Programs and Policies to Assist High School Dropouts in the Transition to Adulthood

Dan Bloom

Summary

Dan Bloom of MDRC examines policies and programs designed to help high school dropouts improve their educational attainment and labor market outcomes. So called "second-chance" programs, he says, have long provided some combination of education, training, employment, counseling, and social services. But the research record on their effectiveness is fairly thin, he says, and the results are mixed.

Bloom describes eleven employment- or education-focused programs serving high school dropouts that have been rigorously evaluated over the past thirty years. Some relied heavily on paid work experience, while others focused more on job training or education. Some programs, especially those that offered paid work opportunities, generated significant increases in employment or earnings in the short term, but none of the studies that followed participants for more than a couple of years found lasting improvements in economic outcomes. Nevertheless, the findings provide an important foundation on which to build.

Because of the high individual and social costs of ignoring high school dropouts, the argument for investing more public funds in services, systems, and research for these young people is strong. The paucity of conclusive evidence, however, makes it hard to know how to direct resources and magnifies the importance of ensuring that all new initiatives provide for rigorous evaluation of their impacts.

Bloom concludes with recommendations for policy and research aimed at building on current efforts to expand and improve effective programs for dropouts while simultaneously developing and testing new approaches that might be more effective and strengthening local systems to support vulnerable young people. He stresses the importance of identifying and disseminating strategies to engage young people who are more seriously disconnected and unlikely to join programs. A recurring theme is that providing young people with opportunities for paid work may be useful both as an engagement tool and as a strategy for improving long-term labor market outcomes.

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The transition to adulthood is likely to be perilous and rocky for young people who drop out of high school. In fact, even those who earn a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate face increasingly long odds of success if they do not go on to get at least some postsecondary education or training. Young people from low-income families are substantially less likely than their higher-income peers to move smoothly through school, making it much more difficult for them to earn family-sustaining wages and, potentially, to reach other adult milestones such as marrying.

Through a variety of school reforms beginning in preschool and running through high school, U.S. educators are working to prevent young people from getting off track. For the foreseeable future, however, the nation will also need "second-chance" systems and programs to re-engage and re-direct young people who leave the public school system. The research record on the effectiveness of such programs is fairly thin and the results are mixed, but there are some positive findings on which to build. Moreover, the individual and social costs of neglecting this problem are potentially enormous.

I begin by describing the magnitude and consequences of the dropout problem, with a particular focus on the heterogeneity of the dropout population. Next, I describe what researchers know about the effectiveness of programs designed to assist young people who leave school before graduation, focusing mainly on how the programs affect participants' educational attainment and labor market outcomes. I conclude with some recommendations for policy and research that would build on the current evidence base to expand and improve effective programs for dropouts while simultaneously developing and testing new approaches that might be more effective and strengthening local systems to support vulnerable young people.

The Magnitude and Consequences of the Dropout Problem

National studies estimate that 3.5 million to 6 million people between the age of sixteen and twenty-four are high school dropouts—meaning that they have not earned a high school diploma and are not now enrolled in high school.[1]

Dropouts come disproportionately from low-income and minority families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the share of sixteen- to twenty-four-year-olds who are out of school and lack a diploma or GED is 4 percent in the highest income quartile and 17 percent in the lowest quartile. Similarly, the dropout rate is 6 percent for whites, 12 percent for blacks, and 20 percent for Hispanics.[2] Moreover, the dropout problem is heavily concentrated in a subset of high schools that are themselves concentrated in large northern and western cities and in the South.[3]

Experts disagree about how to calculate high school graduation rates. Surprisingly, they even disagree about whether the national dropout rate has been rising or falling in the past thirty years and whether racial disparities in graduation rates have been declining or growing.[4] It seems clear, however, that over this period several developments have amplified the negative consequences of dropping out of school. First, well-documented changes in the labor market have dramatically reduced the availability of well-paying jobs for young people, particularly young men, without postsecondary education. Adjusted

for inflation, the earnings of young men with no high school diploma dropped 23 percent between 1973 and 2006 (the earnings of young men with only a high school degree dropped about the same percentage).[5]

Even before the current recession began, growing numbers of young dropouts were entirely disconnected from both school and work. More than half of all sixteen- to nineteen-year-old high school dropouts had no paid employment in 2007. Declining employment among dropouts is one symptom of a broader collapse in the youth labor market. In just eight years—from 1999 to 2007—the share of all sixteen- to nineteen-year-olds with no paid employment during the entire year rose from 44 percent to 59 percent.[6]

Second, changes in sentencing and other criminal justice policies have sharply increased the number of young adults who are incarcerated. The rate of incarceration in the United States stayed relatively flat for most of the twentieth century and then exploded beginning in the late 1970s. More than 2 million Americans (most of them young men) are now in prison or jail—many for offenses that would not have led to prison terms thirty years ago.[7] Spending time in prison not only strains family ties but also depresses future earnings.And high school dropouts are much more likely than their more educated peers to become involved with the justice system. More than two-thirds of state prison inmates have no high school diploma—though a substantial share has earned a GED while incarcerated.[8]

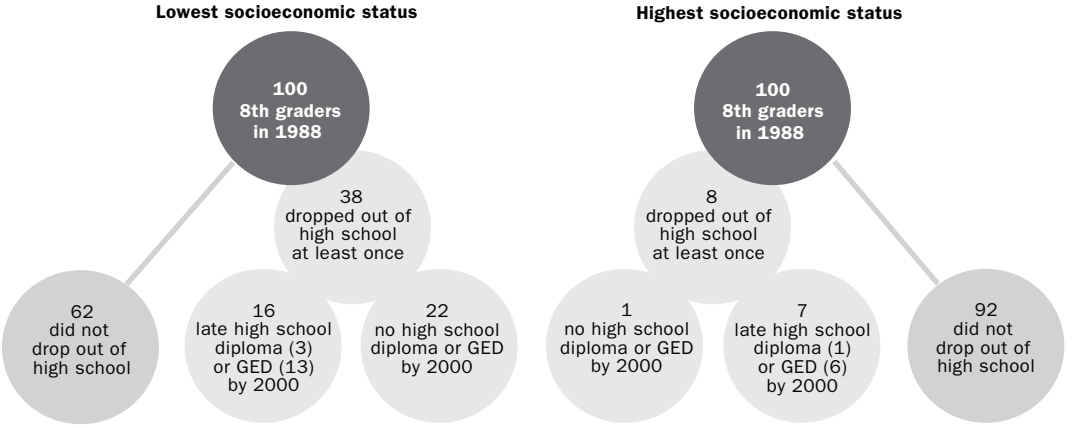
Trends in labor market conditions and incarceration may have made it harder for high school dropouts to reach other adult milestones. As discussed by Sheldon Danziger and David Ratner in their article in this volume, it is difficult to prove a causal relationship between earnings trends and marriage trends. The correlations, however, are striking. In 1970, 68 percent of male dropouts between age twenty-two and thirty-two were married; in 2007, after earnings for dropouts had dropped precipitously, the marriage rate for this group had fallen to 26 percent. One study found earnings a key predictor of marriage rates for young men. Similarly, although trends in out-of-wedlock births are affected by many factors, having children outside of marriage is strongly correlated with education. In 2006, a startling 67 percent of births to female high school dropouts under age thirty were out-of-wedlock (by contrast, the out-of-wedlock birth rate was 10 percent for women under thirty with a master's degree).[9]

