school early, striking the U.S. job markets without adequate preparation. And they did. Inevitably, the numbers of 16-24 year old young adults nearly doubled between 1960 and 1980, peaking at more than 37 million in the latter year, then began a long decline to 32 million in 1995. The numbers then began to climb again, headed toward a new and higher than ever nearly 39 million peak about 2010. Only this time, educational competencies were even more essential to employment at decent wages. Most did and would stay in school, preparing for a promising future. But what of the many who did not and will not?

### **A Wake Up Call**

Noting that the nation appeared unprepared for the fact that many of the most under-prepared among these young adults were already beginning to leave school and flounder, the Levitan Youth Policy Network issued a wake-up call in its June 1997 *A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth*. The monograph proposed that the nation adopt guiding principles that research and practice had proven productive. Thereby, more out-of-school youth could be helped to become contributing members of society. The argument proceeded from a vast array of data that made a straightforward case: the demographic surprise package of a rapidly growing out-of-school population ages 16-24, ill equipped to meet the requirements of a more demanding workplace, would put added pressure on this generation to meet the challenge.

### **A Neglected Generation**

The number, size and intractability of many of our nation's problems have obscured our view of an entire generation of youth that stands in silent danger of being lost to the country and to themselves—their talent and energy wasted, their hopes muted, their promise unrealized, because they live in a generation that has not found its time or place in this one. In 1988, the W.T. Grant Foundation in its report,

*The Forgotten Half*, had called attention to approximately 20 million 16-24 year olds who were not likely to go to college. The report argued forcefully that, despite wide acceptance of its inevitability, the college degree is not the only way to develop the talents of tomorrow's workers, and for some youth, far from the best way. But, in many respects, the recommendations of that study fell on ears tuned to another frequency.

Three interrelated reasons help us understand why out-of-school and out-of-work young adults have received little attention from policy makers in recent years:

First, the policy atmosphere has been tainted by discouragement, largely because so few of the government-funded employment and training programs intended to help these youth and young adults seemed to have made a significant difference in their lives. Dispiriting evaluation results from several federally-funded programs for out-of-school youth have given rise to the disastrously wrong-headed and erroneous conclusion that "nothing works for these kids." Few noted how inadequate the funding was, how small those programs were, and whether and where innovative and promising examples could be found.

Second, in an atmosphere of discouragement, policy makers had found it easier to ignore the problems of out-of-school youth because of their declining numbers. A smaller proportion of the young adult generation were failing to complete high school or obtain a GED certificate than in the past. And the size of the total youth population was declining substantially. Where there had been 30.2 million 18-21 year olds in 1981, there were only 24.9 million in 1995. About one-sixth of the problem seemed to be going away by itself, through the magic of demographics. The message policy makers heard was that they could relax, cut budgets, and turn their attention elsewhere. The oncoming generations were beyond their political attention spans.

Third, it has not always been clear where the policy responsibility for this group of young people lies. The education of American youth has always been primarily a state and local responsibility. But who takes responsibility when youth vote with their feet and leave school with few competencies and no certification? Certainly, federal involvement on behalf of out-of-school youth has been sporadic, limited, and haphazard. The modest school-to-work strategy initiated in 1994, for example, has

addressed in-school youth almost exclusively. Although this system-building initiative has expended a good deal of local effort, it has been supported only by token and temporary funding and does not appear to be commanding long-term attention. "Second chance" programs for those already out of school and pushed to the fringes of the labor market have largely been federal responsibilities since the early 1960s. But these programs are designed primarily for adults with substantial labor force exposure, youth being involved almost as an afterthought.. Too often, such programs have been inadequately funded and unsuccessfully adapted for out-of-school and out-of-work youth.

To be sure, a majority of this new century's young people have been born into favorable circumstances. They will be reasonably well-educated, well-socialized, and well-prepared to lead fulfilling and productive lives. But a substantial minority will not. Fully one-quarter of them have been born into poverty. Many are immigrants or children of immigrants with little schooling and poor language skills. A growing number of them are losing their way, abandoning education, becoming substance abusers, having out-of-wedlock babies, and landing in jail and prison. The light of the future, shining on the coming generation of young adults, has left a significant number in the shadows.

Lost in the gloom of these numbers and projections, and buried in the discouraging evaluations of youth programs thus far mounted to aid disadvantaged youth, is a redeeming fact: many of these young adults have succeeded handsomely because *some of the efforts to assist them do work, and we now know why these programs work*. Because we have identified and trumpeted these successful measures, more of their needs are being addressed, still more can be. The number of success stories is multiplying and more will follow. What is needed now is to pay close attention to what has worked, continue to sound the wake up call, and keep on keeping on with the job—a rendezvous with the destiny of a generation.

Our wake-up call requires facing difficult facts. The rapidly growing youth population continues to experience increasing pressure from declining real earnings, from growing numbers of immigrants competing for jobs, and from the impacts of incarceration, substance abuse and continued high levels of out-of-wedlock births. Tight labor markets at the

turn of the century have slowed the pace of earnings decline but has not ended it. The incidence of births to teenage mothers has declined but not the incidence of out-of-wedlock births to young adults. Labor short employers make short-term use of the inadequately prepared, but do not put them on career tracks. But chiefly, out-of-school youth are negatively affected by the fact that they have not acquired the one asset that makes more difference than any other in achieving labor market success: an effective education base they can build on. Efforts to bolster the literacy/numeracy proficiencies and the academic achievement of youth, both in and out of school, must receive a major emphasis from national, state and local policy makers.

Among the challenging factors in the environment of out-of-school young adults, a significant item of good news is that the one circumstance about which they themselves can take action is the one with the highest potential for change—again, education. Completing high school and some post-secondary education, obtaining early work experience and receiving employer-based training have all shown remarkable correlations with overcoming workplace and earnings deficits for young adults.

Interviews with successful graduates of programs for out-of-school youth add a measure of hope to the message delivered by the statisticians. Young adults have to be “awakened,” their peers and colleagues say; they have to change the way they think about life. But as they are also quick to point out, unless that change of heart and mind is encouraged and fostered by caring adults (parents, teachers, program staff, mentors and employers), it will not last.

Successfully meeting the needs of this new generation of young adults also requires a principled response in the sense of adherence to several proven principles that derive from the experience of successful programs. These are not magic bullets, but history and experience confirm that it is possible to create programs for out-of-school and out-of-work young adults that produce life-changing results. These research-based principles are part common sense and part hard lesson. Their constant reiteration by the Levitan Youth Policy Network and their incorporation in amended form in the youth policy section of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 have almost sanctified them into the

“seven commandments of young adult redemption policy ” and are widely hailed as the Levitan principles:

- Each young person needs to feel that at least one adult has a strong stake and interest in his or her labor market success.
- The centrality of work: each young person must sense that the activity or program has strong and effective connections with employers.
- Each young person must have at each step of the way the need and opportunity to improve his or her educational skills and certification thru a variety of learning options.
- Each young person must feel that the program or initiative will provide support and assistance over a sustained period of time.
- Effective connections are needed with external providers of basic supports such as housing, counseling, legal services, medical assistance, food and clothing.
- The program requires an atmosphere, buttressed by specific activities, that emphasizes civic involvement, leadership development and service.
- Motivational techniques are needed, such as financial and other incentives that recognize good performance

### **Emergent Solutions**

But principles out of context are merely words. Unless they are incorporated into a living, breathing system of organizations, partnerships, coalitions, processes, relationships, and activities at the community level, they cannot produce effective programs and practices. Young people whose parents are unable to advocate for them are isolated from many opportunities for success. Leaders in our communities must join hands to build the collaborations and partnerships necessary to build ladders of opportunity from the street corner to careers. The private sector must arrange jobs for those willing to make an effort. The difficult problem of finding adequate funding resources for out-of-school, out-of-work youth can be solved with sufficient will and innovation. In particular, education funds available to school districts as ADA (average daily attendance) support, when they are creatively applied for, can become a source of new money when generated by the enrollment of out-of-school youth. All levels of the public sector must work together and



community leaders at the neighborhood level, volunteer mentors and the faith community must be full participants.

The newly mandated Youth Councils have the potential to play the key role in facilitating the needed collaborations and partnerships.

The Levitan Youth Policy Network has consistently argued for an integrated system that not only pulls existing pieces together but has the will and the capacity to make a difference in disconnected lives. The national congress, the federal administration in power, governors and state legislatures all have their potential roles in providing resources, direction and encouragement. A great disappointment in the fall of 2000 to all of those concerned with national policies addressing the needs of out-of-school and at-risk youth has been the total disinterest in the topic by the formulators of both parties' campaign platforms and the total absence of discussion of the subject by both candidates in their campaign speeches. That absence persists despite the aggressive efforts of ourselves and other advocates to focus political attention on the issues. Again, national and state attention must be redirected for the sake of resources and direction. But mayors and county executives are generally the persons best positioned to spearhead the local system-building task. A community model based on a neighborhood-based "home room" can serve as a staging area for alternative learning communities, peer support groups, social services, skill building, creative work experiences, and jobs—in short, a one-stop shop for youth services. The networks spawned by integrated service systems become the vehicles for delivering education, job training opportunities, and linkages with employers. Where there are shortages of jobs—rare at this juncture in economic history—community service work opportunities can be created. Above all, success depends on strong and sustained leadership and commitment—political and otherwise—at the local level.

But unless we are pro-active, for at least the next decade, scores of thousands of out-of-school and out-of-work young people, surely one of America's greatest reservoirs of untapped human potential, are at risk of remaining trapped in one or another of various backwaters, eddying against the main current of the nation. Too many are on the way to becoming a wasted cadre of marginal workers or dependant poor who live on the margins of civil society. Welfare reform has reduced their ability to

rely on public assistance to support themselves and their children. That may be all to the good, but only if the society will just invest adequately in their self-reliance capabilities. The problems that will necessarily follow in the wake of the current demographic surge of out-of-school youth and young adults, many of them from low-income, single-parent and immigrant families but seeking to swim against the current, are formidable. These young people, especially inner city residents, face a labor market in which their competitive position has been declining and an environment in which both public and private support for their education and skill-building has been eroding.

The nation has a vested interest in maximizing the career opportunities of its young people. Our economic vitality, standards of living, and social stability depend on having all citizens, but especially the on-coming generation of workers, acquire the knowledge and skills a high quality workforce and a high performance workplace depends upon. We must, in short, reignite the public will. We must create personal and career growth opportunities for these young people, while at the same time instilling in them a sense of personal responsibility and a hope that the world they can build for themselves will be better than the one into which they were born.

We have a solid foundation to build on. There is a growing evidence about what works and how to make it work. What is now required is to increase the public's commitment to and investment in making that success concrete. We need to build, direct and redirect channels and systems for the energy and resources that already exist, and that can be created in this generation and the next

### **A Program of Action**

The Levitan Youth Policy Network and its action arm, the Levitan Center at Johns Hopkins University was encouraged to follow its wake up call with aggressive activities. Regional Offices of the Department of Labor supported day long symposia with hundreds of urban multi-disciplinary teams to jump start the needed strategic planning process. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund supported multi-city efforts to create pathways to post-secondary education for out-of-school youth. Planning guides were developed for the newly forming Youth Councils. That work is continuing.

But in this new volume, it is time to reflect upon the lessons learned and the continuing policy actions needed. That we do within these covers, first by repeating an updated version of the introduction to that earlier volume--(what you have just read) and including chapters organized into five important sections:

### **Section One: Understanding the Data**

Data Analysis: Andrew Sum and his colleagues update their out-of-school young adult data, deepening our knowledge and understanding of the most serious threats to this at-risk population, but this time identifying the most promising among the known remedies to their labor market weaknesses.

### **Section Two: Education Pays Off**

We devote three chapters to this very significant issue. Steve Mangum and Judy Tansky confirm the essentiality of educational competencies in their chapter. Jay Heubert in his chapter, raises a warning flag concerning the growing reliance of the "high stakes testing" trend and advises how it can be used positively with potential harm avoided. David Gruber, in his chapter, draws upon his successful experiences with several cities and school systems across the nation to demonstrate that additional resources can be brought to the table for alternative educational options by the creative use of average daily attendance (ADA) funds, which when coupled with Pell grants, create positive pathways to post secondary credentials.

### **Section Three: Policies and Principles**

Gary Walker updates his influential chapter based on recent research and field experience to guide policy and practice in the youth field.

### **Section Four: Voices From the Field**

We have included two very different chapters in an effort to deepen our understanding of the young people we are committed to assist. Ed deJesus challenges us to recognize cultural diversity. He identifies trends within the popular youth culture and demonstrates how some of the very developments adults fear most--hip hop, for instance--can be turned to

the long-term advantage of our youth development efforts. And we have included an inspirational chapter written by young people, themselves-- YouthBuild graduates-- on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of YouthBuild, entitled "The Declaration of Interdependence".

### **Section Five: System Building**

Dorothy Stoneman has developed a chapter with a blueprint for effective advocacy to build political and financial support for our system building agenda. And finally, Marion Pines and Bill Spring pull it all together, providing a step by step detailed design for creating a community wide system built upon collaborative partnerships among all the relevant actors, public and private, forged together by a common vision. Working in collaboration with Cliff Johnson at the National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education and Families, we have interspersed throughout this section, profiles of system building as a work in progress in several major American cities.

The members of the Levitan Youth Policy Network, individually and collectively, hope that this collection of thoughts and suggestions will keep our important policy agenda moving forward. We feel strongly that for ourselves, and for the young people for whom we advocate, this is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

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## SECTION I

### **Understanding the Data**

# CHAPTER ONE

## CONFRONTING THE YOUTH DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE:

### Labor Market Prospects for Out-of-School Young Adults

By Andrew Sum, Neeta Fogg and Garth Mangum

The young adult population of the United States has been riding a demographic seesaw since the end of World War II. As members of the post-World War II baby-boom generation grew up, the number of 16-24 year olds nearly doubled to more than 37 million between 1960 and 1980. Between 1980 and 1995, however, a fundamental demographic shift brought about by the arrival of the baby bust generation saw the size of the same age group decrease by nearly 5 million (13%), a decline that would have been far greater but for the increased influx of young immigrants after 1980. Now the seesaw is again reversing direction. After bottoming out at 32 million in 1995, the number of 16-24 year olds in the resident population rose to 34 million in 2000 and is projected to rise to nearly 39 million by 2010. Over this 15 year period, the 16-24 year old population will have increased by nearly 6.6 million or just under 21% in the gender and race/ethnic pattern shown in Table 1. Approximately two-thirds of the net increase in the 16-24 year old population will take place among non-Whites and Hispanics.

**Table 1:**  
**Projected Trends in the Growth of the Nation's 16-24 Year Old Resident  
Population, 1995 to 2010, Total and by Gender and Race-Ethnic Group  
(Number in 1000s)**

Population Group	1995	2000	2005	2010	Absolute Change, 1995-2010	Growth Rate 1995-2010
All	32,155	34,124	36,638	38,733	6,578	20.5%
Men	16,398	17,385	18,666	19,740	3,342	20.4%
Women	15,757	16,738	17,971	18,993	3,236	20.5%
Hispanic*	4,151	4,764	5,556	6,674	2,523	60.8%
White	21,898	22,735	23,781	24,069	2,171	9.9%
Black	4,620	4,884	5,245	5,635	1,015	22.0%
American Indian	278	318	35	353	74	26.6%
Asian	1,196	1,420	1,698	1,990	794	66.4%

\*Hispanics can be of any race. All other race categories in this table have Hispanics subtracted.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, National Population Projections, Web Site, 1999, tabulations by the authors.

## **Demographic and Social Factors Affecting the Labor Market Prospects of Young Adults**

At least three demographic factors and social developments involve serious threats to the labor market outlook for this growing population of young adults.

### **The Immigration Factor**

Immigration has been the source of over 30% of the net change in the nation's total population and nearly 40% of the net increase in the civilian labor force since 1990. Since the new immigrants tend to be relatively young, they have comprised an above average share of the 18-24 population, particularly in many large central cities. The foreign immigrant share of the 18-24 year old civilian population of the U.S. doubled from 5.4% in 1980 to just under 11% in 1990 and continues to increase. Many of these young adults arrived in the U.S. without the benefit of secondary education. Their limited formal schooling combined with weak English-speaking proficiencies and literacy/numeracy skills will place many of them at a severe competitive disadvantage in gaining access to the more highly skilled and higher wage positions in the New American Economy. The rising immigrant and minority share among the young adult population also will place greater responsibilities on the schools and the workforce development system to equip these youth with the requisite education, literacy proficiencies, vocational/ technical skills, and job opportunities to raise their employment rates and wages closer to par with those of White non-Hispanic youth.

In addition, the growing numbers of immigrants have exacerbated the employment and wage challenges of many native-born dropouts, especially those living in large central cities where most of the newer immigrants seek work. These immigrants have proven to be very close substitutes for native-born workers, especially those with 12 or fewer years of schooling. Many employers prefer to employ immigrants, attributing to them punctuality, docility, a strong work ethic, and a high degree of cooperation with supervisors and fellow workers. Labor market research suggests that up to 30% of the decline in the relative wage position of school dropouts over the past decades may be due to the labor supply effects of foreign immigration. In the absence of a major shift in their educational backgrounds, the existing and projected high levels of immigration over the next decade will impose a double load on the workforce development system of the United States—the need to upgrade both these younger immigrants and those with whom they so effectively compete.



### Birth Rate Implications

Renewed growth in the nation's young adult female population has a number of important implications for the future number of births, including out-of-wedlock births, in the nation over the coming decade. Birth rates declined during the 1990s, especially among teens and young adult women 20-24, in part because of the absence of growth in the number of women of childbearing-age. The nation's overall birth rate declined from 69.6 per thousand women 15-44 years old in 1991 to 65 per thousand women of that age in 1997, a relative decline of 6.6% (Table 2). Over the same time period, the total number of births declined by 230,000 or 5.6%.

**Table 2:**  
**Trends in the Birth Rate, Total Births, and Out-of-Wedlock Births among Childbearing-Age Women in the U.S., 1991 to 1998**

Year	Birth Rate Per 1000 Women Between 15 & 44	Number of Births	Number of Births To Unmarried Women	% of Births To Unmarried Women
1991	69.6	4,110,907	1,213,769	29.5%
1993	67.6	4,000,240	1,240,172	31.0%
1996	65.3	3,891,494	1,260,306	32.4%
1997	65.0	3,880,894	1,257,444	32.4%
1998	65.6	3,944,046	1,292,534	32.8%
1991-1998				
Absolute Change	-4.0	-166,861	78,765	3.2%
Relative Change	-5.7%	-4.1%	6.5%	11.0%

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Report, Selected years, 1991-1998.

Unfortunately, at the same time as total births and birth rates to young women overall were declining, births to unmarried mothers were steadily increasing. While the overall birth rate among teens and 20-24 year-old women declined between 1991 and 1998, the non-marital birth rate only modestly declined among teens ( from 45 per 1000 in 1991 to 42 per 1000 in 1998) and increased among 20-24 year-old women from 68 per 1000 to 72 per 1000. Consequently, the unmarried mothers portion of all births among young women (under 25) has continued to increase from 49% in 1991 to 57% in 1997. In the latter year, nearly eight out of ten children born to teenage mothers were born out of wedlock as were nearly one-

half of those born to 20-24 year-old women. Given the high incidence of poverty problems among young single parent families and the on-going implementation of state welfare reforms which will restrict their eligibility for future public assistance benefits, any substantive increase in the number of out-of-wedlock births to young women will have a series of adverse consequences for the nation's children.

Of course, the incidence of teen childbearing is far from being a random event among adolescent women. Teenage childbearing is far greater among young women who have low educational expectations, have dropped out of school, and who have weak academic proficiencies. Being raised in poverty with a single, poorly educated mother also raises considerably the likelihood of teen-age childbearing, regardless of the race/ethnic background of the teen. For instance, our analysis of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data during the 1980s shows that:

- 36.3% of those who dropped out of school by age 16, who had an AFQT test score in the bottom 20% of the test score distribution, and who were raised in a poor, one parent family headed by an adult who also was a school dropout, gave birth to a child,
- as did 14.3% of those who were still enrolled in school at the time of the first interview, had average basic academic skills, and lived in a poor family with a mother who did not graduate from high school,
- while that was true of only 2.2% of girls who were enrolled in high school at the time of the first interview, had average basic academic skills, lived in a two parent family with a mother who was a high school graduate, and had a family income that was more than three times the poverty line, and
- only three in 1000 teens with all of the characteristics of the above group, except that they had basic academic skills in the top 20 percent of the distribution, became mothers during those years.

Clearly, those female adolescents having high educational and career expectations and living in an economically and emotionally supportive environment were considerably less likely to give birth during their teenage years. Young women who have children out of wedlock are much less likely to marry as they age and much more likely to bring up their children in a single-parent family. The high incidence of poverty among young single-parent families is largely attributable to their low levels of educational

attainment and limited work experience. Early childbearing frequently truncates the educational attainment of these women. Raising their children in a single mother family leaves little time for them to accumulate human capital in the form of education or full-time labor market work experience, both of which are strong predictors of their future earnings potential and poverty status. Resurgence in the numbers of young adult women over the next decade will challenge the nation to keep their human capital development on an upswing and their birth proclivities declining.

### **Implications for Incarceration**

Over the last quarter of the 20th century, overall incarceration rates in the United States skyrocketed. The number of inmates in federal and state prisons increased six-fold, from under 200,000 in 1970 to over 1,233,000 in 1998, with an additional 592,000 inmates in local jails in the latter year. A total of 5.7 million persons in the U.S. were incarcerated, on probation, or parole, representing a 209 per cent increase since 1980. The proportion of 18-24 year-old men who were incarcerated more than doubled from 1.2% to 2.8% between 1986 and 1995. While the number of young men in the population was declining by 9.7% or about 1.1% a year, the total number of young men in prison and jails increased by 102% or an average of 11% per year (Table 3). Improved economic prospects since 1995 have resulted in a significant decline in the proportion of young men involved in the criminal justice system, though the proportions remain higher than they were in the 1980s

**Table 3:**  
**Estimated Numbers of Young Male Inmates in Federal Prisons**  
**State Prisons, and Local Jails, U.S., 1986, 1995, and 1997**

Year	Total Number of 18-24 Year Old Men in the Population <sup>1</sup>	Number of 18-24 Year Old Men in Prisons and Jails <sup>2</sup>	Percent of 18-24 Year Old Men in Prisons and Jails
1986	14,282,510	177,952	1.2%
1995	12,901,583	359,419	2.8%
1997	12,883,455	348,899	2.7%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Among these inmates, young men with limited education and from minority groups were vastly over-represented. Nearly two-thirds of prison inmates in 1991 failed to complete high school and one-third of jail inmates were unemployed prior to entering jail. In 1995, one in three 20-29 year old black men were under some type of criminal justice system control compared to one in fifteen white men and one in eight Hispanics. High rates of incarceration among young men have sizable social and private costs. Marriage rates in the communities from which these young men appear are low and children are more likely to be raised in single-parent families and in poverty. There are not sufficient positive male role models for children growing up in these communities. In addition, these incarcerated young men themselves pay a high price in terms of reduced future employability and earnings.

In the nation's poverty stricken inner cities, criminal justice system involvement rates at times reach close to 40%. In far too many of these neighborhoods, the criminal justice system is the dominant form of government and adult contact for the young men who live there. The past steep increases in criminal justice system control rates took place in a demographic environment characterized by declining numbers of young men. That demographic situation has now reversed course. The rising numbers of young adult men over the decade ahead will add to the pressures on the criminal justice system. If the nation does not succeed in its efforts to reduce the incidence of criminal activities and incarceration rates among young adults, not only will the nation's jails and prisons face extraordinary demographic pressures in the forthcoming decade, but society will pay high social as well as taxation costs to incarcerate them.

## **The Young Adult Labor Market**

The impending surge of young adults in the population and labor force raises a number of important issues concerning the employability of those who leave school without adequate preparation.

### **Employment Challenges Among the Out-of-School Young Adult Population**

The employment/population ratios of out-of-school youth are more cyclically sensitive than those of adults 25 and older. During the recessionary environment of 1990-91, the employment/population ratio of out-of-school youth declined sharply, falling from 72.1% in 1989 to 68.0% in 1991, a drop of 4.1 percentage points, while the E/P ratio for the nation's adults (25 and over) declined by less than 1

percentage point over the same time period. Following 1992, the E/P ratio for out-of-school youth increased steadily as national labor market conditions improved, rising to 72.6% in 1999, slightly surpassing its 1989 value at the peak of the last business cycle. Employment rates of the nation's out-of-school youth vary widely across major race-ethnic groups (Table 4). For example, during 1999, on average, 75% of White youth were employed versus 66% of Hispanic youth and only 59% of Black youth.

**Table 4:**  
**Trends in Employment Rates of 16-24 Year Old Out-of-School Youth by**  
**Race-Ethnic Group, Selected Years 1989-1999**  
**(Annual Averages, in Per Cent)**

Year	(A) Black	(B) Hispanic	(C) White
1989	55.5	64.9	75.4
1991	50.1	60.3	71.7
1992	48.7	60.0	72.0
1995	53.3	61.4	73.2
1997	54.8	64.6	74.7
1998	57.4	66.5	75.2
1999	59.2	66.4	75.4

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1990, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, tabulations by authors; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data from the 1999 monthly CPS surveys provided to the authors in January 2000.

(i) Hispanics can be members of any race although a substantial majority of them are classified as White in the monthly CPS household surveys.

These race-ethnic youth employment rates also tend to be quite cyclically sensitive: the E/P ratio of Black youth fell by 10% between 1989 and 1991 compared to declines of only 6% for Hispanics and 5% for Whites. Conversely, during the strong labor market conditions of 1992-99, the Black youth employment rate rose by more than ten full percentage points versus gains of only three percentage points for Whites and six percentage points for Hispanics.

Employment rates of out-of-school youth also differ considerably by their educational attainment. Even during 1999, a year with a very low unemployment rate of 4.2% and growing labor shortages, only 54% of young high school dropouts were employed versus 75% of high school graduates, 84% of those

completing one to three years of college, and just under 90% of four year college graduates.

### **Full-Time Employment Status of Out-of-School Youth**

Though it may appear obvious, it is worth noting that full-time employment for youth has a number of important economic advantages. Those include higher hourly and weekly wages, a greater incidence of key employee benefits, increased eligibility for tuition reimbursement by the employer, a greater likelihood of being trained on the job both formally and informally, and a more substantial economic payoff in terms of higher future wages. The fraction of employed out-of-school youth who hold full-time jobs has risen moderately across race/ethnic groupings since the mid-1990s, also varying considerably by educational attainment. During 1999, the fraction of employed out-of-school youth with full-time jobs ranged from a low of 70% for those lacking a high school diploma or a GED certificate to a high of 92% for employed four year college graduates.

These full-time E/P ratios of out-of-school youth also are quite cyclically sensitive. The full-time employment/population ratio for 16-24 year old out-of-school youth declined from 60% to 54% between 1989 and 1991, reflecting a combination of declining employment opportunities among out-of-school youth and greater difficulties in securing full-time jobs when they were hired. The full-time employment/population ratio remained static between 1991 and 1995, then rose steadily to 58.4% in 1999, but still remained nearly one full percentage point below its 1989 peak value.

### **Specific Labor Market Problems of Out-of-School Youth**

The major labor market problems faced by out-of-school youth during the 1990s carry portents for likely developments as their numbers increase in the years ahead. Consider four categories of labor market problems: being unemployed, being employed part-time while preferring full-time employment, being out of the labor force despite preferring current employment--often described as the labor force reserve--and working full-time at a wage less than the poverty line for a family of four--\$320 a week in 1998. Table 5 tells the story as the economy peaked in 1989, declined until 1991, remained essentially static until 1995, though there was no significant improvement for this population until after 1997, and then recovered into

1999 and beyond. Notably, 41% of the nation's young adults under 25 years of age fell into one of these labor market problem categories in March 1999 compared to 17% of older adults, a relative difference of 2.4 to one. The strength of the job market for young adults in the 1990s has so far done more to improve employment opportunities than to substantively boost the real weekly earnings of the full-time employed. What the implication will be for the larger coming population in this age group in future economic slowdowns remains to be seen.

**Table 5:**  
**Trends in the Incidence of Labor Market Problems Among**  
**Out-Of-School Youth ,March of Selected Years 1989-99 ( in %)**

	<u>1989</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>1991-99</u> <u>Change</u>
Unemployed	9.0	11.1	10.0	10.1	8.5	-2.6
Employed Part-time for Economic Reasons	6.1	8.2	7.2	6.3	5.5	-2.7
Not in Labor Force But Want a Job Now	5.2	5.2	4.9	4.8	4.5	-.7
Worked Full-Time at a Weekly Wage Below the Four Person Poverty Line	23.6	27.0	26.6	26.2	22.9	-4.1
Total, All Above Problems	43.9	51.5	48.7	47.4	41.4	-10.1

Source: March 1989, 1991, 1995, 1997, and 1999 CPS surveys, tabulations by authors.

As expected, the incidence of these labor market problems among out-of-school youth also varies considerably by educational attainment. (Table 6). In March 1999, 52 of every 100 school dropouts experienced one of these four labor market problems as did 42 of every 100 high school graduates, but only 18% of four year college graduates; and high school dropouts were three times as likely as four year college graduates to experience one of these four labor market problems.

**Table 6:**  
**Per Cent of Non-Enrolled Young Adults 17-24 Year Olds**  
**Experiencing Various Types of Labor Market Problems, by**  
**Educational Attainment, March 1999**

Labor Market Problem	Less than 12 Years	12 Years	13-15 Years	16 or More Years
Unemployed	14.1	8.2	5.4	2.6
Employed Part-Time for Economic Reasons	6.5	6.1	4.4	2.1
Not in Labor Force, but Wants a Job Now	8.5	4.1	2.1	1.4
Works Full-Time at a Weekly Wage Less Than \$320	23.2	23.4	26.1	12.2
Total, All Four Problems	52.2	41.8	37.9	18.2

Source: March 1999 CPS survey, tabulations by authors.

The rising labor market tide has improved labor market prospects for each of these educational groups. But true to the biblical adage that to he who has gets, the likelihood of experiencing at least one of the above four problems fell between 1995 and 1998 from 33% to 18% for young bachelor degree recipients, from 51% to 42% for high school graduates but only from 56% to 52% for young high school dropouts. In March 1999, only 38% of school dropouts held a full-time wage and salary job versus 55% of high school graduates and 78% of four-year college graduates. Of those holding full-time wage and salary jobs, approximately 69% were able to earn \$320 or more per week. The share of young full-time workers with weekly earnings above this threshold also varied widely across these four educational subgroups, ranging from 42% of high school dropouts to 85% of four year college graduates. Over the past few years, gains in full-time employment with adequate earnings were achieved by out-of-school youth in three of the four educational groups, including young high school dropouts. Still, even by March 1999, only one of every six young dropouts had succeeded in obtaining full-time jobs that provided weekly earnings above our minimum earnings threshold of \$320 per week. Among Black and economically disadvantaged youth, the proportions of dropouts with such jobs were even lower. Strong macro labor market conditions are indispensable to efforts to bolster the employment and real earnings position of the nation's out-of-school youth, but by themselves they are clearly not sufficient, especially for those youth lacking post-secondary schooling.



