From the Prison Track to the College Track

Pathways to Postsecondary Success for Out-of-School Youth

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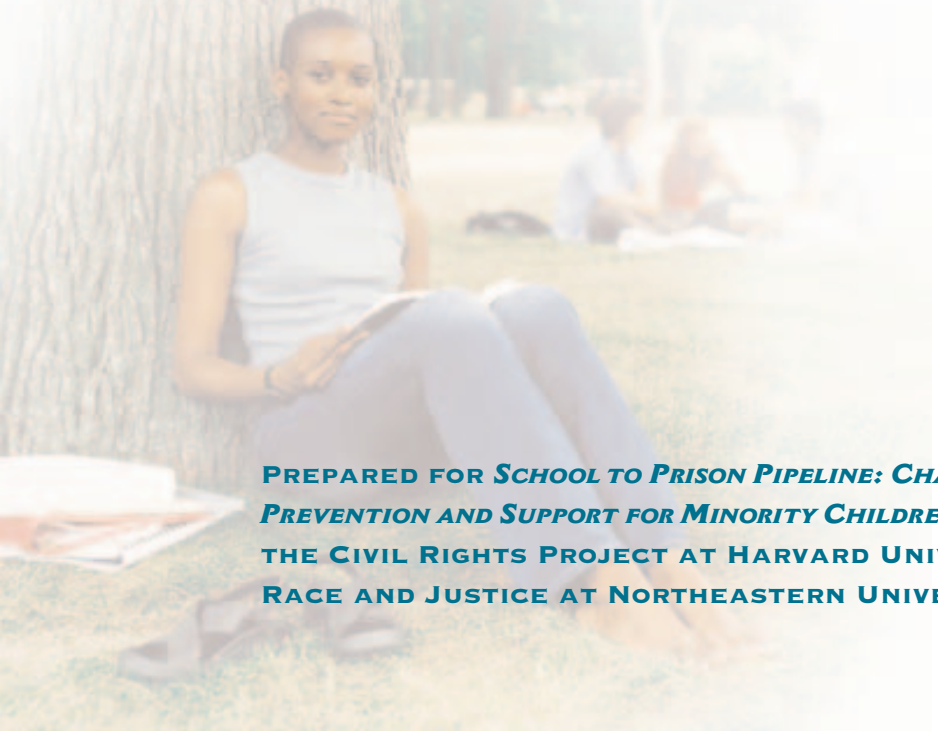

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Pathways to Postsecondary Success for Out-of-School Youth

High school marks the beginning of the "coming of age" period during which young people transition from adolescence to adulthood. Ideally, the years from 16 to 24 are a time when young people become confident, competent learners as they solidify academic, interpersonal, and social skills, establish good work habits, explore future options, and develop a realistic sense of what it will take to make such options a reality. Their success at navigating this transition will determine whether, by their mid-20s, they have obtained the education and credentials to advance to a family-supporting career.

Yet many young people learn a more discouraging set of lessons. They come to see secondary school as irrelevant, available jobs as demeaning, and their prospects and choices as diminishing. Some continue to "drop in" to school long enough to get a diploma but leave lacking the skills or interest to pursue further education. Others drop out of school altogether. Close to five million 16- to 24-year-olds (roughly 15 percent of this age group) are out of school and unemployed (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002). The percentage is far higher in our largest central cities, where large high schools attended almost entirely by minority students are losing half or more of their students between ninth and twelfth grades (Balfanz and Legters 2001).

For the most part this remains an invisible crisis. One reason why drop-out statistics are such an unreliable indicator of the extent of the problem is that dropping out is often not a single and easily countable act, but rather a protracted process of increasing alienation and disengagement from school. This process happens for a variety of reasons, academic, social, and personal: from undiagnosed and untreated learning disabilities, to a disdain for what seems like irrelevant "busywork" that will never be of use; from personal and family circumstances that lead to sporadic attendance and undermine concentration, to the conditions and cultures in schools that make it difficult for adults and young people to form relationships and that lead students to feel that no one cares.