Diverse Population

High school dropouts are a heterogeneous group. In the first place, they leave high school for many different reasons. In a 2005 survey of more than 400 dropouts, about 47 percent reported that a major reason for their decision to drop out was that "classes were not interesting." Overall, 62 percent said they were receiving grades of "C's and above." At the other end of the spectrum, 35 percent of respondents identified "failing in school" as a major reason why they dropped out. For many dropouts, the major reasons for leaving school—needing to get a job (32 percent) or to care for a family member (22 percent) or becoming a parent (26 percent)—were not directly related to school itself.[10]

Second, dropouts follow different trajectories after leaving school. Most try to continue their education. The National Education Longitudinal Study tracked a sample of young people who entered high school in 1988 and were scheduled to graduate in 1992. About 20 percent of the sample dropped out of high

Figure 1. Status in 2000 of 100 People Who Were Eighth Graders in 1988



Source: Authors' calculations based on Cheryl Almeida, Cassius Johnson, and Adria Steinberg, *Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts* (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2006).

school at least once. By 2000, eight years after their scheduled graduation date, nearly two thirds (63 percent) had earned a high school diploma or, much more commonly, a GED certificate, and 43 percent had attended a postsecondary institution. Presumably, more than 63 percent of the dropouts *attempted* to continue their education.[11]

As figure 1 shows, however, the above data mask huge differences by socioeconomic status. As noted, higher-income students are much less likely to drop out in the first place. And almost all of the higher-income dropouts earned a GED or diploma by 2000. By comparison, less than half of the low-income dropouts had a credential by 2000. Similarly, among those in the highest socioeconomic group, 67 percent of those who had a diploma or GED had enrolled in college, compared with 29 percent of those in the lowest group (numbers not shown in the figure).[12] Young people from higher-income families who drop out of school are often able to get back on track, while their lower-income peers are more likely to flounder.

Third, young people who leave school and then become disconnected face a variety of personal and situational obstacles. For example, a recent study focusing on New York City identified five overlapping groups of young people who are at particularly high risk of leaving school, not returning, and then ending up unemployed or out of the labor force: immigrant youth, young people with disabilities (learning disabilities or emotional and behavioral issues), young people involved in the justice system, youth aging out of foster care, and young mothers.[13]

Programming for Dropouts

Second-chance programs have long offered opportunities for young people who leave the K–12 education system without earning a diploma. Ranging from large national programs or networks like the Job Corps (more than 100 sites nationwide) and YouthBuild (more than 200 programs) to small independent programs run by churches or community-based organizations, these programs typically provide some combination of education, training, employment, counseling,

and social services. Some, like the Job Corps, have dedicated streams of federal funding, while others piece together funding from the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and other state and local sources. Many target specific subsets of youth, such as those with disabilities or those in the foster care or juvenile justice systems, reflecting the availability of targeted funding for those groups. High school dropouts are typically overrepresented among these vulnerable populations, which are discussed by D. Wayne Osgood, E. Michael Foster, and Mark E. Courtney in their article in this volume. (Other programs for dropouts have broader eligibility criteria, but end up serving many young people from these same vulnerable groups.)

Not so long ago, second-chance programs that helped dropouts earn the GED credential were fairly clearly differentiated from traditional high schools. Today the landscape is far more varied. On the one hand, many school districts are developing "multiple pathways" initiatives that offer a wider range of high school options in an effort to prevent young people from leaving the K–12 system. For example, New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways has created Transfer Schools (small schools specifically designed for students who have fallen behind for their age or who have dropped out) and Young Adult Borough Centers (evening programs for older students operated by partnerships between schools and community organizations), along with new GED programs, all of which are supplemented by Learning to Work, a program that provides job readiness instruction and paid internships. On the other hand, some community-based programs with experience serving dropouts now operate charter schools or alternative high schools. For example, YouthBuild, a large national network of programs known for serving dropouts and targeting the GED, now includes twenty-nine diploma-granting schools.

Moreover, although second-chance programs once viewed the GED credential as the ultimate goal, their aim now is increasingly to help former dropouts obtain postsecondary education, which has become a virtual prerequisite for admission to the middle class. The Gateway to College program, developed at Portland (Oregon) Community College and now operating in twenty-three other community colleges across the country, gives high school dropouts a chance to attend high school and college simultaneously. Gateway students begin as a group during the Foundation Term, during which they strengthen basic academic skills and adjust to college. Those who succeed in these courses gradually move into the regular college curriculum. Gateway relies on "average daily attendance" funding from the K–12 system even though students are enrolled at a community college.

In addition, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has given grants to YouthBuild and other community-based youth employment programs to help them build pathways to postsecondary education for their participants. These college-focused efforts appear to be growing, though they are likely to serve a subset of dropouts with stronger academic skills.

Beyond specific programs, some cities are working to develop coherent youth "systems" to improve coordination among the many programs that serve specific subsets of disadvantaged youth or provide a narrow range of services using separate, targeted funding streams. Without a single agency or entity to take responsibility for ensuring that young

people with few family supports make a successful transition to adulthood, many youth will fall through the cracks. The National League of Cities has profiled efforts by several cities to build collaboration across many public systems, including law enforcement, education, workforce development, and child welfare, to better serve disconnected youth.[14]

Program Effectiveness

Most programs that target high school dropouts have never been formally evaluated for effectiveness. Moreover, because the programs are often run by small community-based organizations, the most rigorous evaluation methods are probably not feasible or appropriate in many cases. The result is a gap between the strongly held views of practitioners who believe they know what constitutes "best practice" in youth programming, on the one hand, and the knowledge base researchers have built from rigorous evaluations, on the other.