### Trends in the Real Weekly Earnings Of Full-Time Employed Young Adults

Among the most important measures of the labor market success of employed young adults is their real (inflation-adjusted) weekly earnings. The real median weekly earnings of both young men and young women rose throughout the 1960s, despite the need to absorb growing numbers of the baby boom generation. Between 1973 and 1979, the median real weekly earnings (in constant 1997 dollars) of full-time employed young men fell by 8%, they declined by another 17% between 1979 and 1989 despite a substantial reduction in the number of young adults in the resident population, and they fell by another 10% between 1989 and 1996. (Table 7). Since 1996, median real weekly earnings of young men have increased from \$314 to \$343, a rise of \$29 or 9%, the best three-year performance in the past 30 years. Still during 1999, the median real weekly earnings of full-time employed young men were 26% below their peak level in 1973. Similar trends have prevailed for young women, though the rate of decline in the real weekly earnings of women was only 40% as high as that of young men over the 1973-99 period (-11% vs. -26%). As a consequence of these gender differences in the relative rates of decline, the median weekly earnings of young women have risen relative to those of young men over the past 26 years. In 1973, the median weekly earnings of full-time employed young women were equal to only 76% of those of young men, but they had risen above 90% by 1989 where they have remained since.

**Table 7:**

**Median Real Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Employed Young Adults Under 25 Years of Age, by Gender, U.S.: 1973-97**  
(in Constant 1997 Dollars)

Year	Men	Women	Women As % of Men
1973	\$463	\$350	75.6%
1979	\$424	\$334	78.8%
1989	\$351	\$318	90.6%
1991	\$336	\$314	93.4%
1995	\$319	\$290	90.9%
1996	\$314	\$290	92.3%
1998	\$329	\$300	91.2%
1999	\$343	\$312	90.9%
Percent Change 1973-89	-24%	-9%	
Percent Change 1989-99	-2%	-2%	
Percent Change 1973-99	-26%	-11%	

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

The deterioration in the absolute and relative earnings position of young adult men over the past few decades lengthened the stage of "economic adolescence" and has reduced the ability of many young men to form independent households, to marry, and to provide adequate financial support for their children, including child support for non-custodial children. Full-time employed young women also experienced a decline in their relative median weekly wage from 94% of the earnings of their older employed female counterparts in 1967 to 65% in 1999. However, that trend was more attributable to the improved real wages of the older women than to the falling wages of the younger.

### **Weekly Earnings by Educational Attainment**

The weekly earnings of employed out-of-school youth vary considerably by their full-time/part-time status and their educational attainment. For example, among full-time employed 17-21 year olds, median real weekly earnings of high school dropouts declined by 26% between 1973 and 1994 while those of high school graduates with no post-secondary schooling declined by 21% over the same time period.

Similar trends have prevailed for young adults in more recent years. While the real weekly earnings of young bachelor's degree recipients remained unchanged between 1981 and 1996, those of full-time employed 16-26 year olds in every other educational attainment subgroup declined considerably (Table 8). The relative size of these weekly wage declines ranged from 22% for those young workers with one to three years of college to just under 40% for those failing to obtain a high school diploma.

**Table 8:**

**Average Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Employed Young Adults 16-26 Years Old by Years of Schooling Completed, U.S.: October 1981 and October 1996**  
(in 1996 Dollars)

Group	1981	1996	Percent Change 1981 -1996
No High School Diploma	\$366	\$224	-38.8%
High School Diploma, No College	\$388	\$287	-26.0%
1-3 Years of College	\$441	\$346	-21.6%
Bachelor's or Higher Degree	\$522	\$521	-.2%

Source: October 1981 and October 1996 CPS Surveys, tabulations by Robert Zemsky, Daniel Shapiro, et.al., in The Transition from Initial Education to Working Life in the United States of America, p. 27

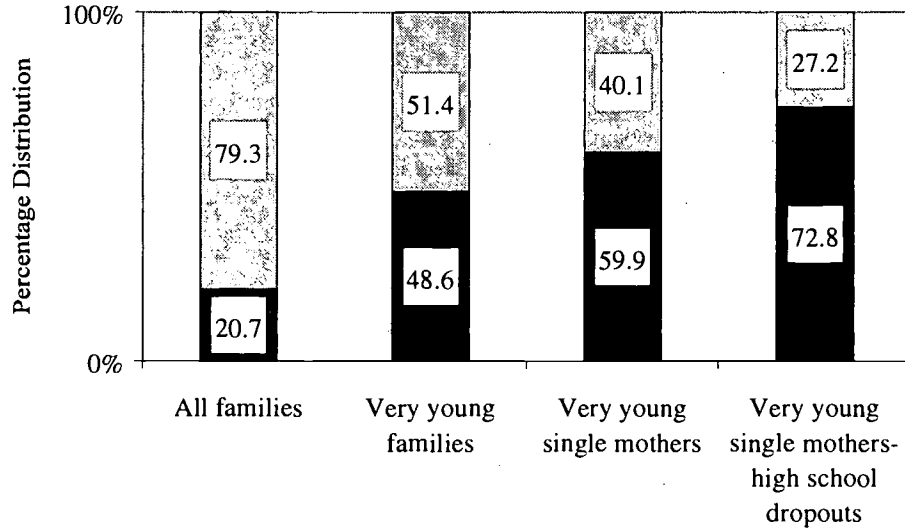
The steep declines in the real weekly earnings of young men with no post-secondary schooling have had a number of adverse consequences for their later labor force behavior and cumulative work experience. The decline in real weekly earnings reduces the incentive for young men to seek legitimate

employment. Reductions in employment rates reduce the cumulative amount of work experience that these young men bring with them to the labor market in their later adult years, thereby lowering their earnings potential later in life. The decline in real weekly earnings from legal employment also increases the attractiveness of criminal activities and leads to increased arrests, further reducing their job market prospects in later life. Labor market policymakers of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century must be prepared to confront these and other challenges on behalf of the growing young adult population.

### **Poverty Problems Among Very Young Families and Their Children**

The poverty status of families in the United States is closely associated with the age and educational attainment of the householder and the family structure. In 1997-98, 20.7% of *all* families with children under 18 years of age had annual incomes below 125 % of the poverty line compared to nearly one-half the families headed by householders under 25 years of age. Six out of ten of those families were headed by a very young single mother and in three-fourths of those families that young single mother had not completed high school (Chart 1). Looking at the same picture from the children's vantage point, in 1997-98, approximately 24% of all of the nation's children lived in families with an income below 125% of the poverty line. However, two out of three children living with very young single mothers (17-24 years old) were poor or near poor as were nearly eight out of ten of those whose young single mother was a high school dropout (Chart 2). Hence, the forthcoming growth in the young adult population has a number of potentially adverse consequences for the future well-being of the nation's children if these trends are not diverted by improved policies.

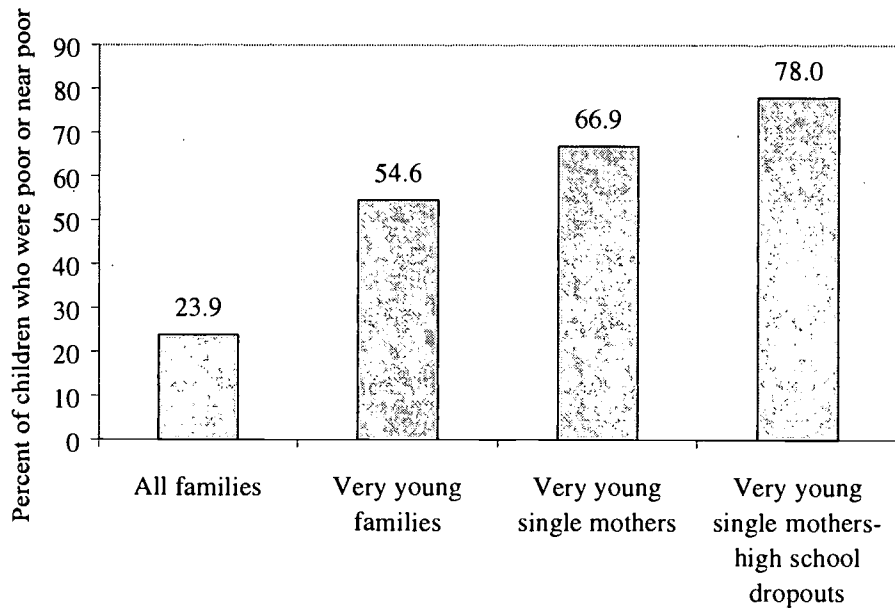
**Chart 1:**  
**Percentage Distribution of Families with One or More Children Under 18, by Their Poverty Status, 1997-98 Averages**



Source: March 1995 and 1999 CPS public use tapes, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Chart 2:**  
**Percent of Children Under 18 Who Were Members of Families With Incomes Below 125 Percent of the Poverty Line, by Type of Family, 1997-98 Averages**

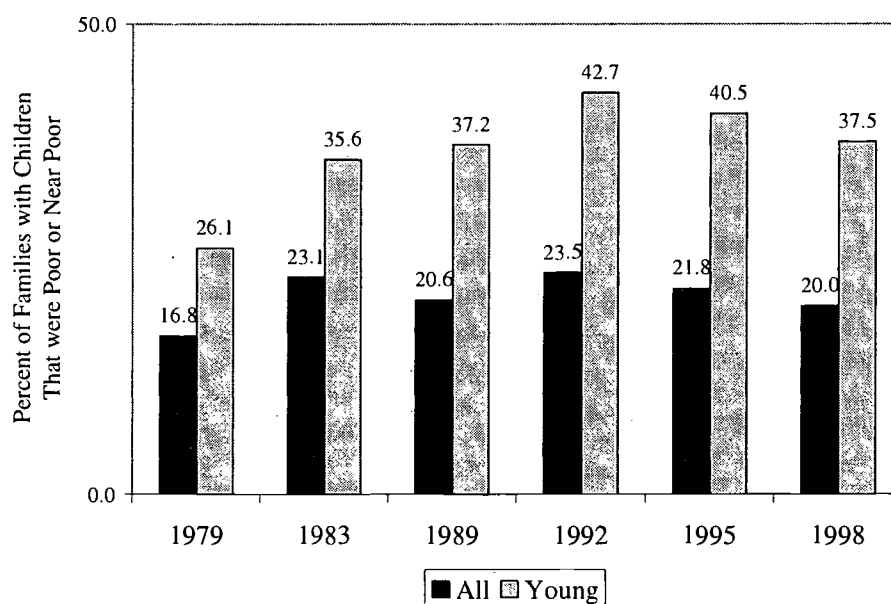
**by Type of Family, 1997-98 Averages**



### Time Trends in the Poverty Problems of Young Families

The percent of all families in the nation that were poor or near poor increased by one-percentage point from 13% in 1979 to 14% in 1998. In contrast, the poverty rate of young families (those with a householder between 18 and 29 years old) increased by ten-percentage points from 19% to 29% over the same time period (Chart 3). Poverty problems of the nation's families, including young families, are cyclically sensitive. The poverty/near poverty rate among young families with children rose sharply during the two back-to-back recessions between 1979 and 1983. It was 28% at the end of the prosperous 1983-89 years, peaked at 43% in 1992, but had dropped only to 38% in 1998, despite seven years of economic growth. As already noted, the poverty problems among single mother families are even more severe if those mothers are young. The poverty/near poverty rate for all single mothers was 53% in 1992 and 46% in 1998 compared to 65% and 56%, respectively, for families with single mothers under 25 years of age. An increasing share of children are being raised by young single mothers, nearly one-half of whom have been poor or near poor in recent years, about double the proportion for all families.

**Chart 3:**  
**Income Inadequacy Among Families With Children Under 18**



Children raised in poverty have an above average incidence of cognitive, educational, health and nutritional problems that place them at high risk of continued poverty in their adult years. Added to that is an inter-generational transmission of poverty and dependence demonstrated for single-parent families.

Children raised in single-parent families have lower cognitive skills and are less likely to complete high school and, as adults, are more likely to have low earnings and unstable employment. There is a growing body of evidence that women raised in single-parent families are more likely to form female-headed families themselves through either premarital births or marital disruption. Hence, another indication of the need for national policy awareness of the implied consequences of the resurgence of young adult numbers.

## **Improving Future Labor Market Outcomes**

The labor market problems confronting many of the nation's out-of-school young adults can be expected to intensify over the next decade as their numbers increase. However, these problems can be diminished through a concerted set of actions and behaviors on the part of the young adults themselves, their parents, the education system, employers, unions and public agencies. Four approaches have proven potency as responses to the impending surge in the young adult population.

### **Basic Academic Skills and Literacy/Numeracy Proficiencies**

Literacy efforts tend to focus on preschoolers and early elementary students, too often neglecting the literacy and numeracy needs of young adults, especially those out-of-school. Adolescents who have more solid academic proficiencies (reading, math, writing, critical reasoning skills) have stronger aspirations for post-secondary schooling, enroll more often in academic courses during high school, spend more of their school hours in such courses, and do more homework. Those students with weaker basic academic skills are considerably more likely to fall behind academically, to experience more serious attendance and behavioral problems, and to leave high school before graduation. Of those who do drop out, the return rate to school and GED programs is higher for those with stronger basic academic proficiencies.

Among those who enroll in GED preparation programs, pass rates are considerably higher for those with stronger basic academic skills, and they are more likely to complete some post-secondary schooling and earn more when they do work. Literacy and math proficiencies also have important lifetime payoffs, the age-earnings profiles of more literate workers being considerably steeper than those of less literate workers.

Any effective set of programs to increase the labor market skills of at risk and out-of-school young adults and enhance their lifetime prospects will begin at that remedial level.

## **Employer-Provided Literacy Training for Young Adults**

Employers frequently voice dissatisfaction with the basic literacy and numeracy proficiencies of their front line workers. The economic payoffs to literacy training have proven to be higher when the training is received from one's current employer than from an outside institution. Yet, surveys of workers and employers find little literacy and numeracy training being provided by employers. When employers do provide such training, they provide it primarily to those employees who already have the most education, thereby further exacerbating wage inequality among young workers. Aggressive initiatives are needed to bolster the ability of the nation's employers, especially small employers, to provide literacy and numeracy training to more of their front line workers. Since the results of such training cannot be restricted to the workplace wherein it is provided, some form of subsidization would have to be provided to bring that about.

## **The Benefits of In-School Work Experience**

Those youth who are employed more frequently and intensively during their high school years are employed more steadily and earn higher hourly and weekly earnings throughout their early adult years than those who do not share this experience. Those young adults with 20 or more hours of work per week during the senior year obtained access to jobs in higher status occupations and were more likely to receive health insurance coverage and pension coverage from their employers than their peers who did not work during the senior year of high school. Of course, work for youth can be excessive as well as inadequate, with 10 hours a week seeming to be the minimum for measurable gains and 20 hours a week a near optimum.

The positive employment effects of work experience during the high school years prevail across gender and race/ethnic lines though its positive returns are stronger for men than for women. Similarly, the impacts are positive for those of all different levels of post-high school education, but of greatest value to those who do not continue on to further education. Unfortunately, many high school graduates and dropouts from low income families and high poverty neighborhoods enter the labor market as young adults with little human capital in the form of general and specific work experience.

While most forms of work experience appear to have a positive influence on future employment and earnings, the quality of that work experience is highly relevant. Despite the 1990s job boom and expanded school-to-work initiatives, employed high school students remain poorly represented in many key industries. In-school work experience in the retail and service industries which are the dominant employers of high school students, even fast food, does appear to improve the early post-high school

employment and earnings experiences of those high school students who do not continue on to college. However, future high school students would clearly benefit from exposure to jobs in a wider array of industries and occupations. Experimentation with efforts to restructure jobs in retail trade and to open up new career paths in other industries should be encouraged by future workforce development programs. Government itself needs to expand its role as an employer of high school students during the school year. In the mid-1990s, only 3% of employed high school students worked for government at all levels compared to 15% of all employed adults. Emphasis needs to shift to those industries and occupations having the greatest promise for lifelong, remunerative careers. Only 4% of employed high school students report holding jobs in professional, management-related, technical or high level sales positions compared to nearly 42% of the nation's adults. Greater exposure to such jobs during the high school years as interns, assistants, and job shadowers would provide students with greater insight into the nature of the job duties and responsibilities of workers in a broader array of occupations. While it is true that many jobs in the teen labor market are entry level positions requiring few skills and offering little systematic training, the opportunities to experience and sample the job duties, requirements and working conditions of entry-level jobs can be a valuable employment experience of long-term payoff, if only the opportunity to learn "what I don't want to do with the rest of my life."

As Table 9 shows, the employment opportunities available during high school are mal-distributed by race/ethnicity, by poverty status, and by neighborhood. The availability of employment opportunities, the relative ability of the adults in low poverty neighborhoods to perform a brokering role in access to jobs, and social behaviors and norms antagonistic to successful workplace involvement are all involved.

**Table 9:**  
**Trends in the Employment/Population Ratios of 16-20 Year Old**  
**High School Students in the U.S., March 1992 to March 1998-99,**  
**Total and by Race/Ethnic Group and Family Poverty Status**  
**(Numbers in Per Cent)**

Group	March 1992	March 1995-96	March 1998-1999
All	29.1	34.1	34.3
White, not Hispanic	34.9	41.2	41.5
Black, not Hispanic	13.6	18.4	17.7
Hispanic	20.6	20.5	21.7
Poor	12.4	19.5	17.6
1.00-1.99 times poverty line	22.2	28.2	26.4
2.00-2.99 times poverty line	31.7	37.4	36.8
3.00-3.99 times poverty line	37.4	43.0	43.3
4.00 or more times poverty line	37.2	40.0	40.8

Source: March CPS public use tapes, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, and 1999, tabulations by authors.



This limited degree of attachment to the labor market by poor youth during the high school years complicates the task of moving smoothly from school to work upon leaving high school, especially for those not going on to college. This reduced amount of work experience during high school also will reduce their ability to gain immediate access to jobs upon graduation, the likelihood of their obtaining a full-time job, and the wages they can command. Future youth employment programs aimed at high school students should assign a priority to improving immediate employment prospects for minority students and those from low income families and high poverty neighborhoods, both urban and rural. That would improve their early post-high school labor market experiences and, when combined with high quality work-based learning and employer-based training, should increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates.

### **Training Experiences of Young Adults**

A third strategy for improving the future labor market prospects of the nation's out-of-school young adults involves the acquisition of greater amounts of job training, especially apprenticeship training and formal employer training. Secondary and post-secondary classroom occupational training activities have been more likely to succeed in raising the wages and earnings of young adults when they are taken as part of a structured course of training, when they are combined with a solid core of academic training, and when they lead to employment in jobs in which the occupational skills acquired during the training program are effectively applied on the job. Returns from employer-provided training is much greater. However, young adults in general receive little formal training from their employers for several reasons. U.S. employers tend to do little formal training for most of their front line workers. The industries in which young adults tend to be employed are the ones in which the employers train the least, and when employers undertake training, their youngest employees are often the ones in which they are least likely to invest. When employers do choose to invest in the training of their younger employees, they tend to invest the most in those who already have the most education (Table 10). Also, the training they provide tends to be very short and limited to specific processes, needs or skills. Training length also tends to increase consistently with the educational attainment of the employee.

**Table 10:**  
**Training Experiences of Young Adults in the U.S., by Educational Attainment,**  
**1986-1991**  
**(Numbers in Percent)**

Educational Attainment	Any Training Between 1986-91	Employer-Provided Training, 1986-91	Worked for Firm Where Training Was Provided, 1991
All	38.0	23.7	---
0-11 Years	18.9	8.7	28.0
12 Years	33.5	19.4	45.0
13-15 Years	44.5	28.0	58.0
16 or More	50.1	35.3	68.

Sources: (i)Jonathan R. Veum, "Training Among Young Adults..", Monthly Labor Review, August 1993; (ii)U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Report 489, July 1993.

### **Apprenticeship Training for Young Adults**

Despite the economic benefits of apprenticeship programs to workers, to the productivity of their firms, and to the economy at large, there have been few gains in the proportion of recent high school graduates, especially the non-college bound, participating in apprenticeship training programs. This is the case despite the passage of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 which initially promised a new commitment to the implementation of such programs. A variety of longitudinal surveys during the 1980s and 1990s have found only 1% to 2% of high school graduates in their late teens and through their twenties to be or have participated in apprenticeship. Graduates from low socioeconomic status backgrounds have had especial difficulties in obtaining access to jobs providing apprenticeship training, despite the fact that they are more likely to be working after graduation than their higher SES counterparts. The low apprenticeship training rates for recent high school graduates are reflective of many factors in U.S. labor markets, including the absence of job growth in key goods producing sectors (manufacturing, mining) that were more intensive users of apprenticeship training, the expansion of the non-union sector in the construction industries, and the limited presence of apprenticeship training in many service, finance/insurance, and retail firms, particularly in smaller establishments. Nationally, less than 20% of all employers offer any apprenticeship training to their workers, with smaller employers (those with fewer than 50 employees) only one-half as likely to do.

## **Expanding Employer-Provided Training**

The likelihood of U.S. workers receiving formal or informal training from their employers has been found repeatedly in past studies to depend not only on their own human capital traits, but also on the characteristics of the establishments and industries in which they work and the occupational characteristics of their jobs. Larger economic establishments, those that are units of a multiple establishment corporation, those that use more capital intensive production techniques, those using various types of high performance work systems, and those operating in a more complex production environment are significantly more likely to provide formal training to their workers. Young workers who are members of labor unions are more likely to receive apprenticeship training or on-the-job training, and those who hold full-time jobs and occupations with a higher socioeconomic status are significantly more likely to receive training from their employers.

Employer reluctance to provide training, especially to younger workers and those with little education, is based on the conviction that the private costs of such training often exceed the private benefits. However, absence of sufficiently positive private returns to the training investments of individual employers does not imply low returns to training at the industry level or for the economy as a whole, nor does it refute the gains to the trainees. A sustained increase in the level of economic resources devoted to employer training of young workers could also improve future labor productivity and accelerate the future rate of economic growth in the United States.

## **Educational Strategies for Out-of-School Youth**

Formal education clearly has become the dominant factor determining the labor market success of adults of all ages in recent decades. Those young adults who complete more years of schooling have heightened success in obtaining access to employment, securing full-time jobs, and avoiding unemployment. They also earn considerably higher weekly and annual wages when they do work and are much less likely to end up being poor or near poor in their young adult years than their counterparts with limited formal schooling (Table 11).

**Table 11:**  
**Weekly and Annual Earnings of Employed Out-of School Adults by**  
**Years of Schooling Completed, Selected Years 1997-98**

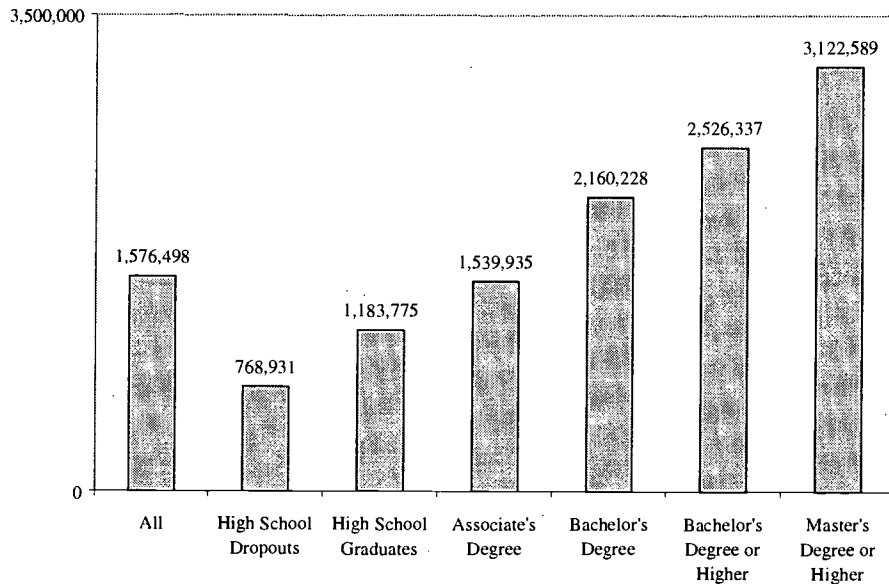
Earnings Outcomes	High School Dropout	High School Graduate or GED Holder	1-3 Years of College Associate Degree	Bachelor's or Higher Degree
Median Weekly Earnings for Employed 16-24 Year Old Out-of-School Youth, 1997-98	\$220	\$280	\$300	\$462
Median Weekly Earnings for 16-24 Year Old Full-Time Employed Out-of-School Youth, 1997-98	\$260	\$312	\$323	\$481
Median Annual Earnings of Employed 20-29 Year Old Men, 1997-98 (in 1998 Dollars)	\$12,831	\$19,131	\$21,145	\$30,202 <sup>(1)</sup>
Median Annual Earnings of Employed 20-29 Year Old Women, 1997-98 (in 1998 Dollars)	\$6,746	\$12,587	\$15,608	\$24,423 <sup>(1)</sup>

**Note:** (1) Findings apply only to bachelor's degree holders.

**Source:** Monthly CPS surveys, January 1997- December 1998, tabulations by authors.

Those young adults who leave school without obtaining a high school diploma fare the worst on every employment and earnings measure. A high school diploma by itself, however, no longer provides as sure a path to a middle class life style as it did in the 1960s and early 1970s, especially for men. The ability to complete some post-secondary schooling and to obtain an associate's or bachelor's degree will have important long-term impacts on the occupational status of men and women and their lifetime weekly and annual earnings (Chart 4). For those youth still in school but at risk of dropping out, the challenge is to keep them there and enable and motivate them to succeed. For those youth already out of school but with inadequate education, the challenge is to re-enroll them or find some reasonable substitute.

**Chart 4 :**  
**Mean Lifetime Earnings of Males Through Age 64 by Educational Attainment**  
**(1997-98 Averages)**

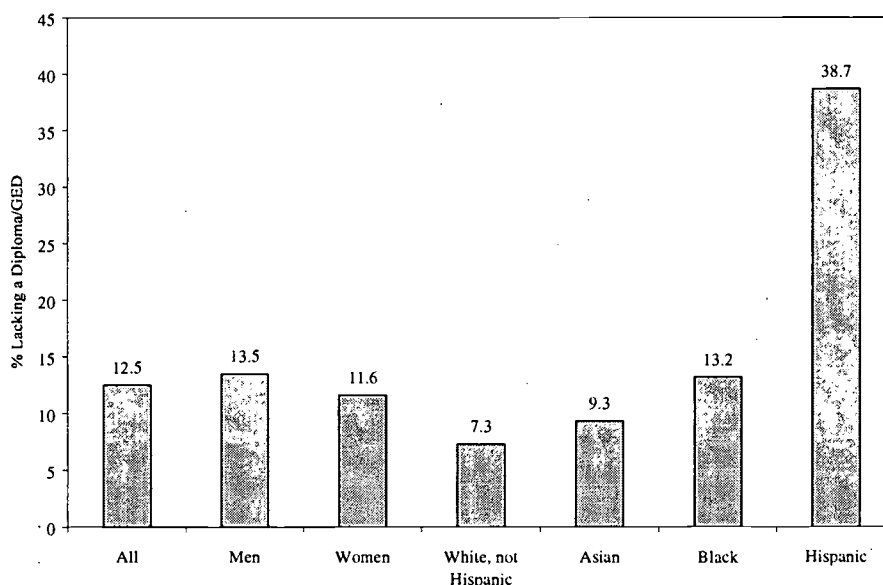


Recent educational attainment trends are in the right direction. The fraction of the nation's young adults who are neither enrolled in school nor a high school graduate (or GED holder) has been declining over the past quarter-century from 15% in 1972 to 11% in 1997. The declines were particularly strong for Black and Hispanic youth although both Black (13%) and Hispanic youth (25%) were still more likely than Whites (8%) to have left school without obtaining a diploma or a GED certificate in 1997. Nevertheless, over the period 1996-98 one of eight 25-34 year olds lacked a high school diploma or a GED certificate (Chart 5). Men (13.5%) were more likely than women (11.6%) to have failed to acquire such a credential and Hispanics (39%) were three times more likely than Blacks (13%) and five times more likely than White, non-Hispanic adults (7%) to have done so. A majority (60%) of the 25-34 year old Hispanic population were foreign immigrants, and the dropout rate among foreign born Hispanics was nearly three times higher than that of native born Hispanics (52% vs. 19%).

The adult basic education system and youth workforce development systems have lagged considerably behind in addressing the employability problems of this rapidly growing segment of the young adult population.

**Chart 5:**

**Per Cent of 25-34 Year Olds in the Civilian Non-institutional Population of the U.S. Who Lacked a High School Diploma or a GED Certificate, Total and By Gender and Race/Ethnic Origin, 1996-98**  
**(Three Year Averages)**



A rising fraction of the nation's annual output of new high school graduates has been attending college since the early 1980s. In 1981 and 1982 only 50% to 51% of each year's graduating class were attending a two or four year college or university in the fall immediately following graduation. By the end of the decade, the college enrollment rate had risen to 59% and continued to rise through the late 1990s, reaching all time highs of 66 to 67% in the fall of 1997 and 1998, before declining to 63% in the fall of 1999. Gains in college enrollment rates were quite strong for men and for women and for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics (Table 12). There, however, has been a widening gender gap in college enrollment rates with the advantage in favor of women rising to 7 percentage points in the late 1990s.

The gender gap in college enrollment rates for Blacks and Hispanics in major central cities is often quite substantial and should be a policy concern for educators, youth workforce development professionals, and advocacy groups for families. While college enrollment rates have improved considerably, closer attention also needs to be paid to college retention, especially for high school graduates from low socioeconomic status (SES) families and Black and Hispanic youth. Attrition rates are high for community college students from low SES families, and very high attrition rates occur between two-year

and four-year colleges, especially among youth from low SES families. Similarly large gaps in bachelor degree attainment rates by SES status prevail among those post-secondary students who enroll initially in a four-year college or university. Simply boosting college enrollment rates of high school graduates from minority and lower SES backgrounds is clearly not sufficient to guarantee high rates of ultimate degree attainment.