This population is growing. At a time when our country's economic growth depends more than ever on an educated and skilled workforce, the largest projected population increases are among the demographic groups with the greatest percentages of vulnerable youth (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2001). And the so-called "pipeline to college" is leaking badly, particularly for minority and low-income youth. Some of our youth, especially African-American and low-income youth, are more likely to end up in a pipeline to prison than a pipeline to college.

Seen in this context, the ambitious promise implied in the federal law to "leave no child behind" will require moving expeditiously beyond the "one-size-fits-all," factory-model high school to a far richer diversity of learning environments. This paper focuses on four types of learning environments that appear to hold particular promise for vulnerable and potentially disconnected youth: reinvented high schools, secondary/postsecondary blends, education/employment blends, and extended learning opportunities beyond the school day, year, and building. This typology of learning environments, as well as the profiles of specific programs presented in this report, were developed as part of *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, a multi-year initiative of Jobs for the Future. JFF launched this initiative with the goal of helping urban communities take advantage of breakthrough possibilities offered by emerging learning environments being invented on the margins of the one-size-fits-all high school.[1]

Many young people learn a discouraging set of lessons. They come to see secondary school as irrelevant, available jobs as demeaning, and their prospects and choices as diminishing.

The first section paints a statistical portrait of the substantial number of urban youth who could potentially benefit from these new programmatic options. The second section describes our process for identifying and investigating emerging, powerful learning environments, then profiles four programs that show evidence of effectiveness.

We conclude with a discussion of the policy opportunities today for creating multiple avenues for young people to achieve to higher standards, along with four specific policy recommendations to meet this goal:

- Develop accountability mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of learning environments for dropouts.
- Channel increased dollars to programs for vulnerable and disconnected youth by instituting mechanisms through which public money follows the learner.
- Create a governance structure that ensures that youth who have left the public school system, or are on their way out, are counted and that they have enough learning options to get them back on the road to postsecondary credentials.
- Build political will through organizing efforts, policy advocacy, and public communications.

A Leaking Pipeline to Self-Sufficient Adulthood

In 1989, the National Governors' Summit set a goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate by the year 2000. Over a decade later, about 25 to 30 percent of the nation's youth do not obtain a regular high school diploma (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002).[2] In fact, the U.S. graduation rate has actually declined from a high of 77 percent in 1970 to a low of 71 percent by 1980, and it has hovered fairly close to this mark over the past 20 years (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002).

Dropouts face extraordinarily bleak employment prospects, especially during economic downturns.

Alienation from school is not evenly distributed across all populations of young people. Males are more likely to drop out than females,[3] as are ethnic minority youth, young people of lower socioeconomic status, and those who reside in urban centers. A report by the Manhattan Institute places the high school completion rates for black and Latino students at a dismal 55 percent and 53 percent, respectively (Greene 2001). These statistics reflect, in large part, the "weak promotion power" of close to half the schools in the nation's 35 largest cities. Nearly 50 percent of the students in these schools do not graduate in four years (Balfanz and Legters 2001). Due to their higher drop-out rates and their concentration in some of our nation's largest cities, young men of color are especially at risk for the poor life outcomes associated with inadequate educational attainment.

If recent statistics on grade retention are an indication, the drop-out crisis is likely to worsen over the coming years. The introduction of high-stakes testing in tenth grade is associated with a surge in ninth-grade retentions. In Texas, for example, by the end of the 1990s approximately 30 percent of black and Latino students statewide were required to repeat ninth grade (Haney 2001). Massachusetts data show a similar pattern. Forty years of studies on the effects of grade retention have repeatedly concluded that failing a student, especially in the critical ninth grade, is the single largest predictor of dropping out (Edley and Wald 2002). Evidence from Texas indicates that 70 to 80 percent of students forced to repeat ninth grade do not graduate from high school (Haney 2001).