Table 1 describes eleven rigorous evaluations of employment- or education-focused programs serving high school dropouts that have been conducted over the past thirty years (a few of the programs served both dropouts and in-school youth).[15] The table focuses on major studies that used random-assignment designs, in which eligible youth were placed, through a lottery-like process, either in a program group that had access to the program being studied or in a control group that did not.[16] The table does not include some specialized programs that were rigorously evaluated and may serve some dropouts, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (a treatment approach for youth with serious behavior problems), or Structured Training and Employment Transitional Services (an employment model for young adults with developmental disabilities).[17]

Although the programs and studies can be categorized in many ways, table 1 groups them according to their primary service approach. The first three programs—the National Supported Work Demonstration, the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot program (YIEPP), and the Conservation and Youth Service Corps—relied heavily on paid work experience, while the next six—JOBSTART, the National Job Training Partnership Act, New Chance, the Center for Employment and Training (CET), Job Corps, and National Guard Youth ChalleNGe—focused more on job training or education. The last two—the Teenage Parent Demonstration and the Learning, Earning, and Parenting program (LEAP)—were mandatory, welfare-based programs that encouraged, supported, or required teenage mothers to work or go to school.

This classification scheme is useful in understanding the broad patterns of program effects, but it is far from perfect. For example, two of the work programs include a strong emphasis on education, and some of the training programs provide work experiences of some kind. More important, the simple categorization does not capture critical factors such as the program atmosphere or the types of ancillary services, supports, and activities provided to participants.

Overall, the evaluations tell a mixed story. In several, young people in the program group were substantially more likely than their control group counterparts to earn a GED or another credential. For example, in the Job Corps evaluation, 42 percent of the program group earned a GED within four years after entering the study, compared with 27 percent of the control group. Similarly, 38 percent of the program group earned a vocational or trade certificate, compared with only 15

Table 1. Selected Rigorous Evaluations of Programs for High School Dropouts

Evaluation (dates)	Target group	Program model	Sample size (number of sites)	Summary of results
Work programs				
National Supported Work Demonstration (1976–81)	17- to 20-year-old high school dropouts (one of four target groups)	Paid work experience, with graduated stress	861 youth (5 sites)	Large increases in employment initially, but no lasting impacts for youth target group
Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (1977–81)	16- to 19-year-olds from low-income families who had not graduated from high school	Guaranteed part-time and summer jobs conditioned on school attendance	82,000 youth (17 sites)	Large, short-term increases in employment; no impacts on school outcomes
American Conservation and Youth Service Corps (1993–96)	Mostly 18- to 25-year-old out-of-school youth	Paid work experience in community service projects; education and training; support services	1,009 youth (4 sites)	Increases in employment and decreases in arrests, particularly for African American males; short follow-up
Education and training programs				
JOBSTART (1985–93)	17- to 21-year-old high school dropouts with low reading levels	Education, training, support services, job placement assistance	2,300 youth (13 sites)	Increases in GED receipt; few impacts on labor market outcomes (except in CET site)
National Job Training Partnership Act (out-of-school youth analysis) (1987–94)	Disadvantaged 16- to 21-year-old out-of-school youth	Education, job skills training, job placement, on-the-job training, and support services	5,690 youth (16 sites)	No earnings impacts for females or male non-arrestees, possibly negative impacts for male arrestees
New Chance (1989–92)	16- to 22-year-old teenage mothers who were high school dropouts	Wide range of education, employment, and family services	2,000 youth (16 sites)	Increases in GED receipt; no impacts on labor market outcomes
Center for Employment Training (CET) Replication (1995–99)	Disadvantaged, out-of-school youth, ages 16 to 21	Education and vocational training	1,500 youth (12 sites)	Few impacts on employment and earnings overall; some impacts for younger youth
Job Corps (1994–2003)	Disadvantaged youth, ages 16 to 24	Employment, education, and training in a (mostly) residential setting	15,386 youth (nationwide)	Earnings and employment impacts in years 3–4 of study period; impacts faded after year 4 according to administrative data. Results appear stronger for older youth (20 to 24 years old)
National Guard Youth ChalleNGe (2005–present)	High school dropouts, ages 16 to 18, who are drug free and not heavily involved with the justice system	Education, service to community, and other components in a quasi-military residential setting; 12-month post-residential mentoring program	3,000 youth (10 sites nationwide)	Early results show large increases in diploma or GED receipt and smaller gains in employment, college enrollment, and other outcomes
Mandatory welfare-based programs				
Teenage Parent Demonstration (1987–91)	Teenage parents receiving welfare	Mandatory education, training, and employment-related services; support services (case management, workshops, etc.)	6,000 youth (3 sites)	One of three programs increased high school graduation; increases in employment and earnings
Ohio Learning, Earning, and Parenting Program (LEAP)(1989–97)	Teen mothers under age 20 who are on welfare and do not have a GED or high school diploma	Financial incentives and sanctions based on school enrollment and attendance	7,017 teens (12 Ohio counties)	Increases in GED receipt and some earnings gains for initially enrolled teens

Sources: Rebecca Maynard, *The Impact of Supported Work on Young School Dropouts* (New York: MDRC, 1980); Judith Gueron, *Lessons from a Job Guarantee: The Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects* (New York: MDRC, 1984); JoAnn Jastrzab and others, *Impacts of Service: Final Report on the Evaluation of the American Conservation and Youth Service Corps* (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates, 1996); George Cave and others, *JOBSTART: Final Report on a Program for School Dropouts* (New York: MDRC, 1993); Larry Orr and others, *Does Training for the Disadvantaged Work? Evidence from the National JTPA Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates, 1997); Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, and Denise Polit, *New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children* (New York: MDRC, 1997); Cynthia Miller and others, *The Challenge of Repeating Success in a Changing World: Final Report on the Center for Employment Training Replication Sites* (New York: MDRC, 2005); Peter Schochet, John Burghardt, and Sheena McConnell, "Does Job Corps Work? Impact Findings from the National Job Corps Study," *American Economic Review* 98, no. 5 (December 2008); Dan Bloom and Megan Millenky, *21-Month Results from the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, forthcoming); Ellen Eliason Kisker and others, *Moving Teenage Parents to Self-Sufficiency* (Princeton: Mathematica Policy Research, 1998); Johannes Bos and Veronica Fellerath, *Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents* (New York: MDRC, 1997).