**Table 12:**  
**Trends in the College Attendance Rates of New High School**  
**Graduates in the U.S. by Gender and Race-Ethnic Group, Selected Years, 1982-83 to**  
**1997-98**  
**(Numbers in Per Cent)**

Years	Men	Women	White <sup>(1)</sup>	Black <sup>(1)</sup>	Hispanic
1982-83	50.5	52.8	53.5	37.5	48.7
1988-89	57.3	61.2	58.6	48.9	56.2
1993-94	60.2	64.3	63.2	53.2	55.7
1997-98	63.0	69.7	67.7	60.8	56.5
Percentage Change, 1982-83 to 1997-98	+12.5	+16.9	+14.2	+23.3	+7.8

Notes: (1) Hispanics can be members of any race. They are included in the White and Black totals appearing in this table.

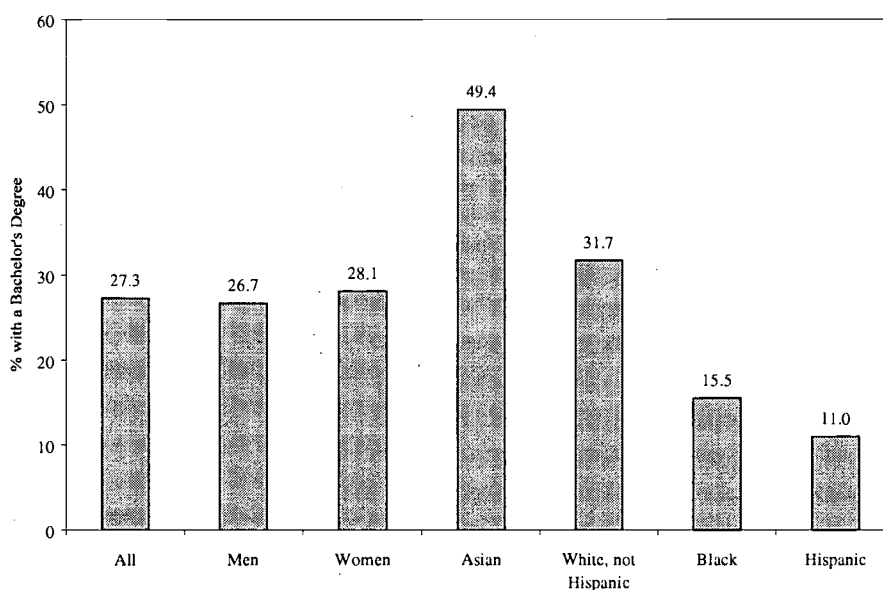
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, October CPS survey supplements, tabulations by authors.

The proportion of the nation's young adults holding a bachelor's degree has risen modestly over the past 15 years although it has not quite kept pace with the growing demand for college graduates in the nation's labor markets. Women, in particular, have made impressive gains in obtaining bachelor degrees as have Asians whose college educated ranks have been augmented by the arrival of very well educated recent immigrants, many of whom attended college in the United States. On average, over the 1996-98 period, 27% of all 25-34 year olds in the nation's civilian non-institutional population held a bachelor's degree. Women (28%) were slightly more likely than men (27%) to possess a bachelor's degree. Bachelor degree attainment rates varied considerably across race-ethnic groups. Asians and Pacific Islanders had the highest bachelor degree attainment rate (49%) followed by White, non-Hispanics at 32% and much further behind by Blacks (15%) and Hispanics (11%). (Chart 7). The low

rate of degree attainment by Hispanic adults is partly attributable to the very high fraction of foreign immigrants among the 25-34 year old Hispanic population, many of whom arrived in the U.S. with limited schooling. Only 8% of 25-34 year old Hispanic immigrants possessed a bachelor's degree over the 1996-98 period versus 15% of native-born Hispanics. Even among the native born, however, the bachelor's degree attainment rates of both Blacks and Hispanics are only one-half as high as college completion rates among White non-Hispanics. Reducing the large gaps in bachelor degree attainment rates currently prevailing among race-ethnic groups should be a major priority of the nation's high schools and colleges in the years ahead.

**Chart 7:**

**Per Cent of 25-34 Year Olds in the Civilian Noninstitutional Population  
With a Bachelor's or Higher Degree, Total and by Gender and  
Race-Ethnic Origin: U.S. 1996-98**



Source: Monthly CPS surveys, January 1996-December 1998, tabulations by authors.



## Whither the Future?

*"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22)*

The demographics of the nation's young adult population are undergoing fundamental shifts with important implications for labor markets and educational and workforce development systems. The future young adult population will be composed of a higher share of race-ethnic minorities and immigrants, especially Asians and Hispanics. Young immigrants are more likely to have failed to graduate from high school or obtain a GED certificate than their native born counterparts. Low levels of formal education and limited English language proficiency will place many of these young immigrants at a sizable disadvantage in the labor market, and they will increase labor supply pressures on native adults with limited schooling. Renewed growth in the size of the young adult female population will have important implications for the level of births and out-of-wedlock births in the future. Given the very high incidence of poverty among these families, an increase in non-marital childbearing will have adverse consequences for the economic and social well being of the nation's children. Another cause for concern is the rising number of young men in incarceration. All of these factors and more are leading to an intensification of poverty and near poverty among very young families. A comprehensive approach to youth development involving the resources of the education, criminal justice, health, and social service systems, as well as the workforce development system, will be needed to address the diverse needs of youth. Stronger literacy/numeracy proficiencies, higher educational attainment, more in-school work experience, especially in the industries which will offer the greatest opportunities thereafter, a wider availability of employer-provided training, integrated with and supported by post-secondary skills training, are all essential if the rapid increases immediately ahead in the size and demographic composition of the youth and young adult population is not to have dire results.

The attainment of these human resource development goals for young adults will require sustained and concerted actions on many different fronts. From a macroeconomic perspective, broadening economic opportunities for young adults will require sustained high levels of new job creation and the maintenance of full employment conditions in the nation's labor markets. Young adults' employment prospects are very sensitive to the overall state of the economy. Favorable macroeconomic conditions, however, need to be supplemented by a diverse array of coordinated, microeconomic human resource development initiatives to bolster the educational attainment of youth, their literacy and

numeracy skills, the quantity and quality of their work experience, their occupational skills, and their work habits and attitudes. The development of this network of human resource development activities will require the joint commitments and resources of a wide array of actors: high schools, post-secondary education and training institutions, local workforce development agencies, private and public sector employers, labor unions, the criminal justice system, and many social service agencies (child care, health care, legal services). No one sector can be expected to carry the burden and responsibility for developing and maintaining this system. Political support for this system also should be bi-partisan. Youth development should be at the forefront of both the Democratic and Republican agendas at the national, state, and local level.

Finally, there are the youth themselves. Youth from all walks of life, but especially those from low income families and communities, must be provided broad-based opportunities to acquire the human capital skills and personal behaviors needed to succeed in today's labor markets and be given economic incentives for participating in and successfully completing human resource development program activities. They also must be committed to assuming greater responsibility for their own lives, availing themselves of opportunities to improve their skills and gain valuable work experience and avoiding the personal behaviors (teen pregnancy, fathering children out-of-wedlock, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activities) that will adversely affect their personal labor market and economic prospects and the quality of community and social life. The demographic, social, and economic challenges facing the current generation of young adults are in some cases quite daunting, but the opportunities to improve their lives can be enhanced through an appropriate mix of public and private policies. To paraphrase the views of the late Hubert Humphrey, "the moral test of a nation's workforce development policy is how it treats those who are in the dawn of their work lives (teens and young adults), those who are in the twilight of their work lives (the older workers); and those who are in the shadows of the labor market, the dislocated, the discouraged, the underemployed, and the working poor."<sup>1</sup>

By more effectively addressing the human resource development needs of today's and tomorrow's adolescents and young adults, we can help reduce the number of future adult workers who will fall in the shadows of the labor market and increase the future number of older workers who can look back at their past work lives and feel a greater sense of personal accomplishment.

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The late Hubert Humphrey's quotation on the moral test of government appears in a book by ex-Congressperson Pat Schroeder:  
Pat Schroeder, Champion of the Great American Family, Random House, New York, 1989, p. 120.

## SECTION II

### **Education Pays Off**

## CHAPTER TWO

# HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENTS BY PEOPLE MATTER

By Stephen L. Mangum and Judith W. Tansky

We have a story to tell. While the moral is not unique, it is powerful and worthy of repetition – HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENTS BY PEOPLE MATTER! The characters in our story are youthful American adults making up the Youth Cohort of the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS); a sample of individuals ages 14 to 24 when first interviewed in 1979. Our characters are those of the cohort who were in school in 1979 but who had not been enrolled in school for at least a year as of 1984. The educational attainment of these young adults in 1984 is summarized in Table 1. Fifty-six percent of the sample left school with a high school diploma, 24% left without completing high school, and 20% completed high school and less than two additional years of post secondary education before leaving school for at least a year prior to being interviewed in 1984.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of the Sample: Educational Attainment as of 1984**

	Totals	Less than High School Completion	High School Completion	12+ But Less Than 14 Completed
<b>Males</b>				
<b>Non-Black</b>	3,024	761	1,692	571
<b>Black</b>	1,135	314	628	193
<b>Females</b>				
<b>Non-Black</b>	2,927	662	1,682	583
<b>Black</b>	1,062	212	583	264
<b>Totals</b>	8,148	1,949	4,588	1,611

Source: National Longitudinal Surveys, Youth Cohort

Having introduced the characters of the story, let's fast forward the tape of their lives and look at them some 14 years later at ages 28 to 38, focusing on their performance in the labor market as captured by three measures: wage and salary income, weeks worked, and weeks unemployed. The differences in education observed in 1984 are reflected in differentiated labor market success 14 years later. Individuals who completed some post-high school education

**Table 2**

**Labor Market Outcome by Level of Educational Attainment (Means)**

<b>Labor Market Outcomes</b>	<b>Less than High School Completion</b>	<b>High School Completion</b>	<b>12+ But Less Than 14 Completed</b>
<b>1998 Total Wage and Salary Income</b>	<b>\$19,051</b>	<b>\$26,578</b>	<b>\$34,884</b>
<b>Weeks Worked in 1998</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>48.7</b>
<b>Weeks Unemployed in 1998</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>

**Source: National Longitudinal Surveys, Youth Cohort**

before leaving school in 1984 averaged higher earnings in 1998 than did those who attained a high school diploma but no further education before leaving school by 1984. In turn, high school graduates earned more on average in 1998 than did those who dropped out of high school. Corresponding differences are noted in weeks worked and weeks unemployed. These are less sizeable than the differences in annual earnings, suggesting that the earnings differentials are due to differences in hourly wages or hours worked per week more than to differences in weeks

worked. For example for respondents with less than high school completion in 1984, the average weekly wage was \$421.48 ( $\$19,051/45.2$ ) while the average weekly wage for those who had graduated but had completed less than two years post high school in 1984 was \$716.30 ( $\$34,884/48.7$ ). Looking at the same two groups, the hourly rate if each group worked a 40-hour week would be \$10.55 and \$17.91 respectively. On the other hand, if each group earned \$10 an hour, the average workweek at 1 1/2 times for overtime would be 41.4 hours versus 61.1 hours.

Some individuals return to school and complete additional formal education after leaving school earlier in the lifecycle. Among the characters in our story, additional investments in education (post 1984) may have contributed to the labor market differences observed in 1998. Among the sample, 35% of those classified as leaving school by 1984 without a high school diploma completed one or more additional years of schooling between 1984 and 1996. In contrast, 19% of those having a high school diploma and 42% of those having more than a high school diploma but less than 14 completed years of education in 1984 acquired one or more additional years of education by 1998.

Additional formal education beyond that attained by 1984 yielded favorable economic returns (Table 3). For each education grouping, individuals completing additional schooling averaged higher earnings in 1998 than did their counterparts who did not further their education. The earnings differentials widened across the three groups. Returning high school dropouts completing additional education averaged 3.4% more in 1998 than those who did not add to their educational stock. The differences widened to 11.2% for the high school graduate and 16% for the post-high school groups.

Table 3

**Labor Market Outcomes by Level of Educational Attainment in 1984 and  
Level of Educational Attainment in 1996 (Means)**

<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<b>1998 Total Wage and Salary Income</b>	<b>Weeks Worked in 1998</b>	<b>Weeks Unemployed in 1998</b>
<b>Less than High School Diploma in 1996</b>	<b>\$18,679</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>High School Diploma in 1996</b>	<b>\$20,061</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>3.4</b>
<b>High School Diploma in 1996</b>	<b>\$25,871</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Further Education in 1996</b>	<b>\$29,553</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>12+ But Less Than 14 Years Completed 1996</b>	<b>\$29,053</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Completed Further Education 1996</b>	<b>37,058</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>.9</b>

**Source: National Longitudinal Surveys, Youth Cohort**

Table 4 reinforces the point. Among those who acquired additional formal schooling between 1984 and 1996, investing more extensively improved labor market outcomes, compared to investing less still garnered better labor market outcomes than undertaking no additional investment in formal education over the time period.

Table 4

## 1998 Labor Market Outcomes by Level of Educational Attainment (Means)

<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<b>1998 Total Wage and Salary Income</b>	<b>Weeks Worked in 1998</b>	<b>Weeks Unemployed in 1998</b>
<b>Less than High School Diploma in 1984</b>			
<b>Less than Diploma in 1996</b>	<b>\$18,679</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>Diploma in 1996</b>	<b>\$20,061</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>3.4</b>
<b>High School Diploma in 1984</b>			
<b>Diploma in 1996</b>	<b>\$25,871</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Associate's Degree in 1996</b>	<b>\$28,183</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>More College than Associate's Degree in 1996</b>	<b>\$30,632</b>	<b>48.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>
<b>Less than Associate's Degree in 1984</b>			
<b>Less than Associate's Degree in 1996</b>	<b>\$29,053</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Associate's Degree in 1996</b>	<b>\$31,959</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>More College than Associate's Degree in 1996</b>	<b>\$34,884</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>.8</b>

Source: National Longitudinal Surveys, Youth Cohort

### Characteristics Contributing to Labor Market Success

Education is not alone in explaining differences in labor market outcomes across individuals. Some of these factors also might influence educational attainment and thereby



influence labor market outcomes. Table 5 lists some factors thought to potentially impact labor market outcomes, providing means for three education groupings.

**Table 5**  
**Mean Value on Characteristics Thought to Influence Labor Market Successes**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Complete Sample</b>	<b>Less Than High School Completion</b>	<b>High School Completion</b>	<b>12+ But Less Than 14 Completion</b>
<b>Gender (% Female)</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>49.5</b>	<b>52.7</b>
<b>Race (% Black)</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>28.4</b>
<b>% Married, 1998</b>	<b>59.3</b>	<b>58.7</b>	<b>60.0</b>	<b>58.3</b>
<b>Family Size</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.1</b>
<b>Years Mother's Education</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>11.7</b>
<b>Years Father's Education</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>11.9</b>
<b>% Poor in 1979</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>14.4</b>
<b>AFQT (percentile ranking)</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>52.1</b>
<b>Personal Control</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>32.4</b>
<b>Work Commitment</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>8.3</b>
<b>Wages Collectively Bargained</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.04</b>
<b>Urban Residence, 1979</b>	<b>76.0</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>74.7</b>	<b>82.1</b>
<b>Ever Convicted as an Adult, %</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>% ever used Marijuana*</b>	<b>61.3</b>	<b>62.1</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>57.5</b>
<b>% ever used Cocaine*</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>21.8</b>
<b>Health Limits Kind of Work Can Do %</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>Have Health Limitations, 1998, %</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>8.2</b>

Source: National Longitudinal Surveys, Youth Cohort

\*The use of drugs was a separate survey that the participants were asked to complete on the computer. Of our sample 5,424 responded to the question about marijuana use and 5,440 responded to the question about cocaine use.

Correlations between educational attainment and these characteristics were examined. Significantly correlated with highest grade achieved in 1998 were: highest grade completed by

mother in 1979, highest grade completed by father in 1979, gender, family poverty status in 1979, the Armed Forces Qualification Test (an intellectual capacity test), personal control (respondent's outlook on life), self-esteem, and work commitment (measure of whether respondent would work if family encountered rough times versus using public assistance). When these factors were regressed on educational attainment in 1998, family poverty status in 1979 and personal control were no longer significant. Controlling for parental educational attainment, the poverty status of the family in which the individual was raised was insignificant in explaining later educational attainment among the individuals in the sample. This finding is consistent with a world in which parents pass their values for educational attainment on to their children such that, on average, parental educational attainment "explains" a significant portion of the variance in respondent educational attainment and where poverty status is an insignificant explanatory force when viewed in the context of parental educational attainment.

We next investigated correlations among these factors and the labor market outcomes. A person's 1998 wage and salary income was significantly correlated with being non-black, male, being raised in families who were not in poverty in 1979, and having higher scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Parental educational attainment, self-esteem level, personal control level, and work commitment level were also positively correlated with wage and salary income. This was also true of marijuana and cocaine usage as well as smaller family size in 1998, no health limitations and living in a locality with a low unemployment rate.

Number of weeks worked was positively correlated with parental education, being non-black and male, being raised in a family not living in poverty in 1979, having a higher AFQT profile, not using crack, cocaine or marijuana, having higher levels of self-esteem and commitment, living in a locality with a lower unemployment rate, having smaller families, and no health limitations. Lower parental educational levels, being female, living in poverty in 1979, having a lower AFQT profile, use of cocaine, having lower levels of self-esteem and work commitment, living in a locality with higher unemployment rates, and health limitations were associated with a higher number of weeks unemployed in 1998.

Hierarchical regression was used to examine the impact of these factors on labor market outcomes. The factors explored were categorized into four groups including: demographics (race and gender), background characteristics (parental educational attainment, family poverty status 1979, AFQT score, highest grade completed), personal attitudes (personal control, self-

esteem, work commitment), and other influences (use of cocaine, use of marijuana, unemployment rate 1998, family size 1998, health limitations). Controlling for demographics, background characteristics, personal attitudes, and other influences, significant predictors of 1998 wage and salary earnings were race, gender, AFQT score, highest grade completed, personal control, self-esteem, living in an area with low unemployment rate, and having no health limitations. Of these significant predictors, highest grade completed had the highest explanatory power.

The moral of the story? Education is a prime determinant of future earnings, and more formal education leads young people to productive choices in life. An increased likelihood of further educational attainment and accompanying earnings gains occurs to those who make positive life decisions and who avoid the negatives such as criminal activity and substance abuse. While it may sound crass and oversimplified, the best advice to a young person when it comes to education is – get as much of it as you can! It is to their economic advantage to do so. Caveats are of course in order. The evidence presented here, and the lessons drawn, is derived from what is true on average or “in general.” While more education may not be the best course in every specific case, it is certainly the best course in most.

### **But What About Children Raised in Poverty?**

What strategies can effectively help at-risk youth rise from poverty? We separated the characters in our story into two groups; those raised in families that were living in poverty in 1979 and those whose family did not live in poverty in 1979. For both groups, we looked at labor market status in 1998 in terms of work activity and annual earnings and asked what factors, controlling for other influences, were most significant in explaining variations in labor market outcomes. Were there factors that contributed to the labor market success of one group, but not the other?

Youth who were living in poverty households in 1979 were less likely than their non-poor peers to avoid poverty during adulthood, as measured in 1998. In 1979, 24.9% of the respondents lived in poverty households. In 1998, 11.2% of those still lived in poverty. In contrast, of the 75.1% of respondents not living in poverty households in 1979, 9.9% lived in poverty households in 1998. However, the list of factors contributing significantly to labor

market success did not differ between the two groups (poor/non-poor). In both regression analyses, after controlling for other factors, race, gender, AFQT score, educational attainment, self esteem, having no health limitations, and living in an area with lower unemployment rates were significant predictors of labor market success.

Poor women earned less than poor men. Likewise, non-poor women earned less than non-poor men on average. Blacks earned less than non-Blacks in both groups, the percentage gap being similar for those raised in poverty and those not raised in poverty. Being married had a positive influence on the earnings of the poor as well as the non-poor. Family size was a negative factor for both sexes in both groups. Greater cognitive ability (AFQT score) and greater self-esteem were rewarded as much for the poor as for the non-poor. Conviction for illegal activity was correlated with lower earnings, for poor and non-poor alike. Educational attainment, as expected, was very important in differentiating labor market outcomes among both groups. In summary, the factors contributing to labor market success were remarkably similar for both groups, those raised in poverty households and those raised in non-poverty households – but youth in poverty households had to crawl out of deeper holes.

### **What Can Be Done?**

The factors that contribute positively to the labor market success of young people raised in economically poor households are similar to the factors that contribute to the success of young people raised in non-poor households. Some factors influencing youth's earnings are immutable: race, gender, and parental educational attainment all contribute to an individual's own economic success but the individual has no choice in the dealt set of cards.

The values of other earnings determinants can be influenced over the course of a person's life by choices made, by supporting structures, and by opportunities extended. For example, self-esteem levels can be raised by parents focusing on giving their children positive experiences, by teachers who encourage students to try for their "best," by close personal relationships with positive role models, and by programs that extend the opportunity of participation to individuals frequently denied access by their demographic or economic background. Self-esteem levels, feelings of personal control, and a sense of work commitment all increase with positive early education and work experiences. Additional educational support for children of uneducated

parents could help create in youth a value for education that motivates them to achieve higher levels of education. This support might include Head Start programs for parents as well as children, mentoring experiences, or other involvement with educated adults.

Some factors cannot be changed over the short-run, but can be influenced over generations. For example, greater cognitive ability, consistently associated with labor market success, can be impacted by improved prenatal care, by policies that discourage "babies from having babies," by investing in early childhood education programs, and by time devoted to rigorous course work and study outside school. In our analysis, parental educational attainment was an important predictor of their offspring's educational attainment. When parental educational attainment was included in the regression analyses, household poverty status early in the individual's life was no longer a significant predictor of later labor market success. Consequently, all efforts that have the effect of increasing educational attainment of parents or prospective parents should improve the life prospects of the next generation.

Involvement with the criminal justice system clearly diminishes the chances of success; thus, efforts that reduce the likelihood and frequency of youth running afoul of the law should have a positive long-term impact on their earnings. Substance abuse has a similar negative impact on labor market success. Efforts that reduce its attractiveness to young people should be encouraged.

We again emphasize the point that the effect of educational attainment on labor market success was greater than that of any other factor. Although returning to school after having dropped out had a positive effect on labor market outcomes, the effects of staying in school through graduation were even stronger. Successful efforts at keeping at-risk young adults in school yields labor market dividends. Programs serving at-risk, out-of-school youth should stress the positive impact of educational attainment on earnings as part of their advocacy rationales. Attempts to help at-risk, out-of-school youth must maintain an education and labor market focus, stressing the well-established links between educational attainment and success in the world of work.

## CHAPTER THREE

# HIGH STAKES TESTING: Opportunities and Risks for Students of Color, English-Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities

By Jay P. Heubert

High-stakes tests - tests used in deciding whether individual students will be promoted to the next grade or awarded high-school diplomas - are increasingly widespread in American public education. At present about 23 states deny high-school diplomas to students who fail state graduation tests, even if they have completed satisfactorily all other requirements for graduation (American Federation of Teachers (AFT), 1999). The number is up from about eighteen two years ago (National Research Council (NRC), 1999), and is expected to increase to about 29 by 2003 (Shore *et al.*, 2000). Further, in response to concerns about “social promotion,” a growing number of states and school districts now require students to pass standardized tests as a condition of grade-to-grade promotion, even if students have satisfied all other requirements for promotion. Twelve states have (or soon will have) tests to determine grade-to-grade promotion (Shore *et al.*, 2000), compared with about half as many only a year ago (AFT, 1998).

Moreover, federal law now requires states to include English-language learners and students with disabilities in their large-scale assessment programs, with appropriate accommodation. Significantly, however, the purpose of these federal requirements is not to hold individual students responsible for what they have learned but to promote *system* accountability, *i.e.*, to determine how well states and school districts are educating English-language learners and students with disabilities (NRC, 1999).

There is broad agreement among scholars and advocates that standards-based reform and high-stakes testing will have the greatest impact on students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities. There are major disputes, however, over whether promotion and graduation testing will help or hurt such students. Proponents of “standards-based reform” and high-stakes testing point out that it is children of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities who are most often educated poorly, and who therefore have the most to gain

from a movement whose central objective is to hold *all* schools, teachers and students to high standards of teaching and learning. Meanwhile, critics of high-stakes testing fear that such children will be harmed by high-stakes tests: that they will disproportionately be retained in grade or denied high-school diplomas - both of which have highly negative consequences for students - because their schools do not expose them to the knowledge and skills that students need to pass the tests.

Both arguments are plausible and both are supported by evidence. The story is often complex, however, and the evidence incomplete.

There is strong evidence, for example, that students of color, students with disabilities, and English-language learners have much higher failure rates on high-stakes tests, especially in the years after such tests are first introduced. In the 1970s, for example, when “minimum competency tests” gained popularity, 20 percent of black students, compared with two percent of white students, failed Florida’s graduation tests and were denied high-school diplomas (*Debra P. v. Turlington*, 1979). Similarly, when students with disabilities first began taking minimum competency tests for high-school graduation, they failed at very high rates, in the 60 percent range (McLaughlin, 2000). Gaps also may be found on basic-skills graduation tests in use today; 1998 data from the Texas graduation tests, for example, show cumulative failure rates of 17.6 percent for black students and 17.4 percent for Hispanic students, compared with 6.7 percent of white students (Natriello and Pallas, 1999).

There is evidence, at least for basic-skills tests, that overall failure rates and differences in pass rates based on race, language, and disability decline over time. During the 1980s, the proportion of black students denied high-school diplomas due to minimum competency testing was well below 20 percent, and black-white discrepancies also declined. More recently, Texas has reported that the gap in failure rates between whites, blacks, and Latinos narrowed between 1993 and the present (Natriello and Pallas, 1999). Data for students with disabilities are harder to find, in part because many states have historically exempted such students from statewide assessments, but 1998 data from fourteen states show gaps that are quite high: students with disabilities fail state tests at rates that are consistently 35 to 40 percentage points higher than those for nondisabled students (Ysseldyke *et al.*, 1998). The gap does appear to be somewhat smaller than in the early years of minimum competency testing, however.

What is unclear, however, is the extent to which improved pass rates on basic-skills graduation tests actually reflect improved teaching and learning on the part of teachers and students. Improvements in teaching and learning are certainly one of the possible explanations for lower failure rates on basic-skills graduation tests; it appears, for example, that the achievement of students in Texas has improved not only on the state test but also on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a highly regarded nationally administered examination (Grissmer, 1998; Viadero, 2000).

But there is also support for other, quite different, explanations. For example, it is well known that scores on a test can increase as students become familiar with that test's format, "with or without real improvement in the broader achievement constructs that tests and assessments are intended to measure" (Linn, 2000: 4). Second, some states may reduce initially high failure rates by making the state tests easier or by setting lower cutscores. Similarly, if students who expect to fail a graduation test drop out of school - or if students with disabilities are excluded from the state testing - then pass rates for those who remain will increase, simply because the test-taking population will include fewer low achievers. In Texas, for example, there is evidence both that students with disabilities have been excluded from the state tests at unusually high rates and that the state's graduation tests have led to increased - and racially disproportionate - dropout rates (Clarke, *et al.*, 2000). Similarly, in 1997, Congress noted that students with disabilities are twice as likely as nondisabled students to drop out (IDEA, 1997). It is thus difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether basic-skills testing for graduation has on balance helped or hurt minority students and students with disabilities.

In any event, the consequences of *minimum* competency tests are becoming less relevant as more states raise the bar for graduation, adopting graduation tests that reflect "world-class" standards such as those embodied in NAEP. Based on national NAEP data, about 38 percent of *all* students would fail tests that reflect such "world-class" standards if they were administered today.

For minority students and English-language learners, moreover, there is clear evidence that failure rates for minority students and English-language learners would be extremely high - about 80 percent - at least at first. These predictions are consistent with recent data from Massachusetts and New York, where students have begun taking state tests that reflect "world-



class” standards. For students with disabilities, it is also reasonable to assume that failure rates on such tests would be very high: in the 75 to 80 percent range.

Last but not least, the proliferation of large-scale promotion testing, which is especially pronounced in large, urban school districts (AFT, 1999), has led to sharply higher rates of retention in grade, especially for minority students and English-language learners. In New York City, Chicago, and other cities, hundreds of thousands of students, the vast majority students of color and English-language learners, have already failed promotion tests in 2000 and will be retained in grade if they do not pass tests at the end of summer school.

The growth of promotion testing is likely to create an increasingly large class of students - disproportionately comprised of minority students, English-language learners, students with disabilities, and low-SES students - who are at increased risk of dropout by virtue of having been retained in grade one or more times. Those retained in grade later drop out at far higher rates than those of students not retained (NRC, 1999; Shepard and Smith, 1989). Promotion testing is thus likely to reduce, perhaps significantly, the numbers of students who remain in school long enough to take graduation tests, and increase the numbers of students who suffer the consequences of dropping out.

A similar analysis applies to teachers. As noted above, high-stakes testing is intended to raise teacher motivation and effectiveness, and it will doubtless do so with appropriate professional development, support, resources, and time. There is already evidence from several states, however, suggesting that the negative publicity associated with poor test scores is leading many experienced teachers to flee urban schools for the suburbs (Lee, 1999). Plainly efforts to improve weak urban schools - and the students such schools serve - will be undermined if those schools lose their best teachers, upon whom educational improvement largely depends.

As noted above, policies that lead to improved teaching and learning are likely to benefit minority students, English-language learners, and students with disabilities even more than they do other students. In New York, for example, Education Commissioner Richard Mills defends stringent graduation-test requirements partly because he hopes they will bring an end to low-track classes, in which students - most of them minority students and English-language learners - typically receive poor quality, low-level instruction. There is certainly strong evidence that students in low-track classes would acquire high-level knowledge and skills if placed in more demanding educational settings (NRC, 1999; Weckstein, 1999). Disability rights groups

likewise hope that state standards and tests will drive teachers to upgrade the individualized education programs (IEPs) of students with disabilities, so that IEPs reflect more of the knowledge and skills that nondisabled students are expected to acquire - and here, too, there is evidence that students with disabilities learn more if they are held to high standards (Ysseldyke *et al.*, 1998). Advocates for minority children and low-SES children hope that high standards will provide the political and legal leverage needed to improve resources and school effectiveness so that all children receive the high-quality instruction they need to be able to meet demanding academic standards 1999). Moreover, some proponents of high-stakes testing argue that fear of negative consequences - retention or diploma denial for students, negative publicity and (in rare instances) adverse personnel action for educators - is a positive force, which serves to increase the motivation to teach and learn well.

In sum, it is plausible that high-stakes testing will improve the education and life chances of minority students, English-language learners, and students with disabilities. It is also possible, however, that high-stakes testing will have negative consequences for such students and their schools. Most likely, perhaps, is that they will have positive effects in some places and negative effects in others, depending on whether tests are used to promote high-quality education for all children, the stated objective of standards-based reform, or to penalize students for not having the knowledge and skills that they have not been taught.