Even students who do graduate from high school find themselves traversing an often-precarious path to postsecondary credentials. While nearly three-quarters of high school graduates eventually enroll in a postsecondary institution, over half fail to complete a degree, and one-third never even see their sophomore year (Haycock and Huang 2001). Of those entering public two-year colleges, fewer than a third complete a certificate or degree within three years of enrollment (Carnevale and Desrochers 2001).

A young person whose family income is under $25,000 has less than a 6 percent chance of earning a four-year college degree (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2001). Among African-American and Hispanic youth, only 18 percent and 10 percent respectively complete a four-year degree by age 29, compared to over one-third of whites (U.S. Department of Education 2001). Native-American students are more likely to drop out and less likely to complete college than any other ethnic group in the United States.

If postsecondary success is a distant goal for many young people who complete high school, what happens to those who leave school without a diploma? In 2000, 3.8 million 16- to 24-year-olds lacked a high school diploma and were not attending high school or college (Toft 2002). One in three Hispanics and one in five blacks fell into this category.[4] And this number did not include the 65 percent of the 360,000 incarcerated 16- to 24-year-olds who are high school dropouts (Stoneman 2002).

Dropouts face extraordinarily bleak employment prospects, especially during economic downturns. Only 54 percent of all young adult dropouts ages 16 to 24 were employed in March 2001, and only 45 percent held a full-time job.[5] When dropouts do manage to find jobs, they tend to get low-wage positions without benefits, job secu-

rity, or opportunities for advancement. Black youth were hit the hardest in the most recent economic downturn. The employment rate declined to only 31 percent for young black high school dropouts and to 25 percent for young black dropouts in poor families (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002).[6]

If we add the youth who graduate from high school but lack the skills necessary for an entry-level position to the more than three million dropouts, the total number of out-of-school and out-of-work youth rises to close to five million (about one-seventh of the total population of 16- to 24-year-olds). Being disconnected from school and work during the critical coming-of-age years, or even working sporadically at very low wages, dampens lifetime earnings. Yet opportunities for gainful work experience and a second chance at meaningful education and skills development are in short supply: there are fewer than 300,000 openings per year in long-term, comprehensive education and youth employment programs that can get these youth back on a pathway to postsecondary credentials, a family-supporting wage, and productive adulthood (Stoneman 2002).

Young people who fall off the track to further education and decent jobs also are at high risk of adjudication and incarceration, which then further reduces their chances of getting back on track. High school dropouts are three-and-one-half times more likely to be arrested than graduates (Lawrence et al. 2002). And once young people are arrested, they are more likely to be incarcerated than in the past, even though research repeatedly shows that incarceration is the most expensive and least effective form of intervention.[7]

Our juvenile courts and facilities are overpopulated with young people who have not been well served by our educational institutions. Most incarcerated youth lag two or more years behind their peers in basic academic skills and have high rates of grade retention, absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion. More than one-third of all juvenile offenders (median age 15.5 years) read below the fourth-grade level. The lack of educational attainment for youth under 18 incarcerated in adult prisons is even more striking. Nine out of every ten of the 11,000 youth in adult facilities have, at best, a ninth-grade education (Coalition for Juvenile Justice 2001).

Just as they are at higher risk of dropping out, youth of color are at greater risk of incarceration, whether in juvenile or adult facilities. African-American youth with no prior admissions are six times more likely to be incarcerated in public facilities than white youth with similar backgrounds charged with the same offense. Latino youth are three times more likely to be incarcerated. Racial disparities occur at each of the critical decision points as youth are processed through the system, from arrest to court referral, pretrial detention, and incarceration. In 1997, African-American youth represented 15 percent of all youth under 18 but made up 26 percent of all juvenile arrests, 44 percent of the pretrial detained population, 32 percent of youth judged delinquent, 40 percent of youth in out-of-home (e.g., locked) facilities, 46 percent of youth sent to adult courts, and 58 percent of youth incarcerated in adult prisons (Poe-Yamagata and Jones 2000).