Table 2. Interim Results from the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation

Outcome	Program group (percentage with outcome)	Control group (percentage with outcome)	Difference
Educational attainment			
High school diploma or GED	60.5	36.4	24.1***
High school diploma	22.0	16.3	5.7***
GED credential	48.3	21.9	26.5***
Any college credit	24.8	9.6	15.1***
Current activities			
Attending high school or GED prep	16.1	26.0	–9.9***
Taking college courses	11.6	7.0	4.6***
Working for pay	55.0	50.1	4.9*
Serving in military	10.9	6.2	4.7***
High school diploma or GED and in college, training, work, or the military	45.5	23.1	22.4***

Source: MDRC analysis of the National Guard Youth Challenge Evaluation 21-month survey. Asterisks indicate differences that are statistically significant, meaning that they are very unlikely to arise by chance. Differences marked with three asterisks are significant at the 1 percent level, those marked with two asterisks are significant at the 5 percent level, and those marked with one asterisk are significant at the 10 percent level. The 1 percent level denotes the highest degree of confidence that the program actually had an impact.

percent of the control group. Interim results from the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe evaluation show that about 61 percent of the program group and 36 percent of the control group earned a GED or diploma within twenty-one months after study enrollment (see table 2). The JOBSTART and New Chance studies reported similar findings.

Some of the programs, especially those that offered paid work opportunities, also generated significant increases in employment or earnings in the short term. For example, in the National Supported Work Demonstration, which provided subsidized (paid) jobs for up to twelve to eighteen months to dropouts aged seventeen to twenty, the difference in employment rates between the program and control groups was as high as 68 percentage points early in the follow-up period. Similarly, the Youth Entitlement project, which guaranteed part-time and summer jobs to all disadvantaged young people in certain geographic areas who agreed to attend school, employed 76,000 youth and virtually erased the large gap between the unemployment rates for white and black youth. The Conservation and Youth Service Corps also provided subsidized jobs and generated some statistically significant increases in employment outcomes, particularly for African American males, over a relatively short follow-up period.

The Job Corps program did not rely on subsidized jobs but still managed to increase employment and earnings in the third and fourth years of the study period—and even longer for older participants (aged twenty to twenty-four at enrollment). Similarly, as shown in table 2, the National Guard ChalleNGe evaluation found that program group members were modestly more likely than their control group counterparts to be employed twenty-one months after entering the study.

The gains in credentials and short-term earnings are notable, but none of the studies that

followed participants for more than a couple of years found lasting improvements in economic outcomes. Some of the studies (YIEPP and Conservation and Youth Service Corps) did not report or collect long-term data or are still ongoing (ChalleNGe). In other cases, early effects faded over time. For example, the Job Corps evaluation found that increases in employment and earnings faded by year five and did not reappear (though, as noted, earnings gains persisted for study participants who were aged twenty to twenty-four when they enrolled).[18]

JOBSTART, which operated in thirteen sites, showed no significant earnings gains overall during a four-year follow-up period, but the study measured large impacts in one site, the Center for Employment and Training in San Jose, California. However, as shown in table 1, when CET was replicated in twelve sites during the 1990s, an evaluation found no increases in earnings over a fifty-four-month follow-up period (women at the program sites that most faithfully implemented the model made shorter-term earnings gains, but these gains faded after year three).

Several of the studies measured non-economic outcomes such as crime involvement, drug use, health, and psychosocial development—again, with mixed results. Partway through the evaluation's follow-up period, the National Guard ChalleNGe program has produced modest decreases in crime convictions and improvements in some measures of psychosocial development. The Job Corps significantly reduced arrests, convictions, and time spent incarcerated over the first four years of the study period (these outcomes were not measured after the four-year point). The Conservation and Youth Service Corps reduced arrests overall and had a range of positive effects on non-economic outcomes for African American study participants. For example, African American females were less likely to become pregnant and African American males improved in measures of personal and social responsibility. Few of the other programs generated impacts on these non-economic measures.

Overall, these findings do not support the common perception that "nothing works" for high school dropouts. Many of the positive effects produced by the programs, however, were modest or relatively short-lived. Moreover, the studies suggest that even some of the relatively successful programs may have difficulty meeting a strict benefit-cost test. The authors of the Job Corps evaluation concluded that the benefits produced by the program probably exceeded its costs (about $16,500 per participant) for older participants, but not for the full study sample. Nevertheless, the findings provide an important foundation on which to build.

One important study is not included in table 1 because it targeted in-school youth, but the findings may be relevant to the topic discussed here. A random-assignment evaluation of Career Academies, a high school-based model, found that it produced statistically significant increases in earnings over an eight-year follow-up period. Men in the program group earned about $30,000 more than their control group counterparts over the eight years even though they were no more likely to graduate from high school or go to college. The researchers suggest that the program's use of "career awareness and development activities," including job shadowing and work-based learning activities, may have contributed to the earnings gains.

Perhaps most interesting, the Career Academies produced significant effects on

several adult transition milestones. At the end of the follow-up period, program group members were more likely to be living independently with children and a spouse or partner, and young men in the program group were more likely to be married and to be custodial parents.[19] These findings suggest that improving young people's economic prospects may ease their transition into other adult roles.

What Conclusions Can Be Drawn?

It is difficult to draw cross-cutting lessons from the evaluations in table 1 because there are many programs and not many unambiguously positive results. For example, the data do not support clear conclusions about whether paid work, a residential structure, or other program design elements are associated with more positive results in random-assignment studies. It is possible, however, to make a few general points.

First, although sustained positive effects would obviously be preferable, short-term effects are not unimportant. When programs achieve short-term increases in earnings or other outcomes, those effects are not erased if the program and control groups have similar outcomes later. Although many programs assert that they can alter the long-term trajectories of their participants, it is worth considering whether it is reasonable to expect even the strongest youth programs to produce effects that can still be measured many years later. Results like those achieved in the Career Academies evaluation, where earnings gains persisted eight years after students had completed high school, are very rare—and the Academies that were tested did not serve a highly disadvantaged group of young people. Some experts have raised the question of whether it is more appropriate to think of time-limited programs for dropouts as inoculations, whose effects may last forever, or as vitamins, whose effects wear off if they are not taken consistently.