This is the principal theme that Education Secretary Richard Riley, a strong proponent of standards-based reform, emphasized in his February 22, 2000 "State of American Education" address. Riley called for a "midcourse review" of the standards movement, a step he said was needed "because there is a gap between what we know we should be doing and what we are doing" (Riley, 2000: 6).

Specifically, Secretary Riley said that state standards should be "challenging but realistic....[Y]ou have to help students and teachers prepare for these [high-stakes] tests - they need the preparation time and resources to succeed, and the test must be on matters that they have been taught" (Riley, 2000: 7). He also advised states not to rely on any single measure of students' knowledge in making high-stakes decisions: "All states should incorporate multiple ways of measuring learning" (Riley, 2000, 6).

Not coincidentally, perhaps, these concerns are also reflected in norms of appropriate test use that the testing profession and the National Research Council have articulated as recently as

1999. For example, the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, issued by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (and referred to here as the *Joint Standards*), assert that promotion and graduation tests should cover only the “content and skills that students have had an opportunity to learn” (AERA, APA, and NCME, 1999: 146, Standard 13.5). The Congressionally mandated NRC study, *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation* reaches a similar conclusion: “Tests should be used for high-stakes decisions...only after schools have implemented changes in teaching and curriculum that ensure that students have been taught the knowledge and skills on which they will be tested” (NRC, 1999).

Unfortunately, there are often discrepancies between what high-stakes tests measure and what students have been taught, especially where minority students, English-language learners, and students with disabilities are concerned, and where students are expected to master “world-class” standards. As a result, many states and school districts appear to be using promotion and graduation tests in a manner that is inconsistent with widely accepted norms of appropriate test use.

Similarly, as noted above, increasing numbers of states and school districts automatically deny promotion or high-school diplomas to students who fail a test, regardless of how well the students have performed on other measures of achievement, such as course grades. Secretary Riley is not alone in believing that states and school districts should weigh information other than test scores in making high-stakes decisions about promotion and graduation. The NRC study (1999: 279) emphasizes that educators should always buttress test score information with “other relevant information about the student's knowledge and skills, such as grades, teacher recommendations, and extenuating circumstances” when making high-stakes decisions about individual students. This is also consistent with the testing profession's *Joint Standards*, which state that “in elementary or secondary education, a decision or characterization that will have a major impact on a test taker should not automatically be made on the basis of a single test score. Other relevant information... should be taken into account if it will enhance the overall validity of the decision” (APA, AERA, and NCME, 1999: 146, Standard 13.7).

Why is it so important to use multiple measures in making important decisions about individuals? The answer is that any single measure is inevitably imprecise and limited in the information it provides. For example, proponents of high-stakes testing sometimes point out the

problems associated with exclusive reliance on student grades in making promotion and graduation decisions: there has been considerable grade inflation during the last three decades, for example, and there is considerable variation between teachers, schools, and school districts in what particular grades mean. Their points are well taken.

At the same time, however, large-scale tests are also limited in what they measure; standardized tests do not measure student motivation over time, for example, as important as motivation is to later success. Moreover, there is considerable error associated with even the best large-scale tests, something many people do not realize. The imprecision of test scores is best illustrated by specific examples: First, what are the chances that two students with identical “real achievement” will score more than 10 percentile points apart on the same Stanford 9 test? For two ninth graders who are really at the 45th percentile, the answer is 57 percent of the time. In 4th grade reading, the probability is 42 percent.

Second, how often will a student who really belongs at the 50th percentile according to national test norms actually score within 5 percentile points of that ranking on a test? The answer is only about 30 percent of the time in mathematics and 42 percent in reading (Viadero, 1999, citing Rogosa, 1999).

Given the imprecision of grades and test scores, combinations of both are far more accurate and reliable than either by itself. Unfortunately, as Secretary Riley noted, “there is a gap between what we know we should be doing and what we are doing.” This is certainly the case in the many states and school districts that make promotion or graduation decisions relying solely on student test scores. Such practices, though widespread, are inconsistent with widely accepted norms of appropriate test use.

Nor are these the only ways in which current high-stakes test programs seem to violate standards of appropriate test use. Problems arise, for example, where states use English-language tests to evaluate the subject-matter knowledge of students whose English proficiency is limited (in subjects other than English itself). Where an English-language learner performs poorly on a history test administered in English, for example, it is impossible to know what portion of a student’s poor performance is due to limited English proficiency and what portion is attributable to limited knowledge of history. Yet many states require that English-language learners take promotion and graduation tests in English (NRC, 1999).

To complicate matters, there is at present no satisfactory mechanism for ensuring that states and school districts respect even widely accepted norms of appropriate, nondiscriminatory test use. The two existing mechanisms - professional discipline through the professional associations that produce the *Joint Standards*, or legal enforcement through the courts or administrative agencies - have complementary shortcomings. Professional associations such as the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education have detailed standards, but lack mechanisms for monitoring or enforcing compliance with those standards. For courts and federal civil-rights agencies, the reverse is true; they have complaint procedures and enforcement power, but lack specific, legally enforceable standards on the appropriate use of high-stakes tests. Recognizing the problem, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has released a draft resource guide that, while not legally binding, aims to promote appropriate use of high-stakes tests.

In conclusion, the standards movement and high-stakes testing present both opportunities and risks to students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities. Such students, many of whom do not now receive high-quality education, stand to benefit if states and school districts insist that all schools and teachers provide high-quality instruction to all students. Such students are also at great risk, however, especially in states that administer high-stakes promotion and graduation tests before having made the improvements in instruction that will enable all students to meet the standards. As noted earlier, if graduation tests embodying "world-class" standards were implemented today, students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities would fail at rates approaching 80 percent, which would plainly be a catastrophe, not only for the individuals affected most directly but for our entire society.

Whether high-stakes testing precedes or follows the necessary school-improvement efforts - *i.e.*, whether high standards are used to leverage improvements in teaching and learning - will therefore make a very big difference. As noted earlier, "Tests should be used for high-stakes decisions...only after schools have implemented changes in teaching and curriculum that ensure that students have been taught the knowledge and skills on which they will be tested" (NRC, 1999). For students with disabilities, this will mean revisiting countless IEPs to make sure that all students subject to high-stakes tests are taught the relevant knowledge and skills (NRC, 1999). For English-language learners, this will mean ensuring students the opportunity to

acquire high levels of English proficiency as well as the other knowledge and skills that high-stakes tests measure.

States and school districts should respect these and other norms of appropriate test use, such as those requiring use of multiple measures in making high-stakes educational decisions. If they do not, the need for enforcement, whether through the legal system or new enforcement mechanisms, will increase.

Last but not least, there remains a need for significantly improved data gathering, particularly on such matters as changes in student achievement, dropout rates, and the effects of testing on students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# USING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

**By David Gruber**

It is no surprise that much of the discussion of policy and programs for out-of-school youth revolves around the question of resources. Those program models that do appear to work are, somewhat predictably, among the most expensive. Growing awareness of the importance of access to post-secondary education opportunities for out-of-school youth may lead to further increases in program costs. At the same time, traditional resources for these programs – such as funding under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) – have been reduced. Many of the remaining financing options are smaller, discretionary grant programs that will not reach large numbers of youth who need it.

Largely overlooked in the search for effective financing strategies, however, is a much larger “non-traditional” resource: public funding for secondary and post-secondary education. These education dollars can potentially fund program services for out-of-school youth at a scale that exceeds those supported by federal job training initiatives at the height of their funding. Perhaps more importantly, education funding is more flexible than many traditional resources and often can be used to support longer-term programs or provide more comprehensive services. As graphically described in earlier chapters, at a time when all youth increasingly will need some form of post-secondary education to gain a firm foothold in the job market, the ability to utilize education funds in creative ways may be the key to creating broad pathways to college for youth who have dropped out of school.

The foundation for this funding is the more than \$275 billion in federal, state, and local dollars that support public elementary and secondary education – by far the nation’s largest resource for education and training. Most communities now spend at least \$5,000 per student each year – and many spend far higher amounts – to support public schools. In addition, federal Pell grants provided up to \$3,125 per student each year to support post-secondary training and education. None of this funding typically is viewed as available to support programs or services

for youth who have dropped out of school. Yet, in the face of growing concern that traditional schools are not adequately serving all youth, a number of states and cities have chosen in recent years to make funds for secondary education available to alternative education programs serving at-risk and out-of-school students. An increasing number of such programs also are tapping post-secondary education resources to finance longer-term and more comprehensive interventions that combine secondary and post-secondary learning opportunities.

This chapter examines the most promising strategies for using education resources to finance programs for at-risk and out-of-school youth. Two of these strategies – contracts with local school districts and certification of programs as charter schools – offer ways of gaining access to state per-capita funding for K-12 education. The integration of post-secondary education with other services for at-risk and out-of-school youth represents another promising approach, one that enables students to receive Pell grants or other forms of federal student financial assistance. These three strategies, if fully implemented and replicated across the country, could drive major increases in both the numbers of out-of-school youth served and the range and scope of services offered by “second chance” programs for the nation’s most disadvantaged youth. For policy makers concerned with the limitations of the traditional, short-term GED programs currently offered to out-of-school youth, these resources also can help support a critical next step: a viable pathway to college and eventual economic self-sufficiency.

### **Contracts with Local School Districts**

Federal, state, and local governments all contribute to the costs of elementary and secondary education. While the federal share of K-12 education funding is by far the smallest, states increasingly have assumed a greater role in public school financing. Informal surveys by the Levitan Center indicate that this state share ranges from approximately \$2,000 to more than \$10,000 per student annually. This state per-capita funding is sometimes known by the name of the allocation method formula used for its distribution (e.g., ADA/average daily attendance or ADM/average daily membership). Although federal and local resources also can support programs for out-of-school youth, a focus on state per-capita funding often is attractive because it allows local service providers and school officials to pursue a shared goal of capturing state funds that otherwise would be lost to the school system and the larger community when youth drop out of school.

Two years ago, the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) surveyed states to determine if state education funding could “follow students into learning opportunities outside the regular classroom.” The results were surprising. The NCSL study found no state with laws prohibiting schools from allowing state education funding to follow the student, and a number of states that explicitly encouraged it.<sup>1</sup>

The Florida Dropout Prevention Act, for example, states the legislature’s intent that “cooperative agreements be developed among school districts, other governmental and private agencies and community resources in order to implement innovative, exemplary programs.” Arizona allows school districts to contract with any public body or private person to provide alternative programs. Texas also allows schools to contract with public or private dropout recovery programs.

This permissive legislative framework opens the door to many new funding opportunities, but it does not guarantee that local school districts will be willing – or in some instances even able – to enter into contracts with agencies serving at-risk and out-of-school youth. State regulations and the lack of precedent in this area may hinder or prevent local school districts in some states from contracting with community-based organizations, community colleges and other providers to design and operate educational programs outside the traditional school system. Local school officials also may resist such proposals, perceiving them as a diversion from or a threat to their central mission. For all these reasons, the development and approval of contracts that pass state per-capita funding through the local school districts to alternative providers is likely to require considerable time and sustained effort.

**How the process works** Funding for new out-of-school programs is generated by a school district formally re-enrolling out-of-school students back in the school system. What constitutes a “dropout” can vary from state to state. A number of the cities contacted in the Levitan research define the term to include any young person who has not attended school for at least three consecutive months. Additional enrollments of these returning students in turn draw down additional state funding (albeit with a time lag of nine months to a year). Using the added state funds as a base, school districts contract with alternative providers to offer educational services. Returning dropouts are enrolled in these alternative providers, without ever re-entering

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<sup>1</sup>Zinser, Jana “State Education Funding Policies and School-to-Work Transitions for Dropouts and At-risk Students Denver: National Council of State Legislatures

a traditional school.

For school districts this is entirely “new” funding: additional state resources are generated by the re-enrollment of students who had previously left the system. In many communities, school districts retain a portion of this new funding as an administrative fee, generating revenue for the school system as well as alternative providers. The resulting network of alternative providers, supported at least in part by contracts with the school district, is often managed through the district itself. In such instances, the district establishes standards, develops contracts, and monitors funding and outcomes.

There is enormous variation across states (and even across school districts within a state) in the amount of funding provided under contracts with local school districts and in the restrictions that govern use of these funds. The informal survey conducted by the Levitan Center found that most school districts awarding such contracts provide annual funding to alternative providers of between \$2500 and \$4100 per student. This survey also documented a spectrum of regulations ranging from nearly complete flexibility to detailed requirements in areas such as curriculum, staff hiring, and educational certification of students. Finally, while contracts typically involve a direct cash transfer, some districts provide in-kind aid by assigning their own faculty to teach in alternative programs.

States such as Oregon, Washington, and Minnesota allow state per-capita funds to be used to support student attainment of either a GED or a high school diploma. These states also allow students to pursue post-secondary options with the same per-capita state education funding. Other states, such as Wisconsin and Missouri, require students to pursue a high school diploma, but do not require a specified curriculum. Alternative programs can develop their own curriculum tailored to meet the needs of out-of-school youth, provided that it meets defined state outcome standards. At least one state surveyed does not allow per-capita funding to be used to support programs that lead to a GED and is reported not to allow much curriculum flexibility.

**Advantages of this approach** State per-capita education funding offers a number of advantages over traditional funding sources for out-of-school programs. Because the funding is an entitlement, it provides a steady revenue stream based on program enrollment rather than annual budget allocations or a fixed budget cap. Under this framework, alternative programs can serve all of the students they manage to enroll and retain.

Second, state per-capita funding can provide long-term support for alternative providers. State aid typically continues to flow until a student graduates or reaches an age limit established

in state law (at least through age 18, and through age 21 in many states). This structure allows alternative providers to design longer-term and more ambitious program models.

Third, state per-capita funding is frequently flexible, allowing communities to experiment with new curricula that might prove more engaging to at-risk and out-of-school youth. The core elements of school-to-career initiatives – connection to employers and colleges, career-themed learning, contextualized curriculum, integration with work and community service – are at least as relevant and perhaps more easily implemented in non-traditional settings.

Fourth, and perhaps most significant for policymakers, funding is tied to local school systems, fostering an important change in perspective: that out-of-school youth are still part of the education system rather than merely being handed off to the workforce development system (or juvenile justice system). Fully realized, this shift in perspective can lead to out-of-school students being held to the same standards – and provided the same opportunities – as students who have remained in school.

In short, education resources have the potential in a number of states to support a network of alternative providers that can be both parallel and complementary to the in-school system. Unlike traditional funding, education dollars can provide a base to enroll large numbers of youth; and can serve them for an extended period of time. Although state per capita levels are often not high enough to fund all the costs associated with effective programs, these resources, alone among the funding sources typically allocated to out-of-school programs, can provide a stable and continuing funding base, which can in turn leverage other grant and program dollars (such as WIA, TANF, juvenile justice and housing resources). Combined with other funding resources (see below), these dollars can support the same kind of college and career pathways offered to in-school students, and can do so in a way that might prove to be more successful.

This option also offers an opportunity to local school systems. Superintendents can provide an educational alternative to dropouts, at little or no additional cost, and without imposing a burden on public schools. For Superintendents concerned with the growth of independent charter schools, this strategy can provide an attractive alternative, allowing local school district to maintain control over the evolving system. In at least one instance, recent state approval of charter legislation has led the local district to increase funding to contracted alternative providers who might pursue the charter option.

In a number of states, state per-capita funding can even pay for post-secondary education for out-of-school students, including enrollment in courses offered at post-secondary institutions

for dual credit (toward a high school degree or diploma). State education funding in Washington State, for example, can be used to support post-secondary enrollment (in vocational courses) leading to a skill certificate or degree at a community college. School districts in states with similar provisions can use state education resources to offer a 16-year-old dropout the chance to attain a community college degree in a high-demand career area – the same opportunity that attracts in-school students to “2+2” programs. In states without such provisions, other resources – such as Pell grants – can be combined with state per-capita funding to extend the same opportunity.

Even in states with less flexibility, state per-capita education resources can be used to fund programs that are more comprehensive than the typical 3-6 month GED program now offered to many out-of-school youth. State education funding can also support a wide variety of related activities, including career preparation, work experience, counseling, and other support services.

**Examples from across the nation** The Sar Levitan Youth Policy Network, through its work in cities across the country, has identified a number of school districts around the country – including Portland (OR), Minneapolis, Houston, Milwaukee, Kansas City, and Seattle – that currently use state per-capita funding to support alternative programs for out-of-school youth. Other cities are now exploring opportunities to tap these state education resources.

***Portland, Oregon*** has perhaps the most well developed network of alternative providers funded through contracts with the local school district. Over \$7 million in state per-capita funds now supports more than 100 providers that jointly enroll at least 3,000 young people, most of whom have dropped out of school. The school district itself retains approximately \$1 million for administration. Alternative providers draw down \$4,500 per student per year, and they receive twice as much funding for students who are pregnant or parenting. Again, for the district these resources represent new revenues from the state that would otherwise be lost when students drop out of school.

A national leader in this arena, Portland deliberately set out to create an alternative network for out-of-school youth. Responding to provisions of Oregon law that support creation of educational options outside traditional schools, the district actively encouraged community-based organizations to recruit drop-outs who could be re-enrolled in the system and then

educated in community programs. The district itself established an alternative schools office to administer the network. This office now contracts with the community college and community organizations to operate programs, with the district monitoring enrollment, distributing funding and maintaining fiscal responsibility. The district is currently working to apply Oregon's Certificate of Initial Mastery standards to alternative providers.

The Portland system supports both diploma and GED programs, and also includes providers who integrate work experience opportunities, counseling and other services with the education program. In contracting with Portland Community College to operate a GED program, for example, the district is funding support services that will help students adjust to a college campus.

While Portland has been very innovative in its attempts to establish a system, it has yet to achieve the full potential of these resources. In Oregon, as in a number of other states, funding can support students up until age 21 or until they have received a high school diploma. If returned out-of-school students do not receive a diploma, state per-capita funding can support them in pursuing an AA or other post-secondary degree. In other words, the district could use available funding to contract with colleges and community-based organizations to design a long-term college pathway that leads to a post-secondary degree.

To date this potential has not been realized. In place of long-term college preparation and training, the district has funded mostly short-term programs of less than a year's duration, leading to a GED or high school diploma. Portland has however recognized the opportunity to make more extensive use of this funding, and is currently participating in a demonstration to develop college pathways for the out-of-school youth served in its system.

*Minneapolis, MN* also has made extensive efforts to serve out-of-school and at-risk youth, serving approximately 2,600 youth through more than 20 school sites. Alternative providers receive funding of approximately \$3,500 per student. Students can enroll in programs that provide high school diplomas, receive a GED, or pursue alternative programs at a community college.

Alternative schools must achieve the same standards as traditional school settings (in testing or evaluation, for example) and 70-80% of teachers in contracted schools must be licensed. The schools can design their own programs around the core curriculum standards that are in place for the entire school district. Upon completion of their program, students receive a

regular diploma from the last high school they attended or a district diploma from the city where they are living.

Like Portland, Minneapolis has expressed interest in using its alternative system as a base for linking out-of-school students to community college.

*Houston* has entered into agreements with ten alternative providers, as well as a community college to create an alternative network also serving over 2,000 students in diploma and GED programs. Channeling state funding of \$ 2200 per student per year through a separately established Alternative Education District, Houston administers a system where alternative providers have discretion to design their own curriculum and programming, provided they meet Texas state outcome standards (the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). Diploma students must participate at least 35 hours per week. Staff are required to have Baccalaureate degrees but are not mandated to be certified teachers. Most programs issue school district diplomas.

GED programs are not required to operate within any established parameters and have full discretion over program design.

The Alternative Education District is mandated by the Alternative Accountability System (an accountability system separate from other school districts) to measure their success through their ability to recover kids who have dropped out of school by bringing them back to school or into a GED program.

*Milwaukee* contracts with 24 community-based organizations, the local technical college and private schools to provide services to dropouts and other at-risk students. Students can attend designated “small community schools” which include schools specifically designed for teen parents, Latino, African American and Native American students. Schools must meet goals set by the state regarding attendance, retention, and academic gains, as well as state standards for instructional hours, but they have discretion in designing curriculum that is appropriate to the mission and target population. Staff can be licensed from the Department of Public Instruction, licensed from some other professional trade group, or be under the supervision of a regular teacher. Students in these schools receive a high school diploma.

*Kansas City* has a network of alternative providers that includes four alternative schools



serving about 500 out-of-school students. As in some of the cities described above, alternative providers in Kansas City have flexibility in developing a curriculum that meets overall state standards. Students receive a high school diploma. The Kansas City system, though small, is particularly innovative in its use of funding. In addition to state funding of \$2,700 per student, alternative schools can receive both federal Title I and local education funding. These combined education resources for alternative providers will reach an estimated \$4,600 per student this year.

Unlike other cities described above, *Seattle-area* school districts are utilizing state per-capita education funding specifically to support dropouts in post-secondary training. Under state legislation that provides up to \$4,100 per student annually to finance post-secondary vocational training, some Seattle-area community colleges are working with neighboring school districts to enroll high school dropouts in college preparation programs. A program operated by Shoreline Community College, for example, uses this funding to provide out-of-school youth with an introduction to career options, counseling, employability development, and basic skills. Students are then transitioned into college classes, again supported with state per-capita funding.

Although state education funding is an entitlement for dropouts in Washington, use of these resources is still low in Seattle. One recent support suggests that only 800 students in Seattle's King County are drawing down these funds, roughly 10 percent of those youth estimated to need these services. Seattle is now developing a strategy to expand current programs to serve as many as 4,000 students per year.

Other cities are now assessing opportunities to use state education resources. In *Baltimore*, a coalition including the school district, Office of Employment Development, and community college is working to develop a district contracting strategy for out-of-school and at-risk youth. *Camden, New Jersey* is also exploring use of this resource.

Not surprisingly, use of this funding source depends on the support of the Superintendent (and/or school board), who must formally approve the use of outside contractors and set standards for program funding. Those cities that have been most successful in developing alternative networks for out-of-school youth have had the active support of local districts. Some districts in fact have created an alternative schools office specifically to foster an alternative network built on this funding.

**Key issues and potential challenges** The programs described above, as well as others around the country, have begun to take steps toward using state education resources, as well as

other funding, to create an alternative system for out-of-school youth. Yet even in a time of scarce funding opportunities, this resource is underused. Many communities simply do not now look to education resources as a funding source for out-of-school programs. Others, while now operating limited out-of-school programs, have yet to develop a full-scale system that can serve a substantial portion of those students who have dropped out-of-school.

There are many reasons why most programs serving at-risk and out-of-school youth continue to operate without support from state per-capita education funding. The most notable obstacles identified during the course of the Levitan Center's work include:

◆ **Unclear and varying regulations**

Surveys suggest that many, if not most, states have no formal barriers to district contracting with alternative providers. Many states, however, have regulations that define or restrict permissible uses of state education funds. The experience of the Levitan Center suggests these regulations are often poorly publicized or obscure, particularly in states where district contracting is not common practice. In one state, for example, senior state education officials working with the Levitan Center were themselves not aware of state regulatory restrictions on use of education funding. In another state, a coalition of local school officials and state staff from outside the education department required several months to determine official state policy on education spending. Intensive discussions that include local school superintendents as well as officials from the state department of education often are necessary in order to assess the full potential for using this funding in many communities.

◆ **Lack of knowledge**

The Levitan research found that many organizations involved in providing service to out-of-school youth – community-based organizations, Private Industry Council staff, community colleges and others – were unaware that school districts in their city had the potential to draw down additional state resources to fund alternative service providers. These entities also lacked any source of outside information that described opportunities, cited models elsewhere and described needed next steps.

◆ **Lack of school district priority**

Active support of Superintendents and school boards is, of course, necessary to developing a community strategy to direct state education funds to out-of-school youth.

In many districts, however, out-of-school youth are not naturally high on the agenda of school superintendents who are preoccupied with school reforms, new state achievement standards, school safety issues, and a myriad of other concerns. Superintendents in some districts may also be reluctant to support alternative learning environments outside the schools, perceiving that it diminishes their control of the education system, and could have the potential to weaken the drive toward higher educational standards.

◆ **School concern over loss of funding**

Forums discussing the issue of using state funding for out-of-school youth reveal concern among some in the educational community that this policy will take money away from schools. In part this is a misunderstanding: some superintendents believe this funding will come from local budget rather than additional state funding gained through new enrollments. This concern also reflects the belief that, if state funding of alternative programs becomes more prevalent, there will inevitably be competition for limited funding between in and out-of-school “systems.” (Currently this does not appear to be a critical issue. In Oregon, the state that appears to make greatest use of this funding mechanism, less than 2 percent of students are enrolled with alternative providers).

◆ **Funding limitations**

Limited or restricted funding may discourage development of a system. In some states where state per-capita funding is relatively low, community providers may not view the additional funding opportunity as a large enough base to encourage new, expanded, or enriched programs for out-of-school youth (although few would not welcome the additional support for existing programs). School districts also may choose not to fund programs at the full level of state support. A more prevalent issue is the time lag typical in accessing state funding: funding generally does not flow from the state until nine months or a year from enrollment, typically requiring schools or some other entity to advance resources.

Alternative providers may also be discouraged by regulations set by the state or local school district. In some districts, for example, providers receive in-kind support – teachers – who may be primarily selected by the district. In others, curriculum restrictions set by the district or state may discourage innovation.

Perhaps more important for long-term self-sufficiency is the unrealized opportunity to

provide comprehensive college and career preparation for those out-of-school students who are enrolled in alternative programs. In most states, state per-capita education funds can potentially support students for several years, allowing new kinds of program models focused on readying students for post-secondary training and education. As noted above, some states even use education dollars to pay for tuition and support at community colleges. Yet despite this opportunity, many of the cities described above continue to employ their funding for short-term programs of 3-6 months duration focusing on attainment of the GED and entry-level jobs. In these cities, despite no formal legal or regulatory barriers to long-term programs, more ambitious goals are not now pursued.

### **Certification as Charter Schools**

The charter school movement is still somewhat new, and yet it potentially offers a more defined mechanism for gaining access to state per-capita education funding. Based on certification usually awarded by the state, charter schools are formal schools that seek to provide a distinct alternative to the public systems. Charter legislation typically allows teachers, parents, and community organizations the opportunity to develop a particular education model and target population and draw continuing support from state (and sometimes local) funding. Currently, there are more than 700 charter schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in 32 states.

Funding for charter schools varies from the average amount of state per-capita aid to local school districts in states like Minnesota (approximately \$3,500 per student) to combined state and local funding in states like Massachusetts (Boston charters receive \$7,000 per student) and Missouri (newly approved charters will receive over \$7,000 per student). Similar to the funding for traditional schools, these resources provide a continuing annual funding stream to support charter programs.

**How the process works** Charters are generally offered through an RFP process administered by the state. While charter schools are subject to state regulation, they also typically are granted broad flexibility in curriculum, structure, and teaching. For students who have failed in traditional schools, charters may offer a much more engaging educational program which might emphasize a given theme – such as the arts or conservation – or combine teaching with community or work experience. As a number of state and local educational officials have commented, the educational flexibility attached to charter schools allows them to adapt the kind of school-to-career program models favored by many out-of-school practitioners far more readily

than public schools. This combination of education and program flexibility with a guaranteed – and substantial – funding stream provides communities an obvious opportunity to develop charters as an alternative for out-of-school youth.

**Advantages of this approach** With their combination of funding and flexibility, charters could be an important opportunity for policy makers looking for new resources for out-of-school youth. Although still very limited in scope nationally, the number of charters has been growing. The success of some programs (such as the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, or LACC) in expanding its program to other campuses around the state indicates the potential, at least in some states, to replicate out-of-school charters beyond their initial site. The ability of charters in some states to draw down both state and local funding at the same level as traditional schools provides a rich funding base unmatched by the district contracting models discussed above.

Charter models also offer an as yet largely untapped opportunity to connect out-of-school students to college. To date many charters have focused on traditional out-of-school program designs - relatively short-term courses leading to a GED or high school diploma. But charter legislation allows these schools to develop - and receive funding for - much longer-term initiatives. Charters could, for example, work with colleges to design a multi-year program that prepares students for college and leads directly into a post-secondary program. For reasons discussed in more depth below, this has not happened to date. Yet with the support of state education dollars, the potential exists to make this important leap.

**Examples from across the nation** A number of cities have created charters focused on out-of-school youth. In Boston, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, charter schools have been established based on the YouthBuild model. The *Boston* YouthBuild program, for example, funded at \$7,000 per pupil (the same as the Boston public schools), enrolls 60 students in a one-year program that includes life skills training, experience in the construction trades, and graduation standards equivalent to a GED.

In *Los Angeles*, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) has established a charter school that blends crew-based work experience with an educational program. Funding is approximately \$3,500 per student drawn from state education resources. 100 students now participate in a program that provides alternate weeks of crew-based work experience with

classroom activity and leads to a diploma. Beginning next year, the LACC will expand its charter program to four additional sites in California: San Francisco, San Jose, Marin County, and Sacramento. In the future, the LACC plans to expand its academic program through creating connections to local community colleges, using its state funding to subsidize post-secondary coursework.

**Key issues and potential challenges** The chief limitations on charters remain those of scale. As above, not all states allow for charters, and states may have caps on the number of charters issued. Expanding the existing charter base may also take time: charters are typically issued through a competitive RFP process, which may require significant planning and development by alternative providers with no guarantee of success.

Charter applications also impose burdens on program operations that community-based organizations may choose not to bear. Because charters are schools, they may carry with them a number of requirements such as the need to provide access to a gym or library, to develop formal security and safety procedures, and to extensively codify educational policies. Potential charter operators must balance the additional funding they might receive with the added regulatory requirements. Response to this choice is mixed; in Massachusetts for example, some community-based organizations have chosen not to apply, while others find the process “onerous, but worth it.” In Missouri, an alternative school funded by local district contracting recently decided to put off a charter application, while at the same time seeking to negotiate a better deal with the local school district.

### **Integration of Post-Secondary Education and Other Services**

Post-secondary resources provide another important, and underused, funding opportunity for out-of-school youth. Federal Pell grants provide up to \$3,125 per student per year for the most economically disadvantaged students. These resources are in effect an entitlement for students who meet qualifying standards. Other federal resources, including work-study funding and federal loans can also support post-secondary education. Respondents at a number of community colleges have noted that these resources can together fund the cost of tuition and books for the poorest students. Pell grants can also contribute substantially to costs at other public institutions. In addition to these federal resources, state and local dollars can also help

support post-secondary attendance.