In many ways the human, societal, and economic costs of dropping out represent a hidden national crisis. No governmental agency—at the local, state, or national level—is responsible for keeping track of dropouts and ensuring that there are opportunities and pathways for them to find their way back to a productive and satisfying adulthood. These young people fall between the cracks of fragmented secondary, postsecondary, and "second chance" institutions and policies. If we do not drastically increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of learning options available to the millions of young people living on the edge of society, many will remain forever shut out.

Our juvenile courts and facilities are overpopulated with young people who have not been well served by our educational institutions.

The Search for More Varied and Effective Approaches

There is no "one-size-fits-all" program intervention for young people who fall off the educational track. Although often painted with one brush as "at risk" or "disadvantaged" youth, young people who are indeed being left behind are diverse in their assets, their needs, and their desires. Failed by the large, traditional high school that neither motivates nor engages them, they need access to educational programming at different levels of intensity, available in a variety of locations, and delivered through different institutional arrangements and "blends" of supports and opportunities.

Until recently, most of the alternatives available to these young people have been in the so-called "second chance" system—actually a fragmented array of alternative schools, GED centers, youth employment programs, and

high school remedial programs offered on community college campuses. Historically, these schools and programs have served two, often conflicting purposes: a safety net for youth in free fall from mainstream institutions and an escape valve for the institutions themselves, as they fail to serve specific populations of young people. Not surprisingly, second-chance programs are sometimes thought of as a young person's best hope, sometimes as a dumping ground or a dead end. One thing seems clear: for many years the second-chance system has been severely under-resourced and marginalized from mainstream policy discussions and decisions. It has not produced either the quantity or the quality of programming necessary to address the growing crisis of low educational attainment in our cities.

A few alternative programs buck this trend, explicitly linking out-of-school youth to postsecondary opportunities beyond a diploma. For example, Commonwealth Corporation's "Diploma Plus" is an alternative education model that uses a competency-based approach to accelerate out-of-school youth through high school and into college. Currently in seven sites across Massachusetts and being replicated across the country, Diploma Plus incorporates post-high school experiences that genuinely look and feel different from "regular" school. Among other things, students in the Plus Phase take college courses, participate in internships, and undertake major projects, all of which involve "adult-like" experiences and require students to assume greater responsibility for their learning. However, programs such as Diploma Plus, that directly address the marginalization of dropouts from opportunities for educational advancement, are rare.

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Recently, with the growth of the small school, charter school, and extended learning/after-school movements, the division between first- and second-chance systems has begun to erode. We have a growing "gray area" as redesigned urban high schools adopt practices previously found mainly in alternative schools at the margins and as institutional boundaries blur between high schools and community-based organizations, secondary and postsecondary institutions, and educational and employment organizations. Increasingly, we see longstanding youth employment organizations running charter schools; youth development community-based programs creating high schools and adult learning programs granting diplomas; schools that combine secondary and postsecondary courses and credentials; and novel combinations of secondary and postsecondary programs for dropouts or over-age students likely to drop out.

Within this growing gray area, one can find such "hybrids" as charter high schools affiliated with YouthBuild (see ISUS, page 12); community colleges offering programs leading to college credentials for dropouts or over-age students likely to drop out (see PCC Prep, page 9); and after-school programs in which at-risk youth work alongside university students to conduct research on community needs (see Youth VOICES, page 10).

It was an awareness of this changing landscape that led Jobs for the Future to launch *From the Margins to the Mainstream* in 2001, with the immediate goal of identifying, studying, and categorizing the most promising of the new and emerging learning environments in our cities.

Jobs for the Future turned to national experts in the fields of education, youth development, and youth employment for nominations of learning environments that are unusually effective with low-income, urban youth. We asked these experts to nominate for further study learning environments in any institutional form or arrangement, inside and outside of school, that succeed in holding young people, getting them onto pathways to high school diplomas and postsecondary credentials and careers, and engaging them in contributing to their communities.