Some experts have raised the question of whether it is more appropriate to think of time-limited programs for dropouts as inoculations, whose effects may last forever, or as vitamins, whose effects wear off if they are not taken consistently.

Second, it is important to note that almost all the programs (and the control groups as well) involved youth who had volunteered to participate—and who thus had at least some motivation to change their lives. In fact, some of the programs extensively screened applicants and accepted only those who demonstrated strong motivation and commitment. Thus the young people who ended up in the control groups likely sought out other programs in the community and received some of the same kinds of services that program group youth received. The study results could thus be interpreted to mean that the tested programs did not do much better than other programs in their communities, but that all of the programs were relatively effective for motivated participants. That said, most of the evaluations also found that outcomes were relatively poor for both research groups. For example, in the Job Corps study, the average employed sample member earned only about $10,000 a year during the later years

of the follow-up period. Similarly, in the JOBSTART study, only about 65 percent of sample members worked at all in the final year of the study period, and those who worked earned less than $9,000, on average. In other words, regardless of their effects, the programs' outcomes leave much room for improvement.

Third, it is possible that the difficulty in achieving sustained increases in economic outcomes may be traced, in part, to the educational goal of most programs—to help participants pass the GED exam. Many studies have concluded that the labor market does not, in fact, view the GED as equivalent to a high school diploma. In other words, GED holders earn significantly less than people with regular high school diplomas. Some studies have even questioned whether GED holders earn more than uncredentialed dropouts, though some recent studies suggest that the GED does have an economic payoff, at least for dropouts with low skills—although the payoff may take several years to appear. Studies have also shown that postsecondary education pays off as much for GED holders as for high school graduates, but only a small minority of GED holders complete even one year of postsecondary education.[20] These data may help explain why programs that substantially increased GED receipt did not lead to longer-term gains in employment or earnings.

Fourth, some youth experts have pointed to broader limitations of some of the program models, particularly those tested during the 1980s and early 1990s. Some have argued that these programs failed to engage youth long enough to make a lasting difference, in part because restrictions on federal funding under the Job Training Partnership Act system did not allow the programs to offer stipends or opportunities for paid work experience.[21]

Others maintain that some of the earlier youth programs were "deficit focused"—that is, they defined participants by their problems and sought to "fix" them. These experts recommend that programs should not only provide participants with training or a job, but also expose them to a range of settings, activities, and relationships that are thought to promote healthy development across a wide range of domains. One study identified these domains as cognitive, physical, social and emotional, ethnic identity, civic engagement, and career.[22] Young people from higher-income families are more likely than their lower-income counterparts to have positive experiences in these developmental areas in their families, schools, and communities. Programs may help to fill these gaps by exposing youth to responsible, caring adult role models; by creating a safe, positive group identity among participants; and by giving young people opportunities to act as leaders and to contribute to the broader society.

Among current programs, for example, YouthBuild helps young people work toward their high school diploma or GED while simultaneously learning job skills as they build or rehabilitate housing for homeless and low-income people. It emphasizes service and leadership development by giving young participants a key role in running the program. Participants also receive stipends or wages. Similarly, Service and Conservation Corps, descendants of the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and of the American Conservation and Youth Service Corps evaluated in 1990 (see table 1), combine intensive community service with job training and education. Crews of participants work on conservation, urban infrastructure, and human services projects and receive stipends. A third such program, ChalleNGe, includes a five-month residential phase built

around eight "core components" designed to promote positive development: service to community, leadership and followership, responsible citizenship, health and hygiene, life-coping skills, physical fitness, job skills, and academic excellence. In a final such example, City Year, participants devote a full year to community service and civic engagement, wearing uniforms to build a team identity and make their work highly visible to the community. Because the program is open to young people from a wide range of backgrounds, participants may be exposed to people quite different from themselves.

It is widely believed that programs built on positive youth development principles are more effective than others. Although this may well be the case, the evidence from rigorous evaluations is too thin to prove or disprove the hypothesis; several of the programs noted have not been rigorously evaluated. Moreover, it may be difficult to achieve consensus about which particular programs reflect youth development principles and which do not.

Tight structure and accountability may also be critical for young people who have grown up in chaotic environments and may help to counteract the potentially negative effects of placing many at-risk young people together in a program setting—effects sometimes called "deviant peer influences" or "peer contagion."[23] For example, the ChalleNGe program adopts a "quasi-military" approach: participants are divided into platoons and squads, live in barracks, have their hair cut short, wear uniforms, and are subject to military-style discipline. Their day is highly structured, with almost no "down time." Most of the staff are military veterans, retirees, or National Guard members. Although the program uses military structure, discipline, facilities, and staff to accomplish its objectives, program participation is voluntary, with no requirements for military service during the program or afterwards. Some experts have suggested that elements of the ChalleNGe model could be applied in non-residential settings and, indeed, a few military-style public high schools already operate in the United States.[24]

Finally, strong youth programs are focusing more on the transition for program graduates. Program effects may decay over time in part because youth have trouble maintaining momentum after they leave the structured, supportive program environment and confront a world where opportunities are limited. In addition, youth programs may have difficulty building strong links with employers, colleges, or other "post-program" resources for their participants. As noted, a number of youth programs have begun to build links to postsecondary education for their participants. Others have an "open door" policy that allows youth to maintain contact with the program for as long as they want or need to.[25] The ChalleNGe program includes a formal one-year Post-Residential Phase that is built around a structured mentoring program. Youth nominate their own mentors, who are then screened, trained, and supported by program staff. Studies suggest that well-implemented mentoring programs can have positive impacts for some young people, though the studies did not examine mentoring for high school dropouts.[26]

Future Directions

The individual and social costs of ignoring high school dropouts—or of focusing attention and resources only on those who show up in the criminal justice and welfare systems—are potentially enormous. Thus, the argument for investing more public funds in services, systems, and research for these young people

is strong, even during a period when public resources will be severely constrained. It is clearly necessary to improve and expand prevention-oriented programs in the schools, beginning as early as preschool, but the need for strong second-chance programs for out-of-school youth is also obvious. As noted, in some cases, second-chance programs can operate within the K–12 education system, drawing on its relatively stable funding.