**How the process works** Although an entitlement for qualifying students, Pell grants are not automatic. To qualify for federal Pell grant funding at most colleges and universities, students must meet an “ability to benefit” test – that is, they must be viewed as likely to succeed in a post-secondary setting. This test is typically based on a student possessing a high school diploma or GED or achieving a designated score on college admission or placement tests. There is also a lifetime limit on Pell aid based on awards for a designated number of quarters of post-secondary enrollment. In addition to income, Pell grant awards depend on cost of attendance, full- or part-time student status and length of enrollment.

Some out-of-school programs that encourage college attendance inform students of Pell grant and other funding options, and seek to link participants directly to college opportunities. Because most programs targeted to out-of-school youth do not currently include a post-secondary component, however, Pell grants are often not seen as a resource for out-of-school youth. Pell grant and other post-secondary funding nonetheless can help communities increase college access for dropouts. Through combining Pell grant and basic education funding, ambitious communities can, in fact, create a pathway to college for out-of-school youth. A number of communities around the country, including Seattle, Portland and Baltimore, are now seeking to use these dollars to prepare out-of-school youth for post-secondary education; connect them to college; and sustain them once there.

**Advantages of this approach** In a time when some form of post-secondary education is virtually required to support a family, the most striking opportunity associated with post-secondary resources is the chance to provide a portal to college and college-level training for dropouts.

Research sponsored by the Levitan Center reveals that males with an AA degree have double the lifetime earnings than a high school dropout – for women, the difference between being above and below the poverty level. With today’s tight labor markets, even short-term post-secondary training can make a difference. In Washington State, for example, out-of-school and other disadvantaged students participating in a three-month machine tooling program are routinely offered wages of \$11-13 per hour upon graduation.

An observer of the GED-focused out-of-school programming that prevails around the

country might well conclude that post-secondary training is simply out of reach for the nation's dropouts. While there are certainly barriers standing between participants in out-of-school programs and college, inadequate funds for preparation and basic tuition (at least at community colleges) does not have to be one of them.

By linking Pell grants, other post-secondary resources, and the state per-capita funding described earlier, communities have the potential to develop pathways to college for out-of-school youth. Creative use of these resources can provide the operational support to transform short-term GED programs into longer-term and more comprehensive college preparation programs, and to then provide a direct transition to college. Partnerships of community colleges and alternative education providers (charter schools or community-based organizations) can use these funds to create a wide variety of new approaches for expanding access to college for out-of-school youth.

One model might be the "2+2" strategy, now used almost exclusively for in-school students, that links the last two years of high school with the first two years of college. "2+2" models typically focus on a particular career area such as health or manufacturing, and provide related, career-themed instruction and work experience. Students receive college credit while still in school, are directly connected to college, earn a related degree, and then can move on to career employment.

Using the largely untapped flexibility of Pell and state per-capita resources, new partnerships of schools, community colleges, community-based organizations and employers can begin to build an out-of-school equivalent of the "2+2" pathway. State per-capita funding can support the first part of this pathway, restructuring and expanding existing GED programs to emphasize college and career preparation. Curriculum can be developed by community colleges, in collaboration with alternative providers. Post-secondary dollars (or per-capita funding in some states) can support the second segment, community college training leading to an Associate degree or skill certificate. Career orientation, contextualized learning, and related work experience can all be woven into the expanded program design.

Given the range and depth of support needed by many out-of-school youth, the resources cited here are not in themselves enough (except in some high reimbursement states) to develop and support a full-fledged out-of-school college preparation system. This funding can, however provide the operating base for an approach that meets a number of needs identified by those who run out-of-school programs. Providing out-of-school youth a college degree (and career



connection) can appeal to the growing number of dropouts who recognize that a GED degree, in and of itself, is of limited value. The real-world applications of a career-focused program can offer a more engaging way to learn than traditional test-centered program models. As program operators have noted, setting a meaningful goal – like college and career employment – can also help programs retain students longer and prepare them better for economic self-sufficiency.

Community colleges can benefit from this strategy, improving both the readiness of their student body and their finances. Urban community colleges now must provide remedial coursework for more than 50 percent of enrolling students. Drop-out rates are also high, again exceeding 50 percent in many cities. A long-term “2+2” model or other pathway targeted to out-of-school youth, emphasizing college preparation and the need to meet academic standards, brings colleges new resources in their struggle to prepare and retain students.

In those states where state per-capita education funding can support post-secondary education, these additional resources can also become a profit-center for the college. In Oregon, for example one community college typically charges \$1,900 per student in yearly tuition. The potential of developing a program that qualifies for Oregon’s per-capita funding of more than \$4,000 per student annually means colleges can provide basic education, support, and counseling and still make money. One Washington college dean noted that out-of-school programs, in the course of two years, had become a significant revenue-producer for the college.

**Examples from across the nation** To date, few cities have effectively used the full spectrum of resources available to support post-secondary preparation and training for out-of-school youth. To demonstrate the potential of using existing funding to support pathways to community college, the Levitan Center (with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and DeWitt Wallace, Reader’s Digest Fund) has worked with three cities – Baltimore, Portland, and Seattle – to develop pilot programs. The demonstration is known as Pathway 14. In each city, coalitions including city government, schools, community colleges, and alternative providers are working to leverage existing resources to create a multi-year college pathway leading to a skills certificate and/or degree. The coalitions are also attempting to incorporate the social supports needed to help out-of-school students succeed in a more demanding academic environment. The demonstration is still in its planning phase.

While each city proposed model differs, common elements include:

- ◆ Educational partnerships between colleges and alternative providers;
- ◆ Restructuring and extending existing short-term alternative programs to emphasize college preparation and transition;
- ◆ Career themes as a basis for curriculum development;
- ◆ Operational support through expanded use of state per-capita education and Pell grant funding;
- ◆ Social supports; and
- ◆ Professional and curriculum development assistance.

In *Portland*, the demonstration builds on the city's extensive network of alternative providers. As described above, while the city has been successful in using state per-capita education funds of over \$4,500 per student per year to establish a system of GED and diploma programs for out-of-school youth, it has been less successful in moving students to college or in retaining participants for more than a few months. The full flexibility of this funding, and its potential to support students for several years of post-secondary education, has yet to be realized. The pathway demonstration, linking three alternative providers with the community college, is designed to use state per-capita funding to extend and enrich the current curriculum, enabling out-of-school students to meet the post-secondary Asset standards that are required for entry into credit-bearing courses at the college. The demonstration sites will also draw down continuing state funding to pay for tuition and social support costs at the community college.

In *Seattle*, community colleges are using state education funds of \$4,100 per student per year to target out-of-school youth, but current programs are limited in scope. Recognizing the potential to expand the use of state funding, Seattle plans to: increase the number of participating community colleges; develop a complimentary network of alternative providers based at housing sites and community based organizations; and expand student recruitment. New curriculum will incorporate career themes from high-wage high skill sectors including manufacturing, information technology and health. The pathway demonstration is intended to serve as a prototype for a system serving 4,000 out-of-school youth.

In *Baltimore*, there is no current use of state per-capita demonstration funds to support out-of-school youth. The demonstration will serve as a prototype for use of this funding, with the community college pathway model as the strategic framework. The Baltimore coalition is currently working with the state and the school district to design an alternative high school

curriculum that will meet state outcome standards; qualify students for a high school diploma; ready students for community college; and allow providers to draw down state funding of approximately \$2,800 per student per year.

**Key issues and potential challenges** Inertia, difficulty in forging institutional partnerships, and lack of priority for out-of-school youth – some of the same issues encountered in attempts to access state per-capita education funds – are also issues in employing post-secondary resources to connect dropouts to college. While the mechanics of connecting out-of-school youth to Pell grant dollars and state education resources are relatively straightforward, the new kinds of partnerships required to develop college and career pathways will pose major challenges for traditional out-of-school policy and programs.

One easily resolved issue is simple lack of knowledge. With no single entity or forum for discussion, community colleges, schools and community-based organizations, are, not surprisingly, often largely unaware of the potential resources and opportunities for partnership presented by the other institutions.

More challenging, however, is the need to change the perspective and ongoing operation of community colleges and alternative providers. Like schools, many community colleges do not see preparing out-of-school youth for post-secondary education as part of their core mission. Faculty may be reluctant to bring on campus students they view as ill prepared and potentially disruptive. In an environment where many students do not currently graduate, out-of-school students will likely require additional counseling and social supports which community colleges may not now provide.

Community-based organizations are now often focused on providing short-term education and training and related social services. Expanding the mission and capacity of these alternative providers to encompass college preparation will require extensive professional development and technical assistance.

Perhaps the most challenging issue is the fragmentation of out-of-school programs and organizations and consequent lack of a community strategy for out-of-school youth. Developing a college pathway is an even more complex and demanding task than generating education funds to support traditional programs, requiring both a higher level of collaboration and greater change in traditional program models. Communities will need to solicit the active support of schools, community colleges and community-based organizations and then put together a working

coalition that can design and operate a system. In addition to political will, this will likely require an outside organization to inform communities about available opportunities and working models elsewhere and to assist in design and development.

## **Conclusion**

Programs for out-of-school youth have typically been viewed as outside of the educational mission of local schools. Often funded through an entirely separate mechanism, these programs have typically been limited by a lack of public investment, by competition for resources with other at-risk populations, and by restrictions placed on federal and state resources that do filter down to communities. Perhaps as a result, out-of-school programs have seldom been seen as an alternative pathway for students who cannot succeed in mainstream schools, but rather as a separate and less ambitious “second chance” option, providing few of the opportunities offered to secondary students.

In today’s economy, where out-of-school youth will need extensive academic and social support to succeed, neither state per-capita education funding nor federal student financial assistance for post-secondary education can fully address the current shortfall in public investment on behalf of this population. Of the cities surveyed by the Levitan Center, Portland probably had made the greatest strides toward building and financing an out-of-school system, serving about 15 percent of the high school population in alternative programs. Networks of this size, however, appear to be rare. Most cities lack an organized network of providers or even a coherent strategy for meeting the needs of at-risk and out-of-school youth. Services for this group typically are fragmented and often duplicative, delivered separately by training programs, community organizations, schools, churches, and other non-profit agencies.

Much of the problem can be traced in local communities to a divide between schools that can provide education resources and community-based organizations or other providers that can deliver services. Many communities have no common forum in which schools and community groups can discuss issues and develop strategy, forge partnerships, and sponsor new program approaches. Without community leadership and organization that bridges the gap between schools and training providers, it is very difficult to establish priorities, assemble the needed partners, gain support of key policy makers, and construct over time a system to serve this population.

Progress in meeting the needs of at-risk and out-of-school youth also is hindered by the

fact that many policy makers and program operators continue to maintain separate – and lower – standards and expectations for out-of-school youth than for in-school youth. Programs for out-of-school youth frequently emphasize a GED and entry-level job, whereas schools increasingly emphasize the importance of post-secondary connection and career development. This difference in attitude explains in part why many communities are not taking full advantage of the potential inherent in state education funding to support the same kind of long-term opportunities for out-of-school youth.

Effective strategies to tap state per-capita and federal student aid funding for alternative programs serving out-of-school youth require strong leadership at city and state levels. Although many of the issues must be addressed within local communities, the federal government and private funders can help community leaders understand and draw upon these resources. Key steps include:

### **1) Improved knowledge**

The use of state per-capita funding is limited by lack of good information on local funding levels, regulations, issues and needed next steps. The federal government should build on the work done by the National Council of State Legislatures in commissioning a comprehensive survey, targeted at both the state and city levels, focused specifically on this resource.

### **2) Dissemination and promotion**

The federal government can employ discretionary grants targeted to out-of-school youth—including those issued by the Departments of Labor, Justice, Housing and Urban Development and National School-to-Work office— as a vehicle to encourage communities to seek and use this funding. Pre-proposal conferences should highlight the potential use of these resources. Grant applications should inform communities of funding opportunities and specifically require respondents to address the use of state per-capita education and Pell grants as matching resources. Federal grant proposals can also ask responding community coalitions to address the potential of building pathways to college for out-of-school youth.

Foundations and other funders should also seek to ensure that state per-capita funding is sought as part of any grant-funded effort targeted to out-of-school youth. Foundations are also well positioned to encourage communities to develop the kind of college pathways discussed here.

### **3) Professional development**

The funding and program opportunities described here require schools, community organizations, and community colleges to rethink their traditional roles and operational practices. To take full advantage of these resources, these organizations will also need to expand their capacity to educate and support out-of-school youth. The federal government and private funders can use discretionary grants to encourage communities to focus on critical areas like curriculum and professional development. Private and public funders alike can focus in particular on expanding the capacity of community-based organizations and other alternative providers to prepare out-of-school youth for post-secondary education.

### **4) Technical assistance**

Creating a system to use state education resources often requires a change in community perspective, formation of new alliances, and clear examples or models of how such a system could work. Given the inertia and turf concerns that frequently prevail in communities, particularly when new alliances or ways of doing business are required, there is often an unmet need for an outside catalyst: an agency or organization that can convene partners, introduce ideas and provide an initial strategy. Policy makers and program operators interviewed suggest that without such an outside agent this kind of change is unlikely to occur. The federal government and other funders should support outside organizations that can inform communities about funding and program opportunities; cite national examples; assist in building a coalition; provide strategic assistance in developing prototypes; and aid in evaluation.

## SECTION III

### **Policies and Principles**

## CHAPTER FIVE

# OUT OF SCHOOL AND UNEMPLOYED: Principles for More Effective Policy and Programs

By Gary Walker

### The Problem

The employment and earnings prospects of low educational achievers--and high school dropouts especially--have always been worse than the prospects of youth who have completed high school. They have been worse, too, than those of youth with higher educational achievements. Today, the differences in employment and earning attributable to educational attainment are wider than ever. Major economic, technological, and demographic trends offer little hope that these differences will diminish naturally.

The country's economic future, the well-being of young families, the crime rate, the social fabric of our civil society, and our commitment to democratic government have all been linked to the nation's ability to improve the educational achievement and job performance of out-of-school and out-of-work youth. Yet, as meeting basic economic needs becomes increasingly harder for many young people, the basic demographic data show that this segment of the American population will soon increase dramatically.

Many unprepared youth will soon reach the age when they will need to earn a living. Can anything be done to improve their prospects?

### The Record

Over the past two decades many social initiatives have attempted to address these issues. Most have been special interventions focused on individual youth. They have tried to remediate educational deficiencies and have focused on job-specific training and access to jobs. A small but growing number of initiatives are trying to address the structural and systemic problems that work against these youth across the board--in our public education system, our labor market, and our communities. In addition, the 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act, the 1998 Workforce



Investment Act, and several new philanthropic initiatives seem to acknowledge that systemic change and special, individualized interventions are both necessary.

Despite this history and variety of initiatives, however, influential leaders agree that these attempts have not made much headway--with the possible exception of initiatives so small, costly, or rooted in charisma that they offer limited hope as large-scale policy alternatives. This negative perception has resulted in fewer resources for out-of-school, out-of-work youth in both the public and philanthropic communities.

Unfortunately, a considerable body of evidence seems to support this pessimistic conclusion. National demonstration programs such as Supported Work and Job Start programs are usually cited, especially one large-scale impact study of out-of-school youth enrolled in the employment and training programs of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Many use the JTPA findings to conclude that large-scale public policy is not an effective mechanism to help older out-of-school youth, but few have provided a serious interpretation of the JTPA findings. (for an exception, see Robert I. Lerman's "Employment and Training Programs for Out-of-School Youth" in *Improving the Odds*, Burt Barnow and Chris King, eds., Urban Institute Press, Washington, D.C.)

But, another body of evidence points in the opposite direction. Recent evaluations of the Center for Employment Training (CET), and the Job Corps, for example, indicate that publicly funded interventions can change long-term outcomes in the labor market. A growing number of initiatives, e.g., YouthBuild, the Youth Service and Conservation Corps, and STRIVE, also point to ways of operating--and results--that distinguish them from evaluated programs that have shown poor outcomes. The leaders of these initiatives feel strongly that the programs that produced poor results, which are often used to support the conclusion that "nothing works" for out-of-school youth, were badly designed and often poorly implemented. Instead of speaking to the realities and needs of young people, these earlier programs simply did not speak well to the realities and needs of youth or the changing labor markets. The critical judgments about these earlier programs are supported by experts in adolescent development. Both the leaders of newer initiatives and youth development experts feel that the JTPA evaluation, in particular, is irrelevant to their work, especially since newer program designs have critical features that could not easily be funded under JTPA regulations. This smaller, growing body of evidence, projects, and theory, continues to hold out hope that large-scale policy initiatives can be effective.

## Future Challenges

At the national level, the "evidence gap" between well-known, pessimistic evaluations and recent, positive ones has prompted the federal government to reduce its financial commitment to less advantaged youth. But the "evidence gap" is narrowing. For those whose public policy positions are not based solely on ideology, new evidence and analyses resound well with common sense and historical perspective. American public policy has experimented with efforts to assist out-of-school youth only for the past three decades, and then only in fits and starts. The new data also play well into America's new political reality—the "devolution" of federal authority to states and localities for shaping social policy. Lower levels of government are claiming unprecedented authority to tackle these issues, as many decision makers try to show policies and strategies that can be effective.

These lower levels of government are also coming under increasing political pressure from organized groups to address youth employment issues. Groups seeking more equity of opportunity, higher workplace skills, reduced crime, and lower income disparities, all figure into the mix. The pressure these groups can generate over the next few years may cause a flurry of state and local initiatives to aid out-of-school, out-of-work youth. The recently funded Youth Opportunity Grants authorized under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 is a prime example. In addition, effective advocacy regarding the *national* scope of youth issues may generate a number of special initiatives, supported by federal, state, local, and foundation dollars. Some of these initiatives will probably have substantial evaluation components, and will thus offer additional evidence about the value of a new generation of initiatives.

At this point, new questions arise. Do past and current experience provide any direction for future initiatives? How can we help ensure that these future initiatives are based on sound principles?

## Principles for Effective Action

An emerging consensus about social interventions for youth rests on two basic conclusions:

- *There are no "magic bullets."* Most local youth program leaders and human

development experts never thought there were, but much national policy, with its short-term outlook, was based on the Pollyanna-ish premise that quick-fix solutions could be found. Few believe that anymore.

- *Many, if not most, youth from poor neighborhoods face multiple obstacles to labor market success, including such obvious ones as low educational attainment and literacy skills, lack of access to jobs, the need for human relationship skills, more personal initiative, and the need to cultivate basic work habits. Add to these, families and neighborhoods full of crises and depressive influences, and the need for a range of services becomes quite clear. In short, there is no easy substitute for the positive supports, experiences, and opportunities that the average middle-class youth receives.*

These conclusions emerge from a combination of program evaluations, operational experience, human development theories, and common sense. They are beginning to replace the optimistic, short-term assumptions that underlay the social policy of the past several decades, i.e., that a modicum of work, training, remedial education, or social services was enough to cause a permanent shift in the life-trajectory of a youth from a poor neighborhood. These new conclusions also help us understand why most of the initiatives that have been evaluated did not produce positive results. The problems are simply not amenable to short-range, single intervention solutions.

By contrast, a set of principles that lies at the core of truly effective programming can achieve labor market success for older, out-of-school youth. This chapter argues that social policy and programs need not address directly every obstacle that a young person faces. Indeed, that approach may be unwise, given the need of young people to develop the internal strength, resilience, and values required for life's challenges. But the core features embodied in the principles laid out here are necessary if we are to shape a social policy that can help a significant share of America's marginal youth enter the economic mainstream.

These principles are consistent with the conclusions set out above. They also allow policy makers, administrators, and practitioners to shape their work vis a vis youth and young adults around a few practical priorities. They do not guarantee that every young person will receive all the help, or even the right mix of help, he or she needs. They do, however, make it likely that a high percentage will receive the help they need most critically. And perhaps most important,

these principles require sustained political commitment.

**Principle 1:** *Each young person needs to feel that at least one adult has a strong stake and interest in his or her labor market success.*

This principle seems obvious. Being cared about and helped are the most consistent, positive factors mentioned by young people who say their lives have been helped by participating in a social initiative. Almost every adult who has worked in a social initiative agrees.

Surprisingly, real caring is not a consistent factor in such programs. Why? Much of the reason is that, for the past 15 years, the major source of funds for labor market services for young people has been the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which had neither promoted nor supported an approach to labor market success based on human relationships. The recent study of JTPA's impact that is most often used to underscore the judgment that "nothing works for older youth" only confirms that JTPA was not as effective as it could have been, because many programs were inadequately funded and did not encourage the basic human support that youth require.

Inattention to this aspect of successful programming is no mere matter of legislative shortcoming. It also occurs because most policy makers and administrators simply *assume* that caring adult attention is a given. Because it is so obviously the "right thing to do," policy makers do not view caring as affected by resource levels, outcome incentives, and expenditure regulations. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, for example, allows for "career mentors" for youth, yet most jurisdictions have not made them a priority, or even begun to plan for them. One suspects that this neglect is not because administrators think adult attention is unimportant, but more because they assume it will happen automatically.

But effective adult caring cannot be taken for granted. Public/Private Ventures' multi-year study of mentoring programs has made the success of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program widely known. What is less noticed is that *from one-third to one-half of the adults who volunteered to mentor for the programs lacked good instincts about how to support and encourage the development of the youth they were matched with.* They needed training. Without it, the mentoring failed.

In short, initiatives to help out-of-school, out-of-work young people must include the

proper resources, incentives, and guidance that will: (1) ensure a healthy adult-to-youth ratio; (2) ensure that the adult-to-youth interaction time is high; and (3) carry out the training and other forms of support necessary to make sure that the adults know what they're doing.

**Principle 2:** *Each young person must sense these three things:*

- *that the activity or program has strong and effective connections to employers;*
- *that placing the young person into a paid position with one of those employers as soon as possible is of the highest priority; and*
- *that the initial job placement is one step in a continuing and long-term relationship with the program or initiative to advance the young person's employment and income potential.*

This second principle-like the first-seems uncontroversial, if not obvious. But the fact is, it does not typify past or current policy and practice. Many initiatives have focused so heavily on *preparing* young people for employment that they have overlooked their need for income and their fragile confidence about passing through too many pre-employment hoops.

In addition, many initiatives do not develop a host of strong employer relationships. They underemphasize the fact that access and connections to employers are key ingredients for most young job seekers, every bit as important as skills and a desire to work. Access to jobs will never be free of the need for advocates or job brokers; that is a reality that youth initiatives must focus on, not ignore. We have learned that there is a strong, positive connection between the ability of training programs to make these connections to employers and the success of young people seeking employment.

Perhaps most serious of all, our major public employment and training initiatives have often made securing an initial job the ultimate goal, when the pattern for most young people is to try out a number of jobs before they finally settle down. National research evidence indicates that the average young male adult will hold between 7 and 8 jobs before he reaches the late 20's. Securing the first job is important, but more so as a beginning than as an end. For young people with few skills, resources and contacts, the *process* of finding their way needs continuing support.

Implementing all three components of this second principle has powerful advantages for program operators as well as youth. It reduces the pressure of trying to make a first job

placement the "right" one; instead, it can become an income-producing experiment. Programs can use low-skill, low-paying, secondary-labor-market jobs as paid work experience for young people who are unprepared for anything else, rather than denigrating those jobs as unworthy. In this way, *work becomes a way to learn about work*, not an end in itself. Educational programming can be integrated with work while developing a growing understanding about career preferences and work aptitudes.

Unfortunately, past funding regulations, performance indicators and conventional practices have made it difficult for programs to carry out all three components of this principle. The time it takes for an organization to develop solid relationships with employers requires a rare level of support and patience. But those few initiatives that have exhibited these characteristics offer promise that being in your late teens or early twenties is not too late to begin a successful work life.

**Principle 3:** *Each young person must feel at each step of the way the need and opportunity to improve his or her educational skills and certification.*

Most early youth employment initiatives did not sufficiently emphasize educational skills and certification, holding that America's diverse economy has many decent-paying opportunities for workers without those skills and certification; they had only to go out and find the job. The accuracy of that proposition has dimmed considerably over the past two decades, yet it has persisted even in the present tight labor market.

But this does not mean formal education must be a *prerequisite* for labor market assistance. Many programs show that it is possible to get people decent jobs and income without it. However, since the probabilities for doing so are diminishing, it does mean that:

- young people should be made starkly aware of those probabilities; and
- pressure and opportunities to improve educational skills and certification should be continuously present, both before initial job placement and throughout the intervention.

Strong and continuous support from a connected caring adult is called for. Experience indicates that previous classroom failure has such a powerful effect on individual motivation that making educational progress a formal condition for labor market assistance will lose many of the youth who need help most.

For continuous pressure for educational improvement to be effective, a great variety of learning options must be available. Supporting these alternatives is the greatest challenge inherent in any wide-scale implementation of this principle. The good news is that the number of models and approaches to alternative learning for older teens that were not successful in high school is increasing. They can be built on and expanded. In addition, the charter school movement, the alternative school movement, many public school systems, and federal school-to-work legislation are creating a more open attitude to using conventional, public funding streams for new approaches to learning.

**Principle 4:** *Each young person must feel that the program or initiative will provide support and assistance over a period of time-perhaps up to several years-that may include several jobs and several attempts at further education.*

For many adult youth, low achievement becomes a habit, experienced first in the world and eventually adopted as a state of mind. The desire to change that habit- the "awakening"- is what motivates a youth to seek assistance. One small success, achieved over a few short months of assistance, is usually not enough to convert an initial desire to change into a life-long habit of high achievement, especially in the labor market. As noted earlier, it is typical for young people to try a series of jobs, change their minds about what they want to do, and be plagued by periods of disappointment, frustration and self-doubt. They need help from parents or other adults in gaining access to new areas of employment. Forming a habit of achievement requires time and continuous support.

This principle does not mean that a program for older youth should not have standards, or should not deny assistance to young people who do not make adequate effort. A "warm bath" environment and cradle-to-grave support are not recommended. High expectations, independence, self-sufficiency, and confidence should be the goals of any initiative to assist older youth.

We must use common sense in setting public policy. The brief, time-limited programs for youth that pointed only toward an initial job placement not only achieved little success, but by being so brief and artificial may also have wasted their own initial investment in the youth.

These four principles are core components for any program or initiative that aims to assist older youth. They are unremarkable notions, in the sense that many experienced youth workers

have advocated them before, and some of them, especially #2 and #3, appear as elements of major national initiatives and legislation, such as the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. There are good examples of each principle currently in practice around the nation, but only a handful of efforts combine several or all of them. Those that do so have usually succeeded by working around conventional funding rules and widely accepted practices.

Three other principles of effective programming are not necessary for all older youth who desire labor market assistance. But they are important for a significant number of them.

**Principle 5:** *Effective connections are needed between the program and external providers of basic supports such as housing, counseling, legal services, medical assistance, food, and clothing.*

Programs find out about these youths' needs in various ways, from formal needs assessments and professional counseling to the information that mentors obtain in informal discussion. Youths obtain these services through diverse means as well, from professional staff responsible for referrals, or from mentors who "scrounge" for what their charges need. There is no clear evidence that any one approach to finding support is generally more effective than any other. What is clear is that a significant number of youth have critical, basic needs that impede their labor market and educational success; their number may grow if basic public services decline, as many predict.

**Principle 6:** *The program requires an "atmosphere, " buttressed by specific activities, that emphasizes civic involvement and service--in short, an extension of practical caring beyond self, family, and friends.*

The primary goal of employment programs is to increase individual economic self-sufficiency. Skills, work habits and attitudes, access to employers, and career mobility opportunities through on-the-job training are obvious components to meeting that goal. For some youth, falling away from the path toward economic self-sufficiency is linked to a deeper disconnect from mainstream institutions and values. Building the necessary leadership and citizenship skills in these young people becomes a critical challenge. Many operators of programs with a community service element report that the feelings that result from working to



meet other community needs help develop a strong, positive attitude about achieving labor market success. Most young people concur.

**Principle 7:** *Motivational techniques are needed, such as financial and other incentives for good performance, peer group activities, and leadership opportunities.*

The activities that will benefit the largest number of youth are represented by the first four principles. The first principle, adult involvement, has the strongest backing in research and practice. However, various other techniques can inspire and motivate young people to sustained commitment and improved performance. A significant number of practitioners say these are critical for young people who grow up with very few (if any) school or labor market successes to build on. Performance incentives, team-building, and other peer group activities, as well as leadership opportunities, are the major techniques mentioned. Though little evidence from program evaluations is now available about the impact of these techniques, they are used with known effectiveness in many settings. They offer an important complement to the inner-directed and personal-relationship-oriented motivation that is the basis for the other principles.

It should be noted that these principles were first described in the June 1997 edition of *Generation of Challenge* and since then have come to be known as the “Levitan Principles”. It has been particularly gratifying to find them codified conceptually in the Youth Title of the Workforce Investment Act.

Taken together, these seven principles present tough implementation challenges; none is self-executing. As noted earlier, however, neither is their execution without precedent or example. Supporting and maintaining the effective application of these principles on a significant scale requires practices such as:

- developing realistic accountability measures;
- tracking performance to reward or penalize the outcomes of actual practices; and
- supporting staff development to ensure a threshold level of quality.

The set of policies, institutions, and funding streams necessary to support and require

these practices are rarely found in states and local communities today. Efforts to assist out-of-school, out-of-work youth are typically small, entrepreneurial programs whose top staff spend most of their time fund-raising, while front-line staff deal with crises and attempt to bring order and coherence to program offerings. It is no wonder that so few are able to carry out the above principles consistently and in concert.

Part of the reason we have failed to construct this supporting framework is our unwillingness to face the fact that no formal high school system is ever going to work for all youth. It is important to remember, that although a higher percent of youth are now graduating from high school or obtaining a GED credential than ever in our history, we certainly can do better regarding school performance, especially in our poorest urban and rural areas. But there will always be a significant group of youth who, for whatever reason, do not achieve at least initial school success. In the past, most of these youth could ultimately find their way to self-sufficiency in the labor market on their own. In most communities, jobs with low skill and education requirements, but with decent wages, were physically nearby. But labor market conditions have changed, and too many youth--high school graduates as well as dropouts--cannot find their way to labor market success without assistance. The cost to society of their failed searches--measured in lost productivity, lost earnings, crime, social welfare and criminal justice expenditures, or in lost confidence in our society's values, policies, and institutions--is staggering.

The experiment this country now needs is to build a system that encourages and supports the use of the principles presented here. The major components of such a system are outlined in the final chapter of this book. The spirit of devolution may spawn the right atmosphere for the creation of such a system particularly in major urban areas. That experiment--far better than any "pilot program"--would tell us if there are more effective uses for the large sums of money our society now spends on these youth in other ways, from welfare to prisons to health care. It might also point the way toward an enlarged vision of schooling and work preparation, one that did not break teens so early in their life into two large clumps--school successes and failures--but instead supported a variety of ways for all our youth to achieve requisite competencies and gain access to the careers they need and want in order to become self-sufficient.