To guide the nomination process, we drew on research across the fields of education, cognitive science, youth development, and youth employment to establish a definition of effective learning environments.[8] We defined such environments as those that embody both the principles of positive youth development, emerging from more than a decade of resiliency and prevention studies, and the principles of contextual and authentic learning, based on several decades of cognitive research. Our definition also drew on the recent, strong, and consistent evidence pointing to the effectiveness both of small, personalized high schools and of community programming focused on youth development. We confirmed the validity of our definition through a review by expert practitioners and researchers with deep knowledge of emerging practice and policy issues in the development of learning options for 15- to 24-year-olds, especially youth who are not well-

served by the mainstream high school.

In addition to using the definition in identifying programs, we asked nominators to consider programs that have credibility in their communities (i.e., programs that are known and considered effective) and that could provide some evidence of their effectiveness. The nomination process resulted in over 100 recommended schools and programs, and it helped to point us to programs that succeed in attracting and holding young people, many of whom have failed in other settings, and in helping young people develop the skills they need to succeed in college and careers.

Preliminary interviews with nominators and program staff and a review of program documents narrowed the list to 55 schools and programs. Through extensive interviewing, and in some cases site visits, we sought to understand with as much specificity as possible how these 55 schools and programs translate their educational philosophies and premises into effective programming and practices, and how their operational strategies support that work. Throughout the research, we viewed ourselves as being involved in an iterative and collaborative process with both practice and policy leaders. A group of advisors reviewed and helped shaped the emerging lessons, frameworks, and policy recommendations we have drawn from the research.

To capture the diversity of the programming that this process led us to, *Margins to Mainstream* developed the following typology:

1. **Reinvented High Schools:** Small, highly focused and rigorous learning environments that use curriculum, staff, community resources, and time in radically different ways to address the developmental as well as the intellectual growth of young people and engage them in work that matters to them and a larger community.

2. **Secondary/Postsecondary Blends:** New institutional arrangements aimed at making the transition to college happen *better* (fewer youth fall through the cracks) and *faster* so that most young people have completed a first postsecondary credential by their mid-20s.

3. **Extended Learning Opportunities:** Programs that make creative use of time and resources outside of the usual school building and school day to engage young people in intensive learning that is potentially credit-bearing (toward high school graduation).

4. **Education/Employment Blends for Older Youth:** Programs and institutional arrangements that combine learning, vocational education, technical training, and work experience, hence stepping across the usual divide between education and workforce development.

Among the programs studied were a number—across the typology—that were experiencing success with vulnerable youth, including youth with a history of court-involvement or incarceration as well as 18- to 24-year-olds with a history of disconnection from school and work. These programs form the basis of the findings described here.

Our research revealed the extent to which programs for some of the hardest-to-reach young people constantly struggle with questions surrounding evidence of effectiveness. In deciding which programs to further explore, we too had to confront these questions. On the one hand, the program leaders we interviewed see themselves as being in the business of saving lives: they are intensely proud of each young person who completes the program, of each young person who proclaims that his or her life has been "saved."

On the other hand, we found that a graduation rate of around 60 percent was typical of the best programs—comprehensive programs that push and support students to achieve high standards, require them to gain competency in academic, workplace, and personal/civic skills, and focus on both school and career. As Ann Higdon, founder of ISUS, puts it: "We serve 100 percent dropouts . . . and we graduate 60 percent of them." Also typical was the attitude of program leaders that while this success rate might be a reasonable expectation given the age and prior experiences of students and the resources available, it was not the end goal. One of the things that set these programs apart is a commitment to drawing on their experience and concrete data on student progress to improve their programs and increase their success rates.

In unpacking what such programs do, we realized that their success lies with the particular and daily ways that they address the tensions inherent in helping vulnerable youth to achieve:

- They combine pressure and support, helping students manage life demands that may hinder learning, while simultaneously pushing them to meet high standards.
- They build a vibrant community where young people who may be discouraged or embittered by their previous education experiences can rebuild their trust in them-

selves, their teachers, their peers, and the process of learning.