The challenge, again, is that the knowledge base on the effectiveness of second-chance programs is still thin. Relatively few programs have been rigorously tested, and even fewer have produced unambiguously positive results. The paucity of conclusive evidence makes it hard to know how to direct resources and magnifies the importance of ensuring that all new initiatives provide for rigorous evaluation of their impacts. Although states and localities will deliver or manage most of the services for these youth, the federal government plays a key role in funding, promoting innovation, and identifying and disseminating evidence about what works.

Some experts have suggested strategies for moving forward despite the lack of definitive evidence. For example, one recent proposal identified a number of "proven" and "promising" models for youth and called for creating a new federal grant program for disadvantaged youth that would replace the Work Investment Act youth funding stream (and possibly other existing funding streams). The new program, eventually reaching $10 billion a year, would provide both formula grants to states (with much of the funding passed through to cities) and competitive grants that would encourage neighborhood-level experimentation. Rigorous evaluation would be a requirement for programs receiving competitive grants.[27]

One possible model for testing innovative approaches might be the federal Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA), which spent more than $600 million on youth-focused research demonstration projects between 1978 and 1981. Lessons on the design, implementation, and management of the YEDPA demonstrations—a comprehensive review concluded that the program yielded some valuable evidence but tried to do too much too quickly—should inform any new efforts in this area.[28]

Whatever the specific format, a new round of youth-focused research might be structured around three general topics. The first would be how to improve outcomes for dropouts who enroll in youth programs or otherwise seek to continue their education or find jobs. The second would be how to identify and disseminate strategies to engage young people who are more seriously disconnected and unlikely to join programs. The final topic, not a focus of this paper, would be descriptive and process studies of local-level "systems" to support disconnected youth. A recurring theme in the discussion below is that providing young people with opportunities for paid work may be useful both as an engagement tool and as a strategy for improving long-term labor market outcomes.

Strengthening Programs for Youth Who Reengage

As noted, most dropouts eventually seek to continue their education or find jobs. Assessing, improving, and, where appropriate, expanding the programs that serve these young people is critical. In this section I describe three possible areas for investigation.

Existing Youth Programs. Many dropouts find their way to large programs or networks such as the Job Corps, YouthBuild, ChalleNGe,

and the Service and Conservation Corps. These programs or networks often have relatively well-developed systems to ensure quality and disseminate program improvement strategies. A rigorous evaluation of the Job Corps has recently been completed, similar evaluations of ChalleNGe and the Service and Conservation Corps are under way, and an evaluation of YouthBuild is being planned as of this writing. If evaluation results are positive or even mixed, these programs should be expanded to serve more young people, while any shortcomings are being addressed simultaneously. Periodic smaller-scale, targeted evaluations could assess the progress of program improvement efforts or test the incremental impact of program enhancements, such as stronger transition services or tighter links with employers.

Other dropouts enter a wide variety of community-based programs funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and a wide array of other sources. Although the Department of Labor is planning a national evaluation of the WIA system, it is neither feasible nor appropriate to try to evaluate every program using a rigorous design, and it will always be difficult to ensure the quality and effectiveness of thousands of independent youth programs across the country. Measuring program outcomes is necessary, but does not ensure quality because programs that achieve good *outcomes* do not necessarily generate strong *impacts* (for example, they may serve youth who are relatively likely to succeed on their own). Initiatives like the National Youth Employment Coalition's Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) are designed to assess and enhance the quality of youth programs. Individual programs that appear particularly promising or innovative could receive financial incentives to participate in rigorous, federally funded evaluations. Those with positive results would be expanded or replicated.

It would be useful if some tests of existing youth programs could be structured as "differential impact studies" that assess the impact of particular program components. For example, it would be useful to understand the incremental impact of paid subsidized employment—a relatively expensive component—for particular categories of young people.

Measuring program outcomes is necessary, but does not ensure quality because programs that achieve good outcomes do not necessarily generate strong impacts.

GED Programs. Many dropouts do not enter "youth programs," but rather seek to continue their education by enrolling in classes to prepare for the GED. These classes may be offered at community-based organizations, schools, libraries, or community colleges. Each year 400,000 to 500,000 people pass the GED nationwide and more than 60 percent of them are under twenty-five years old.[29] Although it is preferable for students to earn a high school diploma whenever possible, for the foreseeable future large numbers of young people will take and pass the GED each year. The data cited earlier suggest that one reason for the GED's limited impact on labor market success is that most people who pass the test do not go on to get post-secondary training—even though 60 percent

of those who pass the GED report that they took the test for "educational reasons."[30]

The past few years have seen the emergence of a number of small programs that focus on increasing the rates of postsecondary enrollment and success for GED recipients and other adult education students. Although college transition programming has a long history in high schools, it is relatively new to the adult education field. A study by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy has identified several models of college transition programs in the adult education sphere. The models include offering student workshops or individual advising about postsecondary options; enhancing the GED curriculum to include academic or study skills needed for college entry; and integrating basic skills and occupational training in a specific employment sector or occupation.[31]

These programs need not limit their focus to academic postsecondary programs. Occupational certificate programs may have a significant payoff in the labor market. A recent study found that median earnings after college were 27 percent higher for students with a certificate than for those who left college without a degree. Given the difficulty many low-income students have completing degree programs, the study concludes that some students struggling in associate's degree programs might be better off in certificate programs.[32] Another recent study projects substantial demand in coming years for "middle-skill" jobs that pay decent wages. Accessing these jobs often requires some postsecondary training (for example, an occupational certificate or an associate's degree), but not necessarily a bachelor's degree.[33] None of these data are meant to suggest that an associate's or a bachelor's degree is not important, but rather that postsecondary occupational programs may help students build skills, raise their earnings, and move on toward a degree (particularly if programs can be structured to earn college credit). Community colleges would seem to be a natural venue for efforts to link adult education GED programs with postsecondary occupational programs. For example, Washington State's highly touted Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program combines basic skills and college-level occupational training in a community college setting, rather than expecting students to complete a GED before starting college-level coursework. Nonexperimental evaluations have found promising results.[34]

Strategies for Youth with Weak Academic Skills. Ongoing efforts to help dropouts access postsecondary education are exciting, but it is important to recognize that not all young people have the interest or the academic ability to attend college. Young people with weak reading and math skills must also have effective options.