## SECTION IV

### **Voices From The Field**

## CHAPTER SIX

# THE POWER OF YOUTH POPULAR CULTURE

By Ed de Jesus

### Recruiting and Retaining Urban Youth

Through our work with over hundreds of at-risk youth employment and training service providers, a common theme has presented itself. Youth workers usually seem confident about helping young people; yet, they are often disappointed by the difficult time many have in recruiting, engaging and retaining youth in the program long enough to make a real difference in their lives. Currently, though the economy is flourishing, more than 50% of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders who start high school in many inner cities never graduate. About 50% of all out-of-school youth are either jobless or making less than \$320 a week. At the same time, existing youth programs across the country designed to reach these struggling young adults only have the capacity to serve less than 3% of the youth in need.

Clearly, then, there is a disconnect between the expectations of youth workforce development service providers, the vast need for services, inadequate funds available for services and the inability of many of these programs to recruit and retain urban youth. What accounts for this discrepancy? Youth cite many reasons for their lack of participation in employment programs, including the following: not knowing the program exists, location, a lack of immediate and tangible rewards, an adult rather than youth atmosphere and focus, and a lack of conviction that the program actually results in concrete, long-term benefits. Perhaps more fundamentally, at the root of all of these causes is a more basic disconnect between young people's needs, interests, and desires and most organizations' current efforts to connect to this population. Indeed, it's obvious that at-risk youth in poor, urban communities must overcome a host of obstacles to achieve success, and many service providers have spent the time, conducted the research, developed the programmatic elements, and devoted the resources necessary to help youth to overcome these barriers. Yet, what is less acknowledged and less addressed by workforce

development service providers, is that these barriers are not only external and not only psychological, but cultural as well.

### **Understanding Urban Youth**

One of the largest miscalculations some youth employment programs make is to attempt to provide services to the at-risk population without first developing an intimate understanding of what truly motivates and interests this special group. Corporate America, then, can sell youth the need for sneakers more easily than a youth employment program can “sell” the promise of a viable economic future. In order to accrue a competitive edge, corporations hold focus groups, phone drives, solicit information through free products, and conduct elaborate advertising campaigns all designed to establish and capture a target audience. For, as all true salesmen know, closing the deal depends as much on connecting and relating to potential buyers as it does on the product.

Similarly, workforce development programs need to conceive of themselves as companies with a “product” to “sell” to at-risk youth- a product clearly more valuable than the newest sneakers or flashy clothing. And yet, sadly, the behavior of the youth service industry often doesn’t validate this concept. Nike and Reebok have found a way to make urban youth care so much about their footwear that they are willing to pay \$100 for a pair of sneakers. Many job-training programs that offer youth a skill set and a chance for a stable future are struggling to get young people to participate. Youth sometimes will sell drugs on the street and risk their lives just so they can spend their earnings on shiny jewelry and adorn themselves with the latest fashion craze. Yet skill development programs that offer youth the chance to earn their GED and connect to higher educational opportunities can’t keep youth in class. Thus, it seems clear that too many youth development professionals lack a key insight that Corporate America has been able to exploit, one that somehow makes material goods seem more appealing than the chance for a brighter tomorrow.

Many urban young adults appear primarily focused on short-term survival and rewards rather than long-term success. In truth, although they desperately crave a successful career and stable family life like the rest of Americans, they have very few genuine opportunities to achieve such a future. Through a surfeit of bad advice and poor role modeling, a street culture- which includes the need for “respect,” “handling your business,” fast money, and being “hard”- has

been developed and maintained that appears attractive to youth, but in reality, has a devastating impact on their future. Indeed, as William Julius Wilson, author of **When Work Disappears** states: "...the decision to act in ghetto-related ways can be said to be cultural. The more often certain behavior such as the pursuit of illegal income is manifested in a community, the greater will be the readiness on the part of some residents of the community to find that behavior not only convenient but also morally appropriate."

For instance, many young adults, through glorifying the negative aspects of Hip Hop culture are indirectly participating in some form of dubious "unemployment training." For these unfortunate young people who buy into the beliefs, values and codes of the streets - completing a job application, displaying positive social behaviors and participating in school is perceived to offer such an uncertain return on their investment that they decide why bother? In the absence of positive supports and a wide range of opportunities to work, learn and grow, many young adults believe that they cannot possibly derive the benefits to compensate for their output. Consequently, they invest effort and energies in activities and attitudes that in the long run, do nothing but limit life and economic opportunity. Unfortunately, many of these activities tend to be of an illegal nature or do very little to add to the young person's future earning potential. They, all too often, lead to death, incarceration, unemployment or chronic underemployment.

An example of this contradiction is best exemplified in what we like to call "Thug Values" vs. "Work Values." An example of a "thug" value is the mean grimace. An example of a work value is a "smile." In fact, in many inner city communities, a smile is a sign of weakness - a sign that you are not hard enough to survive on the streets. Consequently, you don't smile often because you feel that you may pick on or become a victim of violence and crime. The reality of the situation is that most people connect with jobs because of their personal contacts and affiliations. In order to find out about the majority of job openings, strong affiliations with employed people are necessary. It is difficult to develop these systems of connections when your own modus operandi suggests intimidation and non-cooperation.

In the face of negative employer perceptions about hiring inner-city urban youth, lack of services and supports to help all youth reach high academic standards, cuts in the public investment in services for this population, and a decrease in the number of good paying low-skilled jobs, the labor market problems of our youth population will only worsen. Countless more young people will fall into the ranks of the incarcerated, underemployed and unemployed and victims to a life of insidious seduction and street survival.

At the same time, by failing to get past the “R” rating of certain aspects of Hip-Hop and the easily identifiable violent nature of some elements of urban youth culture, it’s easy to overlook the strengths of the movement.

Corporate America has managed to associate material goods like sneakers with symbolic meanings such as opportunity, freedom, popularity and success in a way that resonates with urban youth’s desire to grow and develop.

Unfortunately, many youth programs have failed to capitalize on these insights. The youth employment industry has positioned itself as “sellers” of job opportunities. Yet, in the new economy, youth don’t need a job program to get jobs and job training in and of itself is not a compelling enough reason for youth to discard their street survival ways and peers to flock to service organizations. Instead, programs must focus on providing this motivation by “selling” their future economic opportunity to the young people. A job is a paycheck. Future economic opportunity is a career path that can help youth to both reap important economic rewards as well as fulfill their dreams. A job is often temporary. Future economic opportunity is life long. A job may provide a temporary quick fix to deep-seated problems. Future economic opportunity can equip and prepare youth to meet all of their life challenges.

Many youth that face multiple barriers to success still have mainstream values such as having a family, a steady job, and a healthy, safe, and productive existence, but they don’t believe in the viability of such a future. As a result, youth participate in survival behaviors, even self-destructive acts that directly contradict youth’s stated goals or ideals. In most cases, they have not yet developed the necessary faith in their future to “awaken” to the reality of what they need to do to put themselves on pathways to success. Indeed, research has demonstrated that many at-risk youth change the direction of their lives only after a tragedy--- a shooting or getting kicked out of their parent’s home-- forces them to confront their lives and where their behavior could lead.

Further evidence that supports the need for this “awakening” comes from youth programs that report an easier time recruiting youth 18 and older than younger adolescents because only after youth reach a certain level of maturity do they begin to truly consider and evaluate their prospects for the future. Consequently, youth employment and training programs need to shift their recruitment and retention strategies and program offerings. They need to focus on long term economic opportunities that not only provide youth with more than just a steady

paycheck, but to help youth to have an “awakening” without first suffering injury to themselves or someone they love. Yet, because youth’s current cultural framework has informed them that there are no clear advantages to concentrating their energies on their future, service providers need to find an effective mechanism for connecting youth with this “awakening” experience. In this way, then, it becomes clear that in order to solve the recruitment and retention dilemma and empower youth to become economically self-sufficient, service providers need to understand and address youth’s needs through a cultural framework that is more relevant and engaging to inner city youth than traditional service approaches.

### **The Dominant Influence of Hip-Hop Culture**

In 1998, Hip-Hop outsold all other forms of music- 81 million records, tapes and CD’s- and 85% of all youth report that they buy more than 1 CD a month with the average being about 3 CD’s per month. Perhaps surprisingly, white consumers purchase 55% of this music and 50% is purchased by those under 18. As a result, Hip-Hop music alone is a widespread and powerful medium for transmitting messages to young people and for influencing the manner in which youth think and behave. Yet, Hip-Hop has become more than a music genre; it’s a cultural movement that includes art, fashion, language, beliefs, and moral values- and it defines today’s inner city youth. In fact, research conducted of over 10,000 young people by the MEE Corporation found that in the 1990’s the primary influences on young people were *peers, rap music and television*, in that order, and only then home and school. As a result, an inability to grasp hip-hop culture and appreciate the young people who help to shape it results in a failure to understand how to connect to inner city youth and relate to them in an effective manner.



Table 1  
Hip-Hop Culture

PRIMARY INFLUENCES	Rap Artists (DMX, Jay-Z, Tupac, Notorious BIG, LL Cool J, Master P), The Source Magazine, FUBU, ENYCE, Russell Simmons and DEF Jam Records.
PURSUIITS	Rapping, free styling, dancing, drinking, marijuana, hustling, church, basketball, hanging out, entrepreneurship, temporary jobs, creative expression.
VALUES and BELIEFS	Material wealth, fast money, “keeping it real,” “handle your business,” being hard and aggressive, courage, creativity, flashy success, anti-mainstream and antiauthority, hard work, respect, loyalty.
MODES OF EXPRESSION	Hip-Hop music, R and B, gospel, free styling, writing lyrics, mixing beats, spirituality, designer clothes, baggy clothes, bald heads, creative hairstyles, graffiti art, multimedia, violence, ethnic expression.
RELATIONSHIPS	Non-committed sex, multiple partners, young mothers, children out of wedlock, friendships based on fear, gang affiliations, strong peer influences, loyalty (“got your back”), one parent families, grandparents important, devotion to “shorties.”

For most people, urban youth culture is associated with bad attitudes, aggressive behavior, and anti-mainstream values, and, in truth, the culture, in many ways, glorifies the short-term survival behavior associated with the urban survival syndrome. Many people implicitly believe that a culture that comes from urban youth who struggle to succeed and often act in extreme ways cannot possibly have any value or utility. Yet, we only have to look back into the not so distant past to disprove this stereotypical assumption. The hippies of the 1960’s, a group that possessed a culture all their own, and that was once considered radical and anti-establishment, have grown up to become corporate executives and computer programmers. Why then do we act as if the urban youth popular culture and peer culture of today is beyond redemption? As rapper KRS-One relates:

*“The rich get richer because they want to enrich.  
The poor get poorer cause their mind can’t switch  
from the ghetto,  
let go.  
It’s not a novelty.  
You can love your neighborhood  
without loving poverty.”*



## Cultural Sensitivity

We would have reservations about a youth program with largely minority participants that is devoid of minority staff and that makes little effort to teach youth about prominent black leaders and significant events in the history of African-Americans. We would find such a program more than politically incorrect, but ill-informed about the research-proven need to connect youth with positive role models of their own heritage and about the effects that such experiences can have on youth's confidence and motivation.

Unfortunately, most employment and training service providers actually fail to be truly culturally competent when working with youth. While the importance of connecting young people to their heritage and to positive minority role models should not be minimized, the reality is that urban youth, as already documented, are influenced primarily by another kind of culture: Hip-Hop, or youth popular culture. And yet, how many workforce development programs make an active, conscious effort to connect young people with their own popular culture in a positive fashion? How many youth professionals are aware of the street codes that govern the daily lives of the youth with whom they work and how these codes can keep youth from believing in their future economic opportunity and can sabotage any attempts at short-term success? Indeed, if we understand the need to be culturally sensitive and if we would find fault with any youth organization that doesn't strive to educate youth within an appropriate cultural framework, how can we not criticize ourselves for failing to acknowledge, understand, address, and harness youth popular culture? How are we any better than the all white staff who attempt to teach minority youth history without discussing Martin Luther King and Caesar Chavez, sociology without discussing the politics of race, and the arts without discussing the smooth sound of Miles Davis?

## Youth Cultural Competence

Youth programs and educators alike must strive to develop *youth cultural competence* to connect at-risk, urban youth to a new belief structure that will help them to take responsibility for their growth and development and foster their future economic opportunity. We define youth cultural competence as: *a set of programmatic principles and practices that promote an increased understanding and appreciation of youth popular cultural and the power of peer influence and utilizes this information to promote work and educational achievement among*

*urban youth.* Before explaining further how this concept can be concretely applied to service work with youth, it's important to demonstrate that youth cultural competence is more than just a novel idea. While the resources have not yet been made available to research the programmatic effects of youth cultural competence in a systematic fashion, there is social proof that the power of urban youth culture can be harnessed for a positive purpose.

As earlier discussed, Corporate America has had far more success than the field of youth development in connecting to urban young adults and "selling" a product. Perhaps one encompassing reason for this success is that many corporations such as Nike, Burger- King, Mastercard, Toyota, and Tommy Hilfiger have all instituted urban youth culture campaigns to increase their sales and product marketability. One such documented case comes from the soft drink Sprite, which as of a couple of years ago was the 14<sup>th</sup> best selling soft drink in the country. Sprite then implemented an urban youth culture campaign utilizing a popular Hip-Hop music group as well as a famous basketball player. The product remains the same, but Sprite is now the 4th best selling soft drink in America.

Forward thinking youth organizations and youth movements have also begun to utilize youth popular culture and peer culture for a positive purpose. Some examples of past efforts include:

- **National Urban League Stop the Violence Movement:** In 1990, NUL collaborated with the Hip-Hop community in an unprecedented effort to combat Black on Black crime. A group of socially responsible artists got together to rap about the senseless cycle of violence. A video and sound track was produced entitled "Self-Destruction." The video grossed in excess of \$500,000 to support NUL's anti-violence efforts.
- **"Squash It!" Harvard School of Public Health Center for Health Communication:** "Squash It!" is a hand-sign used by inner-city youth to signal decisions to disengage from confrontations. In 1994, the "Squash It!" Campaign launched a national media initiative targeting urban youth, involving the Hollywood community, the music industry, and professional and collegiate sports leagues in an effort to embed the "Squash It!" message in popular culture. The campaign also conducted outreach efforts in order to build support for programs and policies that offer positive alternatives to violence. Seventy-five percent of surveyed African-American youth said they had heard of the campaign and 60% reported having used the hand gesture to disengage from a potentially violent confrontation.

## 10 Elements of Youth Cultural Competence

Youth employment and training programs can incorporate into training curricula a variety of diverse, youth culturally competent expressions such as Hip-Hop music and lyrics, urban youth videos, urban art, entrepreneurship activities, role playing, rap and spoken word competitions, Hip-Hop events and parties, and survival lessons that directly address the urban survival syndrome. Yet, the key here is that youth cultural competence isn't founded on a series of strategies or fixed mediums, but on a firm belief that the best way to connect to youth is through their culture and their peers. Once youth programs commit themselves to this idea, they will find their own creative, specifically tailored methods for utilizing youth popular culture to increase their success with youth. Indeed, it is important to note that while Hip-Hop culture is the dominant youth culture, it may not be the primary influence on any given set of youth. As a result, youth cultural competence demands that youth professionals find and learn to appreciate the popular influences on youth in *their* community, and then harness these influences for a positive purpose. To this end, we have devised 10 elements of youth cultural competence that youth programs can utilize to design and evaluate program offerings, staff members and even the site itself.

- **Authenticity:** Take advantage of the honest voices, images and experiences of youth. Strive to learn youth's music, language, dress, style, values, and beliefs and work within this framework to promote positive behaviors. Set clear expectations for young people. Don't promise more than you can deliver.
- **Client-Centered:** Seek the participation and leadership of youth in all program endeavors. Hold focus groups and form a youth advisory groups. Utilize alumni. Your initiative also needs to be completely responsive to youth's needs. What hours would youth most want your program to be open? What atmosphere would make youth feel most comfortable?
- **Use Appealing Materials:** Materials should be youth-driven in both content and appearance. All instruction should be funneled through innovative media that utilize youth popular culture. Familiarize yourself with the most up-to-date influences and styles and incorporate them into the program.

- **Create Immediate Benefits:** Design your program and train your staff to highlight the tangible and immediate benefits to participants. Provide immediate incentives such as monetary rewards for good performance, bonuses for skill achievement, camaraderie, food and free gifts.
- **Future Economic Opportunity:** While providing immediate rewards, organizations must focus their efforts on long-term economic opportunity rather than temporary job placement, and must encourage youth to develop a similar career-oriented belief system. At the same time, organizations need to assist youth in developing their goals over the long-term by providing post-program services and supports.
- **Affiliation:** Young people join gangs because they need to feel connected to their peers and part of something larger than themselves. Give youth a sense of membership for participating in the program through devices such as shirts and hats, ID cards that provide for discounts at local stores, and a sense of pride, teamwork, and a shared vision and ideology.
- **Show Youth the Mirror...and the Crystal Ball:** Provide facts and show specific human examples resulting from both positive and negative decisions. Show youth where they are and challenge them to “keep it real” about where they are heading if they continue in the same old patterns. Directly address youth’s street survival codes and give them a new positive vision to replace the story that the statistics are writing for them.
- **Start the Snowball:** Success breeds success. Empower the youth in your program by constantly forcing them to make decisions, participate in hands-on projects, community service, creative expression and anything else in which youth show interest and can achieve some level of success.
- **Train Culturally Competent Staff:** Help staff and board members to stay well-informed on issues dealing with young people’s popular culture and the day to day challenges that they face. Hire staff who demonstrate an ability to “keep it real,” by connecting and relating to youth on their level. Train staff in the codes of the street and encourage them to tap into existing youth culture networks and media.
- **Collaborate:** Invite Hip-Hop artists, sports or entertainment figures to promote your initiative. Link with other institutions that offer similar programming. Work together to put on events and open houses that use Hip-Hop for a positive purpose.

## Exemplary Practices and Programs

Despite the lack of financial support for the youth cultural competence movement, the following programs represent just a few of the organizations across the country that are successfully harnessing the power of urban youth culture.

The Hip-Hop Center at the University of Pennsylvania was founded by Dr. Carl Perkins to act as a repository and educational resource for the many creative mechanisms and the social and political culture associated with the Hip-Hop movement. The Center runs the TOOUCHH program- Teaching Ourselves the Unique Culture of Hip-Hop Linguistics Lab- that works with at-risk youth to teach formal academic skills, language arts, and leadership behaviors. Youth are taught to read using Hip-Hop as a lens to understand more structured text, are instructed in multimedia and public expression, write stories for a Hip-Hop magazine, and are trained as tutors to help children to learn how to read by drawing upon their native language and culture. While comparative outcome measures have not been devised, results for both children and adolescents have demonstrated a clear improvement in both reading levels and tests score.

The Spot in Denver, Colorado is a youth center designed to provide a safe, supportive, and fun environment for youth to interact and to pursue a diverse array of forms of creative expression while being exposed to educational and vocational skill development. The Spot works with 14 - 24 year old urban youth during the evening hours and offers youth the following activities: Computer Desktop Publishing and Web Design, Music Creation and Recording through 3 music studios, Radio Programming, *Inner 303*- a youth created magazine of art and poetry, Visual Arts, Break dancing, Photography, and a construction shop. At the same time, once youth are engaged, the Spot can more readily “sell” youth their GED preparation class, career exploration seminars, and soft skills development programs. As a result of their efforts, the Spot reaches between 500 – 1000 youth a year, and a recent report by the University of Colorado that analyzed the Spot’s participant surveys, found that those youth who attend the Spot for more than one month have been arrested less, used less drugs, and engaged in less criminal or violent behavior.

## **A Vision for the Future**

Most of us strive to excel, even at tasks we find unpleasant, because we understand that to realize our vision for the future, we need to take all of the necessary steps and fight the little battles along the way. Consequently, we are willing to forgo immediate benefits and pleasures for the larger, more permanent rewards that we know we will reap in the future. Yet, what if we believed we had no future and were surrounded by inescapable examples of misplaced dreams and broken promises? Indeed, our primary challenge to serving youth well in the next millennium is not that youth are poor or violent, depressed or performing at low academic levels, but the simple fact that some inner city young adults cannot conceptualize a brighter tomorrow because they have no faith that, for them, tomorrow will come. As one drug dealer in Chicago stated, “ I ain’t gonna be alive in ten years because I’ll be selling my drugs and they’re gonna pop my ass. No one’s gonna be alive in 20 years.” As a result of that mind-set some youth live on the streets, for the streets, and frequently die on the streets because they are not willing to put in the hard work necessary to fight those little battles and provide themselves with viable life opportunities.

We need to offer youth options beyond the streets and beyond a fragile, temporary existence because sneakers get worn down and jewelry loses its luster, but life, freedom and future economic opportunity never go out of style. For many youth professionals, urban youth culture is frightening; yet, if this culture is the primary influence on young people’s thoughts and behaviors, we cannot afford to ignore it. An assets-based youth development approach doesn’t just imply that we use youth’s strengths to compensate for their weaknesses, but insists that we utilize whatever effective mechanisms necessary to transform youth’s negativity into a force for positive social change and development. If youth are “hard,” let us help them use this tenacity to stay in school and deal with a tough boss. If youth feel that urban videos and Hip-Hop music, “keep it real,” let us use the positive elements of this culture to show youth that they can still “keep it real” while also “making it right.” And if young people feel they need to, “do what they go to do,” let’s not shy away from challenging youth to examine the state of their existence and understand that barely staying afloat at a minimum wage job with no plans for the future doesn’t fit the definition of “handling your business.”

Quite simply, to cope with the multifaceted challenges confronted by today’s youth and to give them a vision that can overcome all their obstacles to success, we need to harness the

popular culture and creative energy that is so much a part of their lives. Youth development cannot and must not leave the “youth” behind.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# THE DECLARATION OF INTER-DEPENDENCE

**By The Young Leaders Council & National Alumni Council  
of the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network**

### **Introduction**

We believe it is our responsibility, as young leaders to think through the important issues facing our communities and our nation, and make proposals for changes that will improve the conditions in both.

When we refer to our communities, we mean all low income neighborhoods in which a significant percentage of children are being raised poor. We include and care about all races and ethnic groups.

The purpose of this presentation is to share our view of what types of policy changes would diminish the need for YouthBuild and enable young people coming behind us to take a direct route to success instead of the round-about route that we have taken.

We are convinced that there is an equal balance between the responsibility and initiative that is needed from leaders and policy-makers who control the resources, and the responsibility and initiative that must be shown by the residents of low income communities who want access to greater resources and influence. We hope that we have managed to reflect that balance in this paper.

We believe that our communities and the larger society are inter-dependent. We cannot uplift our communities alone; nor can the society be healthy if our communities are left behind.

### **Basic Assumptions**

- All people are created equal and have a natural desire to fulfill their potential and take responsibility for the well-being of themselves and the people they love.

- People are most likely to fulfill their potential and become contributing members of society if they have food and shelter, a loving family, positive peer group, opportunities for learning, an organized community, protection from violence, and something to believe in.

- Poverty, neglect, abuse, and deprivation of all kinds can prevent people from reaching their potential and enjoying life.

- Most people who have fallen off the track, suffered losses, and made mistakes can recover. If given a chance, they can learn to cope with obstacles and care effectively about themselves, their families, and communities. They can gain the skills and attitudes to become strong, successful leaders who will help others.

- We need more effective and caring leaders in our communities all over the world.

- We live in an interdependent world; all communities now affect each other.

## **Observations**

We have each seen hundreds of YouthBuild students transform their lives. They become a positive force in place of a negative one. The key elements in that transformation are that people in YouthBuild truly care about each other. The staff open doors for us and support us in our learning. We can trust each other. We gain a positive peer group as well as adult mentors.

The opportunity to be part of a school and community in which people care about each other and teach positive values, leadership and life skills, academic and job skills, and respect young people's input should come much earlier in life; it shouldn't wait for a second chance program like YouthBuild.

YouthBuild has supported us in our determination to turn our lives around, and has provided the context for us to heal from many bad experiences. We are grateful for that. However, we would like to prevent the problem, so that fewer young people will need YouthBuild in the future.

In the meantime, it is important that YouthBuild programs are fully funded from year to year, and that young people who need this opportunity can get it. If YouthBuild programs are

not funded, they are likely to fail, and then the policy-makers will say, "Nothing works. Programs like these are a waste," and will give up on us, again.

### **Diminishing the Need for YouthBuild Programs**

To diminish the need for YouthBuild programs, improvements need to be made in several arenas: the public school system; family supports; economic development in low-income communities; the justice system; and the role of young people in our society. We have briefly addressed each one below.

#### **Public School System**

Most incoming YouthBuild students have not completed high school. They left school for a variety of reasons. In some cases the schools failed the students; in others the students failed themselves. Sometimes it was a mixture of both the schools and the students failing. But in any case, it is necessary to change the public school system so that more youth have a successful education.

If the public schools operated the way a successful YouthBuild program does, then more students would have the experience of crossing the stage to receive their diplomas. A good YouthBuild program works because the following is true:

1. The teachers and staff really care about us; they go above and beyond the minimum. Teachers make sure we learn what we're supposed to learn.
2. YouthBuild students don't slip through the cracks, because classes are small. The teachers know us. The whole school is small enough for us to be at ease with each other.
3. The curriculum is not just academic work. It includes hands-on projects, community service, sharing with each other, learning about our heritage, and studying society. They teach us leadership skills and attitudes.
4. We feel safe to ask questions in front of each other, and to help each other; we become a community committed to each other's success.
5. The academic curriculum is connected to a vocational curriculum, so for those of us who are eager to prepare for a good-paying job and are not planning to go to college, the path is there.
6. If we want to go to college, we are encouraged to do so, and to succeed.

7. We participate in making the policies governing the program, so the policies match our needs.
8. The staff teach us self-transformation, life skills, conflict resolution, how to deal with real world problems.

We tried to select one key issue that would make the difference, but decided the above elements are interconnected. They all need attention.

To achieve the above in the public schools in our communities, we believe the inequalities in funding of the public schools in low income communities compared to suburban and wealthy communities would have to be corrected. If education is the key to escaping the culture of poverty, as we believe it is, then our nation needs to invest in the education of low-income children. But money alone will not do it without a caring community in the schools, good teachers, and interesting curriculum.

### **Family Supports**

Young people are unable to focus on our education or our future when our families are struggling or even failing to provide the basics due to a lack of resources in the community or a lack of knowledge among our parents about how to access the resources that do exist.

1. Parents need information about how to access decent jobs, food and shelter, and health care for themselves and their children.
2. Parents need good child care programs that are affordable.
3. Parents need support groups and training for parenting. Knowing how to be a good parent is not automatic. Developing an awareness that our children learn from what we do more than what we say is important.
4. Foster parents should be well screened and trained.
5. Teenagers should be encouraged to delay having children until they are mature enough to provide a stable family.
6. Prevention of drug and alcohol abuse among parents is necessary for good parenting. If drug and alcohol abuse could be prevented the conditions in our communities and families would be drastically improved. Rehabilitation can sometimes help and should be available, but prevention is primary.
7. More collective responsibility from the whole community is needed.

## **Community Economic Development**

Living in a low income community usually means that not only do our families lack the information and resources they need, but the community itself lacks resources that could support our families. Our society should develop strategies for community economic development that would insure the following:

1. Jobs and careers for all. We believe the only sure way to prevent violence and crime is through education and employment. Police and gun control play a role; but jobs and education are ultimately the most critical factors.
2. Transportation to jobs must be available.
3. Enough decent affordable housing must be built.
4. People should have the chance to start businesses to become self-sufficient.
5. Access to low interest loans for home ownership and small businesses is important.
6. In cities, stores should be nearby for people to buy food, clothing, furniture, and books; in addition, parks, child care centers, hospitals, banks, libraries, and places of worship should be reasonably close by. In rural areas, better transportation systems are needed.
7. Police and teachers should have cultural diversity training.
8. People coming out of prison need work and education.
9. Prejudice and discrimination based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation still need to be eliminated.
10. There should be opportunities for young people to participate and take leadership in their communities.

As members of any community, regardless of age, race, class, and gender, it is everyone's responsibility to rebuild our dilapidated communities and improve the quality of life within them. Mobilizing residents to get involved, to fix things themselves is part of any good revitalization strategy. As they say where we come from, "The quickest way to get on your feet is to get off your \_\_\_\_\_."

## **The Justice System**

Crime and violence fill our communities with fear. We have said in other sections of this presentation that education and employment, good parenting and child care, collective

community responsibility, and the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse are the keys to crime prevention.

We also believe that people who have committed crimes should have a second chance for education, training, and employment. Having large numbers of ex-convicts return to their communities with no access to education and employment is a recipe for more crime.

Convicted felons who have demonstrated a commitment to a positive life style should get back the right to vote. Information about how to do this should be widely available.

The huge investment in prisons that our nation has made is frightening to us, especially coupled with the failure of our public schools and the absence of a plan to invest fully in education and training.

We are aware that young people of color receive relatively heavy penalties for certain crimes. We believe that inconsistencies that are associated with racial or class background in the severity of punishment for comparable crimes should be corrected.

We are also aware that during our lifetimes the gap between rich and poor has widened, despite our national prosperity, and the concentration of wealth among the richest people has increased. These are the wrong directions for a nation committed to justice and opportunity for all.

Our experience with the justice system is extensive. It would require a separate paper and much additional discussion among us to address it. Our emphasis here is on education, family, employment, community economic development, youth involvement, and personal and collective responsibility as the central building blocks of an approach to change our communities. This approach would probably also shrink the resources absorbed by courts, prisons, probation systems, private security, and police.

### **Respect for Young People**

Everyone relating to young people should show respect for our intelligence and our ability to contribute. Young people want to feel ownership, and that our ideas and input can make a difference. We want to participate in making important decisions that affect all aspects of our lives.

Young people also want opportunities to give back. One of the reasons students like YouthBuild is because we make a difference by building permanent housing for homeless people. We also enjoy tutoring and mentoring younger children, and helping other people of all

ages: for example, by sponsoring activities for the elderly, providing food for people who need it, helping victims of cancer, AIDS, or other illnesses.

YouthBuild teaches us that leadership is taking responsibility for making things go right in our lives, our families, and our communities. Being invited to take a leadership role is a high level of respect that gives us a high level of responsibility. It allows us to feel pride in giving back to our communities.

### **Making Sure that the Gains of YouthBuild are Not Lost**

As current trainees and graduates, we know that after graduation from YouthBuild we have to work even harder to succeed. We graduate with positive attitudes and a vision. We have the beginning of a positive track record. We even have a new sense of security based on our connection with YouthBuild. But in reality we have little or no economic cushion of security—no savings beyond our AmeriCorps college grants and almost no financial support from our families.

Many of us face peer pressure and temptations to return to previous patterns of behavior. This is why we are systematically organizing YouthBuild alumni clubs—to maintain a positive peer group, access to opportunities, and a commitment to our communities.