As noted, some young people who are not interested in or qualified for academically focused postsecondary programs may benefit from occupationally oriented options. Jobs for the Future is seeking to develop intensive twelve- to twenty-four-month "Career First" programs that expand the limited options available for young people who want to find good jobs but are not prepared for college. In addition, some experts have argued that various forms of apprenticeships and internships are the most promising strategy to improve labor market outcomes for many disadvantaged youth.[35] When they are operating at a steady state, these models should be evaluated and, where appropriate, replicated.

For dropouts with very low levels of basic reading and math skills, postsecondary education, or even a GED, may not be a realistic short-term goal. Such youth may be neglected by programs whose focus is on helping participants pass the GED or find jobs relatively quickly. For example, some ChalleNGe and YouthBuild programs accept only young people who can read at a certain grade level. Ironically, the push to build links between youth programs and postsecondary education may unintentionally exacerbate this problem by encouraging programs to target dropouts who have the best chance to enter college. Experts report that programs targeting dropouts with very low reading and math skill levels are quite rare. The Youth Development Institute's Community Education Pathways to Success program is one model that seeks to help community-based organizations better serve youth who are not ready for GED programs, but much more research and experimentation is needed in this area. Research should focus not only on how best to teach young people with very low skills, but also on how best to retain them in programs long enough to make a difference. Paid work opportunities and performance-based financial incentives are two strategies that may be worth testing.

Although it is crucial to identify better ways to engage and teach young people with serious basic skills deficits, it is also important to acknowledge that some of them will not be able to obtain academic credentials. Unfortunately, today's labor market has few good jobs for this population. This reality magnifies the importance of work supports like the Earned Income Credit, which can provide almost $5,000 to low-income working families with children. The EIC, however, provides only a very small credit to childless workers and to noncustodial parents. Recently several experts have proposed increasing the EIC for low-wage workers who are not custodial parents.[36]

Identifying Strategies to Engage Disconnected Youth

Almost all of the evaluations discussed above focused on youth who voluntarily came forward to join programs. But the reality is that many young people, both high school dropouts and struggling high school graduates, do not seek out programs. Advocates note, correctly, that the existing infrastructure of youth programs serves only a small fraction of the young people who need help. But it is also true that many youth programs struggle to recruit enough young people to fill their slots. Thus, a second goal of research should be to identify and disseminate effective strategies to engage profoundly disconnected young people who are unlikely to volunteer for programs like YouthBuild, the Job Corps, or ChalleNGe.

One way to help address this problem is to make the programs for reengaged dropouts more effective to help them attract more youth. It may also be possible to test systematically various strategies to locate and engage the most disconnected youth. Such strategies might involve financial incentives for participation, opportunities for youth to provide visible services to their communities, or approaches that embrace and incorporate youth culture into the program environment, an idea championed by the Youth Development and Research Fund.[37]

At a broader scale, engagement-focused demonstration projects might operate at the neighborhood level, seeking to saturate communities with work opportunities or other supports for youth. The Youth Entitlement project, described earlier, used this approach

but mostly served in-school youth. A variation might be designed to engage more out-of-school youth. Projects of this type would also help to address the collapse of the youth labor market already noted. The much-discussed Harlem Children's Zone is another community-level model for engaging youth.[38] Although complex, geographically targeted initiatives are challenging to implement and evaluate, there may be synergistic effects from combining a range of proven program models in a single location.

Finally, though beyond the scope of this paper, it is important for researchers to consider the impact of mandatory programs for youth operating within enforcement-oriented systems like juvenile and criminal justice or child support enforcement. Although these programs compel participation, they could achieve positive impacts by using some of the same approaches as the voluntary programs already discussed. Anti-violence initiatives in Boston, Philadelphia, and elsewhere combine strict supervision with a range of supports to try to reach some of the highest-risk young people in the justice system.[39]

Conclusion

Young people who drop out of high school are a diverse group. Some will continue their education and get back on track, but many others, including a large share of dropouts from low-income families, will find it extremely hard to make a successful transition to adulthood in a labor market that offers fewer and fewer opportunities for workers with no postsecondary training or education.

The nation's schools, from preschool to high school, place a strong and appropriate emphasis on prevention-oriented programs and policies to keep students on track, but many thousands of youth nevertheless drop out every year, and the human and fiscal costs of neglecting them would be enormous. Many young people who leave school attempt to reengage as they mature, and both rigorous research and practitioner wisdom suggest that many second-chance programs are worthy of investment and expansion.

At the same time, much remains to be learned. It is important to keep assessing and strengthening existing programs, for example, by building stronger links to employers. It is also necessary to develop multiple pathways for youth who drop out. Some young dropouts have the interest and aptitude to move into academic postsecondary programs; others would do better in occupationally oriented programs; and still others need special approaches tailored to youth with very low levels of basic skills. Many young people at all skill levels might benefit from opportunities for paid work experience. Finally, it is critical to identify and disseminate lessons on how best to reengage the most disconnected young people, many of whom will need to be reached through public systems like juvenile and criminal justice or child support enforcement.

Endnotes

1. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates the number of dropouts at about 3.5 million. Analysis by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, which considers GED holders as dropouts, counts dropouts who are institutionalized, and uses a different estimation methodology, places the number of dropouts at about 6 million. National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), table A-20-1; Center for Labor Market Studies, *Left Behind in America: The Nation's Dropout Crisis* (Boston: Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). In this article, I focus mainly on high school dropouts. However, studies have found a large share of high school graduates not to be adequately prepared for work or college. Overall, about 45 percent of twenty-one-year-olds have a high school diploma or GED and are not enrolled in college; about 20 percent of that group is not employed. Many of the programs and policies discussed in this paper are potentially relevant to high school graduates as well as high school dropouts.

2. Data on dropouts by income are from 2006. See National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2008), tables 105 and 106. Data on dropouts by race and ethnicity are from 2007. See National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), table A-20-1.

3. Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters, *Locating the Dropout Crisis* (Baltimore: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2004).