To help us keep our focus and move to higher levels of achievement and responsibility, certain additional opportunities will make a big difference in supporting YouthBuild graduates and others like us:

1. We need access to higher education and post-secondary vocational education. The AmeriCorps grants we earn through YouthBuild are valuable. Scholarship assistance of all kinds, and information about how to tap into it, is one of the most important things to us.
2. Careers: entry-level jobs are necessary starting points, but we are interested in careers. We seek employers who will continue to train, educate, and promote us, and generally recognize our abilities. We need jobs with health insurance and a future. While some of us will enter the construction trades, some of us want to become counselors, teachers, and directors of community programs, and others have entirely different goals.
3. Really good child care programs are necessary for us to work and raise a family.
4. Affirmative action should not be eliminated.

5. We aim to own our own homes. Low interest loans and grants for affordable housing is essential. Habitat for Humanity has already helped some of us obtain our own homes.
6. Access to information and money to help us start our own businesses is vital.
7. Access to the internet and information about how to use it is necessary. Libraries and community centers that have this are helpful.

### **Our Action Plan**

People listening to this presentation may say, "This is all well and good. The question is how is it going to be achieved? What's your plan?"

It will take people working at many different levels and in many different positions. We hope you will use your influence to move a broad agenda for diminishing poverty and despair. We will do our part at our level.

Community development begins with personal development. We are committed to continuing to improve ourselves.

We are also organizing YouthBuild alumni to stay involved: as block captains, mentors, coaches of sports teams for younger children, members of the local PTA's, liaisons with the police, candidates for local office, volunteers in hospices for parents handling serious illnesses of their children, foster parents, etc.

Further, as our alumni clubs develop, we imagine each club organizing other residents to define the community's problems, devise solutions, and implement those solutions as a group. For change to occur, there must be initiative and responsibility at the grassroots.

### **In Closing**

We have learned to love each other and ourselves. We care about the young people coming behind us. We want to help prevent them from having to go through what we went through before YouthBuild. We care about our children, the ones that are already here and the ones that are yet to come. We see no reason why this wealthy country can't find the means to make sure that every child and every parent get the opportunities they need to fulfill their potential and accomplish their goals in life. That should be our goal for the new millennium.

We have watched some of our parents and grandparents play by the rules, work too hard, and still end up financially unable to help their families in trouble. We don't want this to happen to us. If we work hard, maintain a positive attitude, and give back to our communities, we have the right to share in America's prosperity.



We want to belong to a great movement to make sure that America offers real opportunity for its entire people, in every community. At the same time, we want to help our communities get organized to take responsibility for their own future well-being.

As future community leaders, in the spirit of inter-dependence, we hope to work hand in hand with government, business, non-profits, religious organizations, unions, and local residents to transform our communities as we have transformed our own lives.

### **YouthBuild National Alumni Council Members**

Craig Burton, President, St. Louis  
 Starr Irvin, Vice President, Pittsburgh  
 Jeanette Harris, Secretary, Bloomington, Illinois  
 Antoine Bennett, Baltimore  
 Jerry Ferguson, St. Louis  
 Jesse Galvan, Los Angeles  
 Erick Howell, Philadelphia  
 Sikina Lee, St. Louis  
 Imam Lewis, Cleveland  
 Carl Oren, Gary, Indiana  
 Bernard Scott, Philadelphia  
 Kelly Warren, Los Angeles

### **YouthBuild National Young Leaders Council Members**

Gerald Washington, President, Baltimore  
 Francisco Medrano, Vice President, San Diego  
 Mason Jenkins, Treasurer, New Bedford, Massachusetts  
 Crystal McConnell, Secretary, Indianapolis  
 Lance Goode, Sargent-At-Arms, Washington, DC  
 Norris Bryant, Baltimore  
 Michael Donnelly, Bloomington, Illinois  
 Steven French, Bemidji, Minnesota  
 Annette Goodrich, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
 Tom Kenneth, Gary, Indiana  
 Ricardo Ordaz, Jr., Brownsville, Texas  
 Jennifer Patterson, Portland, Oregon  
 Amon Phillips, Bloomington, Illinois  
 Norberto Ramos, Springfield, Massachusetts  
 Matthew Rosenhek, Portland, Maine  
 Matthew Scheidegger, Burlington, Vermont  
 Lisa Smith, Pittsburgh  
 Lakenya Stone, Columbus, Ohio  
 Yenitza Tanco, New York City  
 Michelle Watts, Providence, Rhode Island  
 Calvin Westbrook, St. Louis

## SECTION V

# **System Building**

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# WINNING SUPPORT

By Dorothy Stoneman

*In the world of youth policy, it is not enough to be right. It is critical to have a strategy for gaining political and community support for good policies and programs.*

### Introduction

Advocates for youth must ensure that public policy decisions result in a reliable opportunity system for all youth. We have a special obligation to poor youth, whose own parents are usually not in a position to access the array of opportunities routinely available to youth from wealthier families.

Initiatives that allocate resources and opportunities to low-income disenfranchised populations only become public policy concerns when people with power come to believe they should be. We, as either policy makers and/or practitioners, can help decision makers reach this conviction. We have observed them to be influenced by the following:

- The policy decision makers have a personal experience that demonstrates the meaning and power and effectiveness of the idea or program or change.
- Enough of the decision makers' constituents call for it.
- Something dramatic scares them into thinking something must be done.
- The proposed program or solution has been objectively proven to make a decisive difference.
- Opinion leaders believe in the proposal.
- The press has demanded it.
- General public opinion supports it.

It becomes the job of the youth policy world to provide those defining personal experiences to decision makers, to mobilize their constituents, to make the objective case for what works, to capitalize on the dramatic incidents that demonstrate the need, and to persuade opinion leaders and the general public that it is important and possible to provide appropriate opportunities to all youth. It is our job, and if we don't do it, as far as I can tell, nobody else will.

### **The Start of Effective Advocacy**

Effective advocacy begins with at least one individual deciding to organize a campaign. Whether local or national in scope, it is never done without at least one person deciding to begin it. We tend to underestimate the power of individual action, and we tend to wait for social forces or existing political leadership to take care of issues. But social forces do not act spontaneously, and elected officials only occasionally take the real lead. More often they respond to good ideas, pressure, and public opinion.

Individuals with conviction have to decide to initiate actions, programs, campaigns, coalitions, legislation, and all the efforts that go into making good policies and winning resources to implement them. If social forces happen to support the initiative they have taken, it moves much faster; if they are working against the grain of existing forces, but with logic and compassion on their side, they can still succeed, but must be prepared for a long slower struggle.

Once an individual decides to take action, the next step is organizing; first a small group that can act in concert to get its points across and then grow into a larger constituency. When the music is loud, clear, and compelling enough, decision makers respond.

### **The Experience of CityWorks and YouthBuild**

In conjunction with other committed individuals, I have launched two separate campaigns that succeeded in establishing new policies and raising hundreds of millions of dollars for youth programs. These two campaigns, one in New York City and one nationally, had certain principles and practices in common that seemed to make them succeed. These principles and practices are the subject of this chapter.

The first campaign in New York City between 1984 and 1988 succeeded in creating the CityWorks program, at the time the largest city funded youth employment program in the nation. It included five distinct approaches to the employment training and education challenge for out of school youth, including the Young Adult Learning Academy and the first replication of YouthBuild at five sites around the City. There were 100,000 out of school youth in New York City at that time. Over a five-year period, our coalition generated \$80 million in comprehensive community based programming for 20,000 out of school youth.

The effort was spearheaded by the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars, sponsored by the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools, now renamed Youth Action

Programs and Homes, Inc. Some individuals who have become well known, played key roles on the organizing committee back then: Richard Murphy, then of Rheedlen Foundation, now of the Academy for Educational Development; Peter Kleinbard, then of the National Center for Youth Resources, now of DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund; Jean Thomases, then of Good Shepherd Services, later an Annie E. Casey Foundation Fellow; Getz Obstfeld, then of Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, now a private non-profit developer; John Bess then and still of the St. John the Divine Youth Program in Harlem. At that time all of us were community activists, rooted in local communities. I name some of the individuals because sustained individual commitment is key.

The second campaign grew out of the New York City success. In 1988 we said to ourselves, "If this works in New York, why not nationally? Nobody is speaking for low-income youth in low income communities. Not in 1988." We had promised the City Council that we would turn our attention toward the federal government and try to bring some of those resources to New York, and other cities, instead of relying solely on New York City's tax-levy funds. So the Coalition for \$20 million grew into the Coalition for \$200 million, which was soon renamed the National YouthBuild Coalition.

This national effort was spearheaded by YouthBuild USA, a new national non-profit entity spun off from Youth Action Programs and Homes, Inc. It has succeeded in persuading the Congress to invest \$293 million in YouthBuild programs in 44 states between 1994 and 1999. At first, observers thought we were naïve to expect a coalition starting from the grassroots, not based in Washington, with no substantial financial backing, to succeed in getting new legislation and a significant appropriation passed. After all, YouthBuild USA was started with only a \$50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation in July 1988 and a second grant of \$100,000 from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in January of 1989. We had no prior experience at the federal level and nobody there had ever heard of any of us. Nonetheless, with conviction, that what had worked in New York City could work nationally, the campaign began.

### **Overriding Principles**

The set of attitudes and principles underlying our approach to advocacy are as follows:

1. We have organized people on the basis of vision, caring, and responsibility, not on the basis of anger.
2. We have motivated people toward the common good, not for self-interest.

3. We have encouraged people to propose solutions, not to protest wrongs.
4. Our objective has been to win, not just to be morally right.
5. Our approach has been consistently to persuade and win over ever more allies; never to identify so-called “enemies” or to attack or embarrass the opposition.
6. Our advocacy work has placed people who benefit from the campaign, in particular the youth in low-income communities, in the forefront, speaking and lobbying as well as participating in planning and policy making.
7. We have organized for broad diversity, bringing as many relevant perspectives into the thinking and constituency as possible.

This approach has attracted extremely responsible people who are able to sustain their energy over time, and we have produced no enemies. Having no enemies is extremely useful when an under-funded coalition is trying to build enough support to win an unlikely uphill battle for resources for a disenfranchised population.

### Elements of A Winning Strategy

These successful campaigns included the following thirteen elements:

1. Building a solid **reputation** over time as an organization that is effective and cooperative.
2. Providing unifying and dynamic **leadership** to the coalition, both through clear individual leadership and a core steering committee that includes youth.
3. Demonstrating the **workability of the proposed strategies** through implementation, and describing them effectively on paper.
4. Obtaining **independent assessment** of the achievements of the strategies.
5. Finding **champions** from among the most influential elected officials.
6. Building and activating a **broad-based membership constituency** that goes well beyond just the groups that are likely to be funded if the effort is successful.
7. **Negotiating** for agreement and support from the key public agencies that will eventually administer the program elements if the campaign is successful.
8. **Involving young people** every step of the way in planning and decision making to better prepare them to take a leading role in public speaking and lobbying.

9. Systematically **lobbying and testifying** both in the offices of all the elected officials that have a bearing on the decision, and at any public hearings related to the budget.
10. Continuously **expanding political support** over a period of years, with an effort to involve the most critically influential individuals and organizations.
11. Obtaining **positive press**.
12. Building **unity with other advocacy groups**.
13. Providing **training and technical assistance to insure the success of the program strategies** once funded.

Each of these needs to be sensitively and energetically pursued. They work together into an unbeatable approach, as long as they are implemented with a determination to persist unto victory and are carried out in a manner consistent with the principles outlined above.

We cannot succeed unless we maintain constant vigilance when programs are established. Once we have obtained public resources, we have a moral and political obligation to see that they are well used.

## **Elements of a Campaign in Greater Detail**

### **1) Reputation**

If the members and leaders of the campaign are known to be individuals who are not selfish or divisive, who support the initiatives of other people, who contribute reliably to the well being of a broader field, it will be relatively easy to attract a broad constituency. This may involve serving on other coalitions and commissions for years before the moment presents itself when you are the logical person to take initiative and obtain the support of your peers. At the point where you go public, all the members of the founding group need to have good reputations.

### **2) Leadership**

A committee cannot substitute for individual leadership. It always takes at least one person to orchestrate the relationship of the parts to the whole and to move the endeavor forward through obstacles and setbacks, seizing opportunities as they arise, and engaging other individuals and committees at the appropriate moments in developing policy.

### **3) Demonstrating Workability**

It is irresponsible to advocate for broad-scale implementation of policies and programs that have never been demonstrated to work. Before replication, initiatives should have been tried, honed, improved, and shown to produce desirable results on the ground. This doesn't necessarily require major research, but results must be documented so that a critical observer can be persuaded of the viability and impact of the strategy before it is widely replicated with public funds.

### **4) Independent Assessment**

Whether through external research or through careful record keeping and verification of outcome data, the willingness to submit to objective assessment and to maintain accountability for outcomes is part of achieving credibility. It is a reasonable and fair expectation of people who are seeking public funds.

### **5) Finding Champions**

There is simply no way to obtain public funds without public officials acting as your champions. Review the individuals who serve on the relevant authorizing and appropriating bodies, and select the one or ones closest to the top who are most likely to embrace your issue. Then win them over. The best way is to have them visit programs in their districts, meet young people who are benefiting, meet and talk with program leaders, and share with them the objective results of your program. Staff members usually have to be convinced before the principals, but sometimes, with the right connections, direct access to the principal is possible.

### **6) Broad-based Constituency**

We have seen groups obtain small amounts of public funds with a narrow constituency that represents only those who will receive and administer the funds. But substantial investments require a broader constituency.

In New York City, 150 organizations signed on to the proposals of the Coalition for \$20 million; nationally, 650 organizations in 44 states signed on to the National YouthBuild Coalition's proposal. Getting this level of commitment required staffing the communications process: mailings to all potentially interested organizations; telephone follow-up to all who answered the mailing; presentations to all gatherings of relevant organizations; individual visits



to the leadership of all key organizations. The communication itself was simple: a two-page summary of philosophy, goals and objectives, plus a form to sign on or request more information; and a presentation that included young people speaking to the issues along with one leading adult advocate. Follow-up was critical. Frequent update bulletins, occasional meetings, and periodic opportunities to lobby or testify seemed to suffice in maintaining the active interest of a constituency that would support our agenda.

### **7) Agreement and Support from Public Agencies**

In every budget process, the public agencies have their own priorities for funding and they will be consulted by the legislators in connection with any proposals that come from "outside." It is therefore critical that the leadership of the relevant agency be supportive of your proposal. You want them to say, "We have looked into this proposal and find that it has merit. We think highly of the people proposing it. We think it should be funded at the level requested and we are prepared to administer it."

Getting to that statement takes a great deal of work. Just as you need champions in the legislative arena, you need champions in the public agency that will be the administering agent. Getting access for initial meetings, bringing the agency officials to visit real programs, demonstrating success on the ground, building relationships, maintaining communication: these take the time and attention of leadership.

### **8) Involving Young People**

Perhaps effective advocacy can be done without engaging young people, but it's a lot less enjoyable and inspiring. And it doesn't build the kind of committed supporters like those who have met "awakened" young people. In addition it throws away an opportunity to develop the leadership skills of the young people.

It takes time and training to bring young people into the process. If you're doing state-level or national advocacy, it also takes money. Transporting young people to distant locations and feeding and housing them along the way can be expensive, but it is worth planning for this.

Up front training is necessary. Young people don't like to go in blind; they don't want to "feel used." They need to know the entire picture and where their participation fits in. Some of them should be involved in planning and making policy, so that they can lead their peers with knowledge and become ever more effective spokespeople. Plan on making presentations to the

entire participating group about how government works. Help them prepare written texts for public testimony with lots of rehearsal time. These efforts will all pay off in increased confidence and skill. In time, the more experienced leaders will throw away their prepared speeches and speak from the heart.

This is the kind of developmental investments our society needs if we are to bring young poor people into the political process to help enlighten decision makers.

### **9) Lobbying and Testifying**

There are various opportunities to lobby and testify, and it is important to lobby widely to every public official you can reach, starting with those positioned with the greatest influence, and to testify at every opportunity. Opportunities to testify are not usually publicized. Researching these opportunities is another important staff function.

In New York City, every borough held open public hearings on the proposed City budget every year, but hardly anybody knew it was happening and only 600 people testified in a city of 10 million. When the Coalition for \$20 million discovered this, we testified in every borough. Young person after young person got up to speak along with program directors. By the third year, 25% of the people testifying on the budget in New York City were members of our Coalition. In the fourth year, the City Council made a new rule: only 5 representatives per organization could testify. But by then \$12.75 million/year had already been committed to youth employment opportunities through the Coalition's advocacy.

### **10) Expanding Support of Public Officials**

While you may begin with one champion and 10 co-sponsors, every year the number of co-sponsors should increase. The National YouthBuild Coalition started in the Senate with Senator John F. Kerry (D-MA) as the lead sponsor and 13 co-sponsors of YouthBuild legislation in 1991. By 2000, fifty-nine Senators had signed on. A similar effort started with Representative Major Owens (D-NY) and 23 co-sponsors in the House; by 1999 one hundred thirty-three Representatives had signed on. Much work (but not much money) went into this expansion of support. A steady drumbeat of outreach, of communication, and most importantly, getting legislators to visit local sites made the difference.

YouthBuild USA has managed the advocacy of the YouthBuild Coalition by spending less than \$100,000 a year for staff work, travel, grassroots advocacy, and professional lobbying.

Contributions to legislators' campaign funds have not been part of the advocacy process, nor has paying large donations to get access to them at fundraising events. We have relied on the merits of the case, good relationships with staff aides, and direct contact with successful programs.

If the process of expanding support is neglected, or worse, if maintaining existing support is neglected, funds are very likely to be redirected. You really can't turn your back for one minute. Competition for limited resources is too intense.

### **11) Positive Press**

When a staff aide looks up your initiative on the web, searching for press reports, you want all the press to come up positive. You may not succeed in getting front page coverage in the key newspapers, you may not have money for public relations efforts, and you may not have a lot of time to pursue press. We all know how hard it is to get coverage for something good. But it is important to get as much as you reasonably can. And every positive article is "gold" and should be distributed to all your friends and supporters at appropriate times.

Over the next few years a major national advocacy effort to increase the investment in out of school youth is absolutely necessary. We will all have to put much more attention on the media to build a positive image of youth, to make known the positive interventions that have worked for them, and to build the case for major investments on their behalf.

### **12) Unity with other advocacy groups**

Sometimes if you are new on the scene, there are other advocacy groups who have occupied the territory and who may not welcome new players. Building relationships requires careful management and attention. In New York City it required intervention from our legislative champion, who told the old guard group that if it didn't have unity with us there would be nothing funded at all because divided advocates are very unpersuasive. This settled it, and we achieved unity without our having to give up our key plank as the old guard group had been insisting. It's better, of course, if possible, to build unity without intervention from the funders.

### **13) Training and technical assistance to insure success**

This is a major undertaking that requires substantial funding. It should be built into the legislation and the appropriation. Having faith that new organizations can accomplish what experienced ones have done, without any assistance, is, in fact, naïve and unwise. If a concept is

being brought to scale, there must be adequate information and support to replicate it effectively and build on what has already been learned. Someone must take on the responsibility of guiding new practitioners to the highest level of success. In the case of the YouthBuild program, we were obliged to build an entirely new intermediary organization, which grew from a staff of three to a staff of 50 during its first 8 years.

### **In Summary**

The advocacy job is fun. It is complex. It is likely to succeed if it is well implemented and if the program or cause you are selling is genuinely worthwhile. Advocacy is just as much our responsibility as is the job of running good programs.

I have described the grassroots approach to advocacy. There is probably an insiders' game that can be described as well by those who have played it. We have focused here on what a truly committed local activist can achieve.

## CHAPTER NINE

# BUILDING A SYSTEM TO SERVE OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

By **Marion Pines and William J. Spring**

Over the past thirty-five years, our nation has made numerous attempts to increase success rates for struggling students and vulnerable youth as they seek to make transitions into the labor market. The federal government has provided modest and often sporadic support for these efforts, beginning in 1964 with the creation of the Neighborhood Youth Corps and the Job Corps as part of the President Johnson's War on Poverty. The Job Corps has proven to be the longest lasting legacy of that "war".

While various approaches have been tested through government and private sector initiatives, most efforts have offered only short-term interventions over a three- or four-month period. Initiatives for in-school youth typically have focused on drop-out prevention and the provision of summer jobs. Programs for out-of-school youth have emphasized low cost GED preparation, at times coupled with some work experience or job training leading to entry level jobs. These limited strategies were the predictable product, to a large extent, of a political climate and policy framework that placed the highest priority on cost containment and short-term placement results. This "quick-fix" modality persisted despite numerous legislative changes and a constantly changing alphabet of federal program ... OEO ... CETA ... JTPA.

In retrospect, hopes that a "quick fix" employment and training program could yield lasting employment gains or permanently transform lives seem clearly unfounded. Too little attention has been paid to the cognitive, social, legal, or health deficits that many youth carry with them, and to the assets that each youth could develop if given the opportunity. More recently, the changing nature of the labor market and the increasingly broad impact of the education standards movement on vulnerable students have posed new challenges for policy makers and program administrators. These shortcomings over time exacted a heavy toll. When evaluations showed

that narrow, short-term approaches yield disappointing results, many policy makers and legislators simply gave up on these youth and they were once again “forgotten.”

The disappointing history of interventions for vulnerable and out-of-school youth stands in sharp contrast to growing evidence of the effectiveness of many new and innovative youth program models. These models typically attempt to integrate learning and meaningful work. They create sustained, family-like support systems of peers and caring adults. They develop a real “opportunity structure” for youth by setting rigorous standards and high expectations. They deliver on their promise of making connections to employers and finding and keeping career path jobs. They pay attention to the quality of staff and display an ongoing commitment to staff development. Most importantly, they focus on developing and transforming the whole person by demonstrating respect for individual intelligence and the ability to contribute to the community.

The track record of these innovations suggests that we already know what works. Findings from Project New Hope in Milwaukee attest to the valuable role of case managers in providing personalized and effective support and intensive follow up. Programs such as YouthBuild, the Center for Employment and Training (CET), Youth Service and Conservation Corps, and the Job Corps incorporate the elements outlined above and they are operating successfully in many communities across the country. Boston’s Pro Tech school to work program, is often cited as the national model for creating opportunity structures for youth by creating unusually strong connections between classroom and work based learning. Yet even effective programs, when operating in isolation, cannot provide the community-wide coverage and accountability that are needed to move more of our young people into the economic mainstream. To achieve this goal, we must construct *systems* within every community that incorporate the lessons of effective programs and practices and that prevent the young people with the greatest needs from “falling through the cracks.” And the proven effective program models cited above *must* be fully funded as the *basic building blocks* of any national system of support and development for at risk youth.

The case for a community-wide system built upon collaborative partnerships has never been stronger. Building blocks for such a system exist in every city and county. They can be found in school-to-career connections, “one-stop” workforce development centers, community-based youth-serving organizations, alternative education or school-based “second chance” learning programs, after school programs, community service initiatives, probation and after care services, libraries, park and recreation offerings, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and other local youth development efforts.

It is true that we have never tried, on a broad scale, to build on this existing and potential capacity present at the community level. We have not tried to extend individual successful efforts or incorporate their lessons into larger systems. But we firmly believe that our knowledge base and expertise could yield far greater results if we connected what we know works to new and redirected resource streams, to long-term educational investments, and to cross-agency support and employment opportunities. In short, we need to create an integrated and comprehensive *service delivery* system, one that not only pulls existing pieces together, but is also backed by the will and capacity to fill major gaps.

### **A New Opportunity: WIA Youth Councils**

The interdisciplinary Youth Councils mandated under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) can help tackle this job. But they must be aware of the necessity of bringing additional resources to the table, because of the paucity of formula funds for youth in most parts of the country. By requiring elected officials, school leaders, housing administrators, juvenile justice personnel, community-based organizations, service providers, parents, youth, and employers to come together under a common umbrella, Youth Councils provide a new vehicle for collaboration, leveraging resources and system-building. The School to Work partnerships that have been developed over the past few years, involving employers and educators at the city level, can be a significant building block in many communities. The Youth Councils give local communities an important opportunity to change the way they work, to re-examine how federal and state funds are used, and in the process to forge a common vision of how to enhance the prospects of vulnerable youth.

Other elements of the Workforce Investment Act create a promising framework within which Youth Councils can function. The legislative and regulatory provisions of WIA's youth title contain specific acknowledgments of the lessons we have learned from research and field experience. Indeed, the "Levitan Principles" (described in Gary Walker's chapter and reinforced by field evidence from the PEPNet initiative) have now been codified in statute: the importance of the caring adult; connections to employers; skill-building and alternative education certification options; positive peer groups; leadership development; connections to comprehensive support systems; and long-term follow-up.

Most encouragingly, WIA recognizes that youth succeed in programs that integrate work and learning in a caring environment with comprehensive, long-term youth development services.

Under WIA, the new emphasis is on youth development, not just youth employment. This approach focuses on developing the young person's assets, providing opportunities for leadership development, and communicating high expectations. WIA encourages communities to fuse youth development concepts with the more traditional workforce development approaches. The key is integrating these concepts into a *system for effective connections for youth* that will enable them to succeed.

There is little question that new and redirected resources are needed to mount an increased supply of effective program activities. At present, federal investments in at-risk youth through WIA are woefully inadequate. Yet, the conceptual framework is right and provides a strong foundation upon which communities can build. Whether the political realities of the delivery system and the decision making process will deliver remains to be seen.

### **Lessons from School-to-College and School-to-Career**

We can find some useful guidance by examining the existing networks serving college-bound youth and the newer connections under development (mostly for in-school youth) as part of school-to-career educational reforms. The elements that these systems have in common include:

- known expectations;
- access;
- rigorous program content with effective connections; and
- accountability

We believe these common characteristics represent key building blocks that must be incorporated into a comprehensive system for out-of-school youth as well.

***School-to-College Networks*** In the case of college-bound youth, school personnel, parents, and students all share a common body of information about college admission requirements. These requirements govern the design of high school curricula and shape the guidance given to students about selecting appropriate courses. Access to admissions information, appropriate curricula, and counseling, as well as information about financial assistance, all contribute to a reasonably effective system that moves large numbers of students from high school to post-secondary education. This system is not without shortcomings. In particular, counseling caseloads often are too high and information about college and student aid options can be



inadequate. Despite these weaknesses, however, communities typically expect school administrators and counselors to know what proportion of their high school graduates go directly to college. It must be acknowledged that the information base is primarily based on student post-high school plans, not on actual follow up. A reliable knowledge base is very thin.

***School-To-Career Connections*** In the case of students who are not competing for places in colleges, or who have not yet formulated college or career plans, the paths beyond high school have not been as smooth or well-marked. To partly address this problem, the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act was enacted in 1994. It models a new approach with three key features:

- The Act requires that attention be paid to *all* young people;
- The Act authorizes the use of federal funds as venture capital to leverage existing public education and private-sector resources; and;
- The Act attempts to construct a school-to-career system that mirrors and forges links to the school-to-college system described above.

The above law (which has sunset) reasoned that if youth are going to enter the workplace successfully, they and the schools that prepare them need knowledge of workplace expectations. This knowledge must translate into an organized effort to develop close working relationships between employers and schools (including community colleges). Employer input is particularly important to establish skill standards for curriculum design and to train teachers and guidance counselors about labor market requirements. Many school systems across the country are reorganizing their high schools into smaller “career cluster” or career academy learning communities (e.g., schools within schools) as an effective strategy for achieving these ends. When fully developed, school-to-career systems have the potential of pulling a series of work-based learning connections for youth together into a coherent whole. Students may start with job shadowing and field trips, followed by community service, work experience, both paid and unpaid, internships, and apprenticeships that eventually lead to successful career placements. It should be noted that very few apprenticeships actually became a reality for young people, which is a lost opportunity.

In many communities, both school-to-college and the emerging school-to-career system have a clearly identified leadership mechanism. In the case of services to the college-bound, the education system itself provides the framework within which parents, students, guidance staff,

and teachers help students make the transition from high school to post-secondary education. Oversight and accountability for the school-to-work system most often rests with a leadership team, one that is anchored in the school system but includes employers, community colleges, and employment and training providers from the community.

### **Building a System for Out-of-School Youth**

But what about out-of-school youth, whether dropouts or disadvantaged graduates, who are disconnected not only from schools where guidance and school-to-work programs are provided, but also from the primary labor market? How do we go about expanding the emerging school-to-work initiatives and building a comprehensive network of services for them? As Chapters 1 and 2 show, out-of-school youth are anything but a monolithic group. Their developmental and economic needs are as varied as their hopes and aspirations, and their access to the labor market is affected by varied factors, including general labor market conditions as well as youths' own human capital traits and job connections. We believe that a number of steps are necessary in order to plan and sustain a comprehensive service and development system for vulnerable youth.

**1. Leadership.** Who should take the lead at the local level in developing strategies to address the enormous out-of-school youth challenge? Since meeting this challenge requires the close and continuing collaboration of a large and diverse group of local players, many of whom are serving the same youth, *the chief elected official of the community is best positioned to provide the leadership needed to make a difference.* We believe that mayors and county executives have a high stake, and therefore should have a keen interest, in efforts to help out-of-school youth. The leadership, authority, and clout of the local elected official is critical to start these efforts and to build a citywide or county-wide system that enables all young people to enter the economic mainstream.

Mayors and county executives have the ability and, we hope, the commitment to place the needs of out-of-school youth on the public agenda, to redirect financial resources within the community when necessary, and to enlist the help of business leaders and area employers. They can use their "bully pulpit" as political leaders to make the case for additional investments and new partnerships. They also can play key roles as conveners and facilitators, providing the impetus and the structure for the collaborative initiatives upon which much progress depends.

Knowledgeable youth advocates have the responsibility of bringing these issues to the attention of locally elected officials, so that they can exercise and mobilize their “clout”.

**City Initiatives Profile  
Baltimore**

*The leadership and involvement of a chief elected official has been strongly recommended, however it is not always easy to pull off. The Baltimore profile describes the engagement and enthusiasm of a newly elected young Mayor and his efforts to marshal the community on behalf of its youth.*

Baltimore has a rich array of community-based organizations that provide education and training services to young adults. Not surprisingly, the city’s Office of Employment Development (OED) has focused on new collaborations and partnerships in its attempt to build a stronger and more effective system to meet the needs of at-risk and out-of-school youth. With a newly-elected mayor who has placed a high priority on developing a city response to those needs, Baltimore is poised to make important strides in this area.