4. For example, James Heckman and Paul LaFontaine write that "the true high school graduation rate…has been declining over the past 40 years [and]…majority/minority graduation rate differentials are substantial and have not converged over the past 35 years." Lawrence Mishel and Joydeep Roy conclude that "high school completion has grown significantly over the last 40 years and the black-white gap has shrunk significantly." James Heckman and Paul LaFontaine, "The American High School Graduation Rate: Trends and Levels," NBER Working Paper 13670 (Washington: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2007). Lawrence Mishel and Joydeep Roy, *Rethinking High School Graduation Rates and Trends* (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2006).

5. Andrew Sum, "The Deterioration of the Teen and Young Adult Labor Market in the U.S. and Their Adverse Consequences for Marriage, Out of Wedlock Childbearing, Young Family Economic Well-Being and Children in These Families," Powerpoint presentation (Boston: Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009).

6. Ibid.

7. Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll, "Why Are So Many Americans in Prison?" in *Do Prisons Make Us Safer?* edited by Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

8. Caroline Wolf Harlow, *Education and Correctional Populations* (Washington: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003).

9. Andrew Sum, "The Deterioration of the Teen and Young Adult Labor Market" (see note 5).

10. John Bridgeland, John DiIulio, and Karen Burke Morison, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (Washington: Civic Enterprises, 2006).

11. David Hurst, Dana Kelly, and Daniel Princiotta, *Educational Attainment of High School Dropouts 8 Years Later* (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

12. Cheryl Almeida, Cassius Johnson, and Adria Steinberg, *Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts* (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2006).

13. Laura Wycoff and others, *Disconnected Young People in New York City: Crisis and Opportunity* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2008).

14. National League of Cities, *Beyond City Limits: Cross-System Collaboration to Reengage Disconnected Youth* (Washington: National League of Cities, 2007).

15. Table 1 lists the sources for the evaluation results discussed in the text.

16. For a more detailed synthesis that includes many of the same studies, see Susan Jekielek, Stephanie Cochran, and Elizabeth Hair, *Employment Programs and Youth Development: A Synthesis* (Washington: Child Trends, 2002). The Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects used a "saturation" approach in which all youth in particular neighborhoods or small cities were guaranteed jobs under certain conditions. Thus, it was not feasible to randomly assign individuals to program or control groups. Instead, the study compared YIEPP sites to other neighborhoods or cities. YIEPP served both in-school and out-of-school youth.

17. For more information on these programs, see Stuart Kerachsky and others, *The Impacts of Transitional Employment for Mentally Retarded Young Adults* (New York: MDRC, 1985); MST Services, *Multisystemic Therapy at a Glance* (Mt. Pleasant, S.C.: MST Services, 2005); Julia Littell, "Lessons from a Systematic Review of Effects of Multisystemic Therapy," in *Children and Youth Services Review* 27 (2005).

18. The Job Corps evaluation collected data on employment and earnings from both surveys and administrative records during the first four years of the study period, and from administrative records only in years five through ten. The positive effects on earnings and employment in years three and four were measured with both data sources, though they were much larger in the survey than in the records.

19. James Kemple, *Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes, Educational Attainment, and Transitions to Adulthood* (New York: MDRC, 2008).

20. John Tyler, "The General Educational Development Credential: History, Current Research, and Directions for Policy and Practice," in *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy,* volume 5 (Boston: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2005).

21. Robert Ivry and Fred Doolittle, *Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth* (New York: MDRC, 2003).

22. Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt, *A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work: Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities* (Washington: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2008).

23. Kenneth Dodge, Thomas Dishion, and Jennifer Lansford, editors, *Deviant Peer Influences in Programs for Youth: Problems and Solutions* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007).

24. Hugh Price, "About Face: A Case for Quasi-Military Public High Schools," in *Educational Leadership* 65, no. 8 (May 2008); Daniel Donohue, *Designing a ChalleNGe-like Program for High School Dropouts*

and Students Who Are Drifting Through School, Disengaged and Repeating Grades (Fairfax Station, Va.: Donohue Associates, 2008).

25. Public/Private Ventures, "Serving High-Risk Youth: Lessons from Research and Programming" (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2002).

26. Michael Karcher, "The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment: A Randomized Study of the Effectiveness of School-Based Mentoring," *Prevention Science* 9, no. 2 (June 2008); Joseph Tierney and Jean Grossman, *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2000).

27. Peter Edelman, Mark Greenberg, and Harry Holzer, "Youth Policy Proposals" (Washington: Georgetown Center on Poverty, Inequality, and Public Policy, 2008).

28. Charles Betsey, Robinson Hollister, and Mary Papageorgiou, editors, *Youth Employment and Training Programs: The YEDPA Years* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1985).

29. American Council on Education, *2007 GED Testing Program Statistical Report* (Washington: American Council on Education, 2008).

30. Ibid.

31. Cynthia Zafft, Silja Kallenbach, and Jessica Spohn, *Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models* (Boston: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2006).

32. Louis Jacobson and Christine Mokher, *Pathways to Boosting the Earnings of Low Income Students by Increasing Their Educational Attainment* (Washington: Hudson Institute Center for Employment Policy, 2009).

33. Harry Holzer and Robert Lerman, *The Future of Middle Skill Jobs* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2009).

34. David Jenkins, Matthew Zeidenberg, and Gregory Kienzl, *Educational Outcomes of I-BEST: Findings from a Multivariate Analysis* (New York: Community College Research Center, 2009).

35. Robert Lerman, "Are Skills the Problem? Reforming the Education and Training System in the United States" in *A Future of Good Jobs?* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2008).

36. See, for example: Gordon Berlin, *Rewarding the Work of Individuals* (New York: MDRC, 2007); Harry Holzer, Peter Edelman, and Paul Offner, *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 2006).

37. Edward DeJesus, *Countering the Urban Influence* (Montgomery Village, Md.: Youth Development and Research Fund, 2005); Youth Development and Research Fund, *Listening to the Voices and Aspirations of Disconnected Youth* (Montgomery Village, Md.: Youth Development and Research Fund, 2007).

38. The Harlem Children's Zone is an ambitious, comprehensive initiative targeting one hundred blocks in Central Harlem. It includes a wide range of programs for children, from preschool through college, along with efforts to strengthen families and "reweave" the neighborhood's social fabric. The initiative's goal is to create a "tipping point" so that children are surrounded by supportive adults and peers. See www.hcz.org.

39. See, for example, Wendy McClanahan, *Alive at 25: Reducing Youth Violence through Monitoring and Support* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2004).