Mayor Martin O’Malley set the tone for Baltimore’s system-building efforts by hosting the first meeting of the newly-formed WIA Youth Council and making clear that he viewed this group as the lead entity responsible for crafting responses to youth needs. The mayor also led an aggressive campaign early in 2000 to provide summer jobs to youth by actively recruiting employers to fill an anticipated shortfall in federal summer jobs funding. Baltimore’s selection as Youth Opportunity Grant site by the U.S. Department of Labor solidified Mayor O’Malley’s commitment to youth system-building efforts. The city now plans to use other available funds to supplement resources provided through the grant and to reach youth who reside outside the city’s Empowerment Zone.

The attempt to forge new partnerships that build a stronger system already has borne fruit in Baltimore. For example, the city’s residential Job Corps program offered strong skills training programs but found it difficult to attract youth who were willing to live in Job Corps facilities. Baltimore OED brokered a partnership between the Job Corps site and a career academy within the city that offered alternative education and counseling services but did not provide students with marketable skills. These new linkages have drawn the best that each program had to offer into a more effective intervention for youth in need of education and training services.

When attempting to promote similar partnerships and collaborations, Baltimore’s officials recommend that cities reach out to all potential stakeholders in the community, including community-based organizations, schools, private employers, and others concerned about or involved in serving youth. Baltimore’s OED began the process with community forums designed to engage a wide range of participating organizations to develop a stake in the development of a community-wide plan to serve young people rather than merely being asked to review or comment upon a plan in its final stages. The process culminated in the submission of the city’s successful proposal for a federal Youth Opportunity Grant.

As noted earlier, the WIA Youth Councils often will provide the best vehicle for tackling the more detailed work of designing an effective system for serving out-of-school youth and monitoring its effectiveness over time. Under WIA, the chief elected official has the power of appointment to the local Workforce Investment Board, which in turn appoints the local Youth Council. Mayors and county executives should assume a strong leadership role to ensure that the Youth Council is rooted in and broadly representative of the larger community, and that the full range of stakeholders are brought to the table. However, to be effective, the Youth Councils

need a strategic planning framework to organize their collaborative work. An eight -step process is suggested below.

***Step 1: Identify the Population:***

Decisions must be reached about the size and characteristics of the population to be served. Helpful data sources include forthcoming census data, school data on student characteristics and early school leavers, program data and perhaps the richest source, administrative records which include UI wage records, JTPA 11B and C records, the local TANF database, new hire registry, registrants at one stop centers, juvenile justice data, probation records, adult basic education information, etc. Cross tabulating the data from a variety of sources can create of wealth of useful information.

***Step 2: Map Existing Services:***

What is the lay of the land? What resources are currently devoted to youth and who controls them? How flexible are the resources and what is their geographic reach? Who are the providers and how effective are they? The answers to these questions will help to craft a comprehensive system.

***Step 3: Identify the Partners:***

Many young people are involved with the juvenile and criminal justice system. Communities and states are investing heavily in the criminal justice system and many CJS leaders are anxious to become partners and help fund education and employment opportunities for young people, especially those leaving gangs or completing jail time and reentering society. Many young people live in public housing developments, and those housing managers have an interest and resources to aid in fostering leadership, citizenship and self-sufficiency for their young tenants. And we are very aware that many youth have health, mental health and/or substance abuse problems that impede their ability to change their life trajectory. As our vision of a comprehensive system broadens, the total range of non-traditional partners must grow.

### **City Initiatives Profile Detroit**

*Building and sustaining partnerships is one of the keys to leveraging resources to support the building of a comprehensive youth system. Detroit's expansive network of community partners is an instructive case study in community building.*

Having started a Youth Opportunity program for the eastern sector of Detroit's Empowerment Zone with a Kulick pilot grant, Detroit now wants to expand their program to serve the severely economically disadvantaged population living in the two remaining sectors of the Empowerment Zone, using the resources of their new Youth Opportunity Grant. This initiative known as the Out of School Youth Opportunity Area Grant Project, better known as the "YO! Movement", is designed to provide a full menu of intensive counseling, educational training, job development, job placement, case management, and community activities along with recreational programs to young people living in the empowerment zone.

This community involved project, carries the weight of 22 exceptional partnerships of employers and community agencies. These organizations have committed themselves to the task of making a difference in the lives of disadvantaged youth by lending their technical expertise to implement an Out of School Youth Opportunity Demonstration for Detroit's federally designated Eastside Empowerment Zone neighborhoods. This exceptional partnership of committed and talented organizations include such names as: Career Works, Inc., City of Detroit Youth Department, Detroit Urban League, Daimler Chrysler, Detroit Recreation Department, Detroit Works Partnership, Eastside Industrial Council (a collaborative of 70 Manufacturing Companies), Focus Hope, Friends of Parkside, G.R.A.C.E. Program (Gang Retirement and Continued education/Employment), Michigan Department of Career Development (Employment Services), Regional Chamber of Commerce, The Warren/Conner Development Coalition, Wayne County Community College, Wayne County Friend of the Court and Young Detroit Builders.

The project will establish two youth centers ("homerooms") in each Empowerment Zone electronically linked to one-stop career centers. The centers will be staffed by 70 case managers/job developers and 10 outreach and recruitment specialists. Youth will be individually assessed and case managers will choose from a number of career ladder occupational skill programs, with strong labor market demand in the Detroit area. The program will develop charter schools modeling Regional Cisco Academies, Ford Advanced Manufacturing Systems training programs and Henry Ford Academy. Available services will include transportation, childcare, medical assistance, mentoring, personal responsibility training, alternative sentencing and gang prevention.

The City of Detroit selected SER Metro Detroit, Jobs for Progress, Inc., to be the implementing agency because of its record of exceptional service to the City.

#### ***Step 4: Create a Shared Vision:***

A clearly focused vision statement can provide a foundation for guiding the construction of an understandable plan. It is one of the early unifying tasks that a Youth Council should undertake and should tell the community what the system hopes to accomplish and why it's worth the effort.

***Step 5: Set Goals/Define Objectives:***

Goals should state the global outcomes that will be achieved; e.g. "youth will obtain the skills needed to be self sufficient and productive in the workforce." The objectives need to be the quantifiable and measurable benchmarks that can inform the Youth Council *how* they will know the goal is being achieved.

***Step 6: Develop Strategies:***

At this point the Youth Council should be getting ready to develop Requests for Proposals for program activities and services that will fulfill their agreed upon goals and objectives. An environmental scan may be helpful. What are the available entry level jobs in the local community, what are the skill level requirements and present wage levels in the local labor market? What is the capacity of local providers to prepare youth for such jobs? Strategies and goals and objectives need to be monitored to make sure they are both realistic and achievable.

***Step 7: Create a Timetable with Benchmarks:***

An effective management tool is an action plan divided into specific steps: what will be done in order to achieve the objectives, who will do it, when will it be completed? Every member of the Council needs to understand his/her role and responsibilities in the design and implementation of the plan and the development of the system.

***Step 8: Track Results:***

The public, the participants and elected officials want and need a sense of value received in exchange for the expenditure of funds. As the system overseer, the Youth Councils need continual feedback from program implementation and outcomes. This requires a reliable, comprehensive and integrated system of data collection and analysis, including tracking and follow-up, monitoring, reporting and observing, ideally tied to existing MIS systems of WIA.

Local leadership from mayors and county executives will yield the greatest dividends if states also are doing their part to address this challenge. Governors like Thompson of Wisconsin and Englar of Michigan have played key roles in state welfare reform and school-to-work initiatives, but in most cases they have not developed a clear strategy for meeting the needs of

out-of-school and at-risk youth. State leadership is particularly important in providing the appropriate policy and legislative framework – as well as sufficient investments – to support new, community-wide systems that expand opportunities for work and learning.

States can promote the development of community-wide systems for out-of-school youth in many ways. For example, they can encourage counties or communities to develop local plans for serving at-risk youth that integrate WIA, TANF, dropout prevention, pregnancy prevention, juvenile justice and other federal and state funds. State education agencies and boards can follow the lead of several states in requiring local school districts to develop plans to serve school drop-outs in high-quality alternative education programs that lead to educational credentials and post-secondary enrollments. States also can encourage local superintendents and school boards to make per-capita education funding available to community-based organizations that sponsor alternative education programs, as described in David Gruber’s chapter. Finally, governors have the option under WIA to create State Youth Councils. These state-level councils can serve as an effective mechanism for showcasing collaborative youth initiatives and raising public awareness regarding these issues.

**2. An Outreach and Engagement Strategy.** Both the college-bound and school-to-work systems start with the school as the basic organizational framework and build from that base. Out-of-school youth are starting in different places. They are not safely enclosed within school buildings. They are often disconnected and “free floating” within their communities, relatively unattached to viable institutions. A logical place for Youth Councils to start in trying to reach and engage youth, then, is where out-of-school youth are - in the community.

Young people need to be helped in developing relationships with effective community-based organizations that already exist, or in creating new ones. Such organizations should have the responsibility of marketing to and engaging out-of-school youth on a long-term basis. Their community base could then become the hub—an out-of-school “home room.” It is this base that must deliver on the promise to bring together the necessary caring adult “connectors” to alternative learning communities, peer support groups, social services, skills building, creative work experiences, and jobs. The “home room” ideally becomes a kind of one-stop shop for youth that has staff and/or technology links to the broader one-stop system for all education, social service, employment and training services in the community.

## City Initiatives Profile

### San Diego

*Developing an effective outreach and engagement strategy is one of the first challenges that communities have to address. San Diego has developed and successfully implemented several strategies that not only engage youth but also engage the whole community. Their innovative approaches are described below:*

**Employing Youth Advocates** - The key staff who are identified to recruit, include young men and women who represent the focus areas demographics and also backgrounds. For example, the group includes teen parents, ex-gang members, and those in recovery, as well as those who have always been obvious "achievers." Preparing the team for their jobs required extensive leadership training.

**Campaign Style Marketing** - This strategy includes a mass mailing campaign within the areas zip codes, delivery of flyers and posters, manning of phone banks, staffing for group intakes, and asking for community support by placing signs on front lawns in high visibility areas throughout the target area. The staff, when working in the field, wear bright yellow T-shirts bearing the program's logo.

**Advertising** - The program advertises regularly through cable television as well as local weekly printed publications.

**Television Coverage** - local cable networks provide general program coverage with special targeting to a youth audience on a program known as "all eyes on teens". program staff participate in multiple live panel discussions on youth-relevant topics, creating greater community awareness.

**Raffles** - Several CD players donated from a local employer were raffled off at a community event within the enterprise community. The raffle requested name, address, zip and age. An average of 100 raffle tickets were completed, and many attendees were converted into program participants.

**Presentations** - Youth Advocates are responsible for identifying and building relationships with key contacts. Power point presentations share the overview of the programs objectives and request assistance in helping to meet goals. Calls increased as a result of partner referrals.

**Community Events** - The Community Outreach Specialist identifies four monthly events in the community, which may attract young adults. Staff rotate in attending these events in order to distribute flyers and promote the programs services. Success has been gained by our presence at community job fairs, youth rallies and street fairs.

To be effective, the carefully chosen staff at community-based "home rooms" must have the information and ability to broker access to the networks youth need. They must also have the credibility to build and sustain trusting relationships. Skill-building organizations, responsive learning centers, social service systems, legal systems, and most importantly employers, must all be in place. No one model for intake, referral, or service delivery will fit every community. *But every model must be able to deliver what young people want—the competencies to get and keep jobs.*



The role of the “home room” must also include the responsibility for case-managed tracking and continuity of support. All partners must see these “home rooms” as the formal connecting mechanism for this group of young people. Specific procedures for these other youth services to work with the “home rooms” will also be needed. There must be clearly established pathways from their activities to the “home room” so that youth do not get lost. Fortunately, available technology and shared databases can augment personal contact, making these functions more doable. Issues related to confidentiality will undoubtedly arise but are often successfully addressed by up-front agreements with participants for release of information.

In many communities, these varied and important roles are performed by well respected community based organizations, including the active participation of the faith community.

**3. New Models For Alternative Education.** Although the academic deficits of many out-of-school youth demand attention, our attempts to replant them into traditional public school classroom settings have been generally unsuccessful. Equally disappointing have been attempts to place these young adults in all-day classrooms in front of a computer screen so they may learn “at their own pace.” The School-to-Work Opportunities Act makes it clear that learning and the *applications* of learning must go together—a concept the education and employment and training systems are only beginning to embrace.

Part of the difficulty is that efforts to help out-of-school youth have usually addressed the needs of participants sequentially with few perceived connections: first remediation, then work experience, then skill training, capped off by (often unsuccessful) attempts at job placement. A different vendor with a different staff tackled each phase of the intervention. We have learned that educational components should be presented in real-life contexts and integrated with work to validate and confirm what is learned. And we have learned that not all young people learn and process information in the same way. Communities need to develop a range of learning options to help out-of-school youth gain competencies and earn credentials. Small, alternative learning communities should focus on one or more careers, providing youth with opportunities to develop personal relationships with adults and their peers. Leadership training and development should also be encouraged, as YouthBuild programs and the Youth Service and Conservation Corps have done so effectively.

### City Initiatives Profile Philadelphia

*A major dilemma facing most communities is how to reengage young adults in the learning process in order for them to develop needed competencies and earn requisite credentials. Philadelphia has created a successful strategy...the Twilight Schools...which are described below.*

In the spring of 1997, the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Education for Employment began working with two comprehensive high schools to design and deliver alternative, after-school programming for youth and young adults who had left the regular school system without a diploma. Prompted by the requirements of recently-enacted welfare reform legislation and by chronically high dropout rates at many city schools, these "Twilight Schools" provide alternative education at convenient times and accessible locations for those seeking to complete high school without returning to a traditional classroom setting.

Twilight Schools are diploma-granting institutions that operate from 3:00 until 6:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Classrooms designated for Twilight School use are accessible without utilizing the primary entrance to the high school. Twilight Schools organize instruction within 10-week cycles. All Twilight Schools offer mathematics, English, science, and social studies, and most provide for elective credit through community service and other forms of individualized instruction.

During the last year, the Twilight Schools have built stronger connections with community-based organizations in their neighborhoods. These new program linkages allow some students to combine Twilight School coursework with training in work readiness, job skills, and academic enrichment during morning and early afternoon hours. In this way, both the Twilight Schools and their community-based partners are able to offer more comprehensive services to out-of-school youth and young adults.

Outcomes achieved by the Twilight Schools seem quite promising. Through the third program cycle of the 1999-2000 school year, nearly 1,200 students had earned one or more credits and almost 500 students were on track to graduate at year's end. These results reflect substantial improvements over the previous year. Based on these positive outcomes, the School District of Philadelphia plans to reallocate adult basic education in order to open six new Twilight Schools for the 2000-2001 school year. Additional support for the program is expected under Philadelphia's Youth Opportunity Grant, which will be able to purchase slots for young adults for whom Twilight School services are appropriate.

Although the attainment of the GED has long been the academic outcome of choice for out-of-school youth, recent research reveals that the long-term earnings of GED holders are less than the level of high school graduates but higher than earnings for dropouts without additional education credentials. While attainment of the GED has been demonstrated to have strong esteem building value, we recommend that successful alternative learning centers should be linked not only to work and community, but also to *community colleges* for continued career development and enhanced long-term earnings potential. Like public schools and employers, all alternative educational options must be held accountable for improved learning and higher earnings.

For maximum accountability and effectiveness, we further suggest that interrelated functions should not be divided among a series of vendors. In communities that have many effective service providers, it might be prudent to consider contracting with several. But each vendor should be charged with developing an *integrated and holistic* learning community, connected to work opportunities for a fixed number of youth. Because the capacity to deliver integrated models may be limited, wherever multiple vendors are involved, caring adults and carefully designed tracking systems become even more essential to ensure that no one is lost.

As David Gruber points out in Chapter 4, the opportunity for local school systems, community colleges, and community based organizations to form alternative educational partnerships has great potential. Each partner has much to offer. Newly developed curricula, experienced technical staff, funding from the average daily attendance (ADA) stream and Pell grants, and community-based know-how in relating to out-of-school youth should be combined in new and powerful models. Communities across the country...Portland, Oregon, Boston, Seattle, Philadelphia ...to name just a sampling, are accessing ADA funds, in some cases, by re-enrolling youth in high school and then arranging for the high school to contract with local vendors for delivering a variety of learning options in smaller more personalized settings. This can be a win-win for everyone...the high school can keep a portion of the state aid for handling the administrative work, community based organizations are funded to deliver new and needed educational services, and the youth get a much need second chance at a rigorous educational experience tied to local labor market needs.

**4. Access To An Organized Network Of Employers.** When asked, "What do you need most?" at-risk youth who are 16 and older invariably say, "A job." Yet, we have learned that without active intervention, labor markets do not work well for poor disconnected youth for a variety of reasons. In addition to being governed by the laws of supply and demand, markets require accurate and dependable information about price and quality. For example, in hiring CEOs, it is routine practice to pay corporate "headhunters" handsomely to screen applicants. Most stock market investors believe that paying for the services of a reliable broker is a wise strategy. In the murky waters of the labor market, the reliable broker has usually been missing for at-risk, out-of-school youth, as well as for many new high school graduates.

### City Initiatives Profile Houston

*Successfully engaging employers and connecting them to young people who are seeking upwardly mobile jobs is often more art than science. Houston, one of the first cities to win a Kulick grant, has had an outstanding track record in this area. Some of their successful strategies are described below.*

Facing a youth population with a 62% unemployment rate in which most were dropouts from high school and had very few occupational skills, Houston launched a two-pronged attack targeting the need to expand options for their youth.

Houston's Kulick project was developed with both an out-of-school and in-school program established to target youth within the area's two High Schools and worked in dropout prevention. By providing counseling, tutoring, part-time jobs and connecting the youth to positive options including recreational activities, a revolving door where one dropout took the place of a recovered youth, was opened. A highlighted feature was the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program matching low-performing high school students, as tutors, with elementary and junior high youth. The results were that both tutors and tutored youth showed improvement in grades.

The demonstration utilized only two service contractors in the operation of the program. This enabled the project to coordinate information easily and promoted a team concept in achieving goals and objectives. Collaboration with fewer contractors helped in establishing a presence with the area's C.B.O. and community partners. An early lesson learned was that the use of community services had a very positive impact on the targeted youth and the community where they lived. Local centers, C.B.O.'s and other organizations as well as local citizens benefited from the community services.

Several other lessons were learned. One was that what the youth really wanted were jobs. Also, we realized that many of the youth were not prepared to attain and/or keep existing jobs. Multiple job placements, utilizing work as a development process and creating an environment where the youth would stay in contact with the program, whether they were successful or not, was important. Therefore, finding and utilizing employers who were interested in developing these youth as a human resource was critical. Conducting at least two job fairs per month proved helpful during the height of the program. Due to these efforts, a coalition of employers who see these youth as a source for future employees has evolved. These employers along with the local community college have begun to collaborate in the planning for future workforce needs.

The City of Houston's Mayor has dedicated his administration to youth. He has appointed a youth liaison, brought funding to provide additional after school programs and sponsored summits for finding solutions to youth problems.

**Institutionalizing the broker** An important first step in organizing access to jobs and employers, therefore, is to develop a cadre of brokers to connect the youth, wherever they are, to a network of employers. The experience of the Boston Compact, as well as that of other

communities, demonstrates that both large and small employers can happily come to rely on brokers to play a major part in their personnel functions. The brokers, for their part, coach youth on interviewing skills, résumé writing, and in such on-the-job survival skills as dealing with supervisors and co-workers. The brokers set up the interviews and provide continuing support, particularly at the outset. Employers report that the broker role is key; on their own, they say, they lack confidence in their ability to tell one baggy-jeaned youngster from another. But most have come to trust the knowledgeable intermediary as a reliable source of entry-level labor.

This intermediary role must be organized into all parts of the new community- and school-to-work service delivery system. It must be connected to the “home rooms,” the schools, the training programs, and the alternative learning centers. The broker role may be performed by a community-based organization with a solid track record of success and employer confidence, or perhaps by a Youth Council, the Workforce Investment Board or a Chamber of Commerce. Whoever the sponsor, the “brokers” must be people in whom private sector leaders have confidence, who can operate on a labor market wide basis and who can meet the needs of a large variety of firms. Evidence suggests that the most successful brokers are the matchmakers for youth with some occupational or industrial specialization. Without a well developed intermediary strategy, placing young people in jobs will remain a freelance, small-scale effort and the task of building a system of shared responsibility will go by the board.

**The small employer** If we are ever to move away from cadging jobs from employers one by one, we must begin thinking about how to reach hundreds, if not thousands, of firms. Even in smaller cities there may be thousands of private sector firms. Yet the beginning of wisdom among employers is the realization that no one firm, acting alone, can make a systemic difference. And no small group of very large firms can have much impact. But if hundreds of firms come together in citywide partnerships to agree on common goals and collaborative strategies, and if they develop relationships of trust with a reliable cadre of intermediary brokers, it then becomes possible to construct and sustain a school to career *system* for *all* youth.

The challenge for local system builders is to think creatively in developing and sustaining the funding for meaningful work connection systems for out-of-school youth. But, creativity has its limits. In considering the sheer number of jobs needed to meet the demands of “welfare reform” and the rise in immigration and the current and forthcoming demographic population surge among young people, it is unrealistic to expect those demands will be met exclusively by the

private sector. *Public sector job creation must be brought to the forefront of the public policy agenda.* Public sector job creation provides opportunities for youth to perform useful work in their community, acquire skills, and develop work histories to facilitate movement into regular private sector jobs. For the communities in which they live, there are the added values of seeing formerly idle youth engaged in the rebuilding efforts, wages flowing into the economy, *and* the added value of the work on services delivery and long-overdue community improvements.

**5. Creative Resource Development.** The heart of comprehensive system development is building trust among the partners, all of whom come to agree (over the course of time) to buy into a common vision of creating a youth development system that enhances the life prospects for the community's young people. As we have seen, that is a complex task, requiring sustained commitment and extensive resources. In order to survive and thrive, elected officials and local Youth Councils need to look beyond the WIA allocation. Therefore, one of the first challenges to be faced is how to deal with the reality of federal program-by-program "silo" funding and the turf protectionism that carries with it. Savvy local teams are learning how to build "tunnels" between the silos.

Given enough time and effort, trust-building, and unifying "visioning," community partners often will come to see that together they bring about change that no one partner can do alone. Effective planning for the use of resources has to start with knowing about them and understanding the constraints on their use. A partial list of potential resources for youth services should include the previously described state aid to education (ADA) and federal Pell Grants as well as funds available through the following federal and state programs:

- Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
- Adult Education Act
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Welfare-to-Work (WtW)
- School-to-Work
- Wagner-Peyser Act
- Job Corps
- HOPE VI, YouthBuild and other HUD initiatives
- Community Development Block Grants
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers (after-school programs)
- Juvenile justice initiatives

And this list is just for starters! This kind of awareness should lead to the consideration of how these resources can be coordinated or integrated for filling the gaps and improving the overall quality of services for young people.

### **City Initiatives Profile Boston**

Boston has been engaged for many years in efforts to organize the job market for young people, building strong connections with private employers and increasing the chances for disadvantaged youth to gain early work experience. More recently, the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services and the Boston Private Industry Council have launched comprehensive initiatives in the city's poorest neighborhoods to help out-of-school youth move into gainful employment. These efforts, launched initially in the fall of 1997 under a Kulick demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and recent expanded as part of Boston's new Youth Opportunity Grant, combine workforce development and youth violence prevention strategies in exciting ways. This partnership between the city's employment and training agencies and its law enforcement establishment is the centerpiece of the current Boston Jobs Project.

The employment and training components of the Boston initiative emphasize skills development through a combination of re-enrollment in public schools or placement in alternative education settings, work readiness training, and structured work-based learning opportunities. Two youth centers, located in Roxbury and South Boston, provide "homerooms" that serve as the primary sites for intake and assessment of young people. Case managers working out of these centers play a key role in helping youth overcome employment barriers by ensuring access to needed services such as alternative education, substance abuse treatment, housing, child care, transportation, family support, and mental health counseling. Street workers carry primary responsibility for recruitment and career specialists are responsible for developing job opportunities for participants.

These interventions on behalf of out-of-school youth are designed as both a prevention strategy (to keep at-risk youth off the streets and engaged in productive activities) and a re-entry strategy (to help incarcerated youth who are returning to their communities). The Boston Jobs Project is embedded in a broader community-wide effort to combat juvenile crime and delinquency, one that has relied heavily upon community policing and built strong ties between law enforcement officials and community groups. The U.S. Attorney's office, Suffolk County District Attorney, Boston Police Commissioner, area clergy, and other community leaders have been key drivers of this overall effort.

Under its new Youth Opportunity Grant, Boston will build upon this strong framework by testing new approaches to employment and skills development for at-risk youth. For example, it has budgeted significant resources for a Winter Jobs Program that will provide transitional, publicly-funded jobs in community agencies for young people who are not prepared to move immediately into unsubsidized employment. A new Street to Work program (based on Boston's Welfare to Work model) will integrate work readiness training with occupational skills training that is linked to specific jobs guaranteed for program graduates by area employers. Over time, a work-based learning plan developed by the state of Massachusetts for its school-to-career system also will be used to measure the attainment of basic work readiness skills among all participants.

**6. Accountability** Which brings us back to where we started.... leadership is key to this kind of effort. Leadership at the political level, at the organization/agency level and of critical importance, at the program level. The quality of leadership at all of these levels makes the difference. Good leadership cares enough to make things go right, helps groups and staff define vision and goals and takes responsibility for outcomes. Occasionally, inspired and insightful local business leaders lead the charge. But, as noted, every community has at least one powerful potential convener and catalyst - the mayor or county executive. This is the person who has the clout to bring together the learning and business communities in a joint venture to make real progress against the persistence of alienation and unemployment that threatens the stability of our cities. This is the person who has the authority to demand accountability for outcomes:

For Youth:

- Are more youth involved in workforce development activities?
- Have their skills improved?
- Are more in jobs, in colleges, in the military
- Are they on a path to high-wage jobs?
- Have risk-taking behaviors been reduced?

For the System:

- Is there a network of effective service providers in which employers have confidence?
- Are youth programs staffed by competent skilled adults?
- Are employers more satisfied with the quality of work performed by their newly hired young adults?

Agreement on measures of success will provide structure to the system and keep partners and services both focused and integrated. However, in establishing expectations for results, it is critically important that the ability to measure is present and the data tracking requirements are in place and well managed. Start early to build appropriate data collection and tracking systems that incorporate identifying information for each youth, each service, and each employer in the system, as well as each job placement. Access to unemployment



insurance wage records should be a key component of the data system in order to track earnings over time as well as the industrial distribution of the jobs held by youth.

In the final analysis, what will give a youth service system credibility with all concerned is not merely the ability to produce results but the ability to produce reliable information that verifies the results.

The major challenge we face is *how to build capacity* to create and sustain such an integrated system at the local level. Following the steps in the strategic planning process described earlier in this chapter will help local Youth Councils frame an effective system. But additional factors must come into play.

1. Governors and state agencies, including the State WIBS, need to extend their workforce development policy agenda to include out of school youth and the use of state resources to support this agenda.
2. Strong mayoral or county executive leadership must take the initiative to marshal resources and community partners into an effective Youth Council.
3. Youth Councils must accept the mandate to become the architects of a comprehensive youth development service system, with an initial focus on the most vulnerable youth but gradually “growing” the system to serve all young people. They must identify and support the existing viable building blocks in their communities.
4. Organized networks of private sector employers are formed.
5. New, alternative learning communities are developed with articulated pathways to post secondary education and training, both public and private.
6. Public resources are committed on a sustained basis for support services, work experience and jobs.
7. Community-based one-stop shops or “home rooms” are created where:

- caring, sustained relationships are developed with adult “connectors” who reach out to engage youth, develop peer support groups, deliver on their promises and follow through;
  - access is provided to alternative small learning communities and skills training focused on career competencies, as defined by employers;
  - access is provided to other effective community education and training resources;
  - access is organized to meaningful work- based learning;
  - brokers provide access to networks of private sector employers; and
8. Accountability for outcomes and the data tracking systems to support them are planned and put in place with clear identification of the actors and agencies responsible for each major part of the system.

But how does a community begin? As already noted, the effort needs to begin with the chief elected official or his or her staff asking *who* needs to be at the table, *where* are the resources, *how* effectively are they being used, and *how* might they be redirected to fill gaps.

- *Who* can reach and engage the kids to make them valued participants in community life?
- *Who* is currently delivering exemplary youth programs in the community that includes effective working relationships with colleges, post-secondary training and employers?
- *Who* is involved with social, health and legal supports for youth on such issues as teen pregnancy, substance abuse, medical and dental care, child support orders, probation, and housing?

- *Who* are developing the job connections for the local school-to-work system?
- *Who* has access to the dollars to develop and sustain small, alternative learning communities?
- *Who* is developing linkages for students to post secondary education?
- *Who* can access the dollars for alternative, court-related interventions?

The potential stakeholders will vary with each local area. But as they come together under the unifying umbrella of the Youth Council, their decisions frame the building blocks for a local system for out-of-school youth. As described earlier in this chapter, they need to meet, identify their resources and strengths, identify the most appropriate community-based anchors for home-rooms and start planning the services the disconnected youth will need to become productive.

While it is completely appropriate to start small, it is critical to think big. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past 35 years by starting and then abandoning more pilot programs. This new effort must be about coordinating and redirecting existing resources, obtaining additional resources to expand all successful existing initiatives, filling gaps and building city-wide sustainable systems. It will not be easy and it will not be quick. Political intervention and leadership at state and local levels are essential and must translate into permanent city and state support. This needs to be seen as an investment worthy of “hard” money. Some unrestricted seed money, from foundations and the federal government also will be important in moving the planning and implementation process forward.

The federal government has been the primary source of funding for out-of-school youth employment programs. But in recent years, only Job Corps has benefited from a modest increase in resources. Although the mandate for youth has been expanded under WIA, the funding has remained flat, with two new stipulations:

- there is no “wall” between summer and year-round programs; summer activities are mandated but only as part of a year round academic and occupational design
- thirty percent of the youth funds must be spent on out-of-school youth

The only new funding is the \$250 million dollar Youth Opportunity program, which awarded multi-million dollar multi-year grants to 36 urban, rural and Indian reservation sites around the country in late winter, 2000. It will be interesting to watch the system building efforts in the sites, which have received saturation funding for youth living in their empowerment zones.

### **Reflection**

We acknowledge that we will not be successful with every out-of-school youth. We recognize that a shared responsibility rests with the young people themselves who must make a sustained commitment to their own success. Educational competencies, a career and a secure place in the community must become our common vision. But if we can construct new opportunities for tenacious young people, more and more will be motivated to make the effort and make the grade. At every level of government and at every level in the private sector our generation of Americans must share the responsibility to start building the system of opportunity - a system the current generation of disconnected youth need if they are to succeed. The time to get started is *now*. The Workforce Investment Act and their mandated local Youth Councils create an entity empowered to tackle the job. This is an opportunity we cannot miss.



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EFF-089 (3/2000)