- They mediate between remediation and acceleration for young adults who have gaps in their skills and knowledge but are not able or willing to spend four to six years obtaining high school credentials.
- They connect young people to opportunities to pursue both immediate vocational interests and needs, as well as longer-term academic and career goals.
- They recalibrate what they do on a regular basis, using data to inform the ways in which they balance the tensions listed above.

The programs featured in the four sections that follow, each of which maps to one category of the typology, are effectively addressing these tensions and contributing to better outcomes for young people. Although similar to one another in the integration of research-based education and youth development principles and practices, each has a distinctive look and feel—a result of the program's mission, origins, institutional affiliations, and location, as well as the day-to-day decisions that adults and youth make about how to mediate the tensions described above. They collectively illustrate how a range of learning options in a variety of institutional arrangements can address the needs of the diverse young people who have dropped out or are in the process of dropping out of school.

REINVENTED HIGH SCHOOLS

Maya Angelou Public Charter School: Owning the Barriers

Fueled by low scores on high school exit exams, high remediation rates in college, and outbreaks of school violence, momentum is growing to reform the American high school. Today, in over a dozen cities across the United States, a smorgasbord of school options is becoming a more accepted part of the educational landscape; indeed, some districts (e.g., the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens in New York City through the New Century Schools Initiative; the Sacramento Public Schools through the multi-city Schools for a New Society Initiative; the Chicago Public Schools in its small schools initiative) are actively promoting the rapid development of small, focused learning options. Recent and significant investments by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are helping a growing number of cities incorporate youth development principles, smaller learning communities, new small schools, and varied models of high school into comprehensive, citywide, high school reform initiatives.

Maya Angelou School sets ambitiously high standards for these students, then takes complete responsibility for helping them overcome any hurdles in their path.

While new schools are proliferating, there continue to be few high-quality options for the most vulnerable youth. The **Maya Angelou Public Charter School** in Washington, DC, is garnering increasing attention for its commitment to working with some of the most vulnerable populations, including youth in the juvenile justice system. Many of these youth have multiple risk factors, including poverty, backgrounds of school failure, undiagnosed or inadequately addressed academic and mental health needs, and families with a history of court involvement. Schools are wary of accepting these youth, and the young people themselves often have little desire to go right back into a school that was not effective for them in the first place. In Washington, Maya Angelou Public Charter School offers an alternative to some of these youth.

Like many of their students, the founders of Maya Angelou Public Charter School had negative experiences with the criminal justice system—as public defenders frustrated with the narrow slice of options available for the youth they met in the system. Based on these experiences, they designed their school to provide a comprehensive set pf experiences to young people facing multiple barriers to success.

With a philosophy of "owning any barriers to student learning," the school serves at-risk and court-involved youth in a comprehensive program that includes academics, leadership opportunities, job training, counseling, and life skills coaching. Students take part in activities twelve months a year—for ten and a half hours each day during the traditional school year and six to eight hours per day during the summer. They take academic courses and participate in a range of other activities, from internships to summer exposure programs to team-building exercises.

The Maya Angelou school works with some of the most vulnerable teens in the District of Columbia. The vast majority of students live in poverty; about one-half of the Class of 2001 had been involved in the juvenile justice or child abuse and neglect systems at some point; more than 50 percent of 2001 graduates had at least one parent who had been incarcerated as an adult, and 80 percent of those with older siblings had seen a brother or sister jailed. Over 80 percent of seniors test "below basic" on the

Stanford 9 upon entry, and nearly 40 percent of students qualify for special education services. The average reading level of entering students is sixth grade; many read at the second- or third-grade level.

The school sets ambitiously high standards for these students, then takes complete responsibility for helping them overcome any hurdles in their path. The average class size is about eight. To meet students' needs, teachers draw on a variety of pedagogical strategies, including direct instruction, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative projects. Those needing extra help with the rigorous core curriculum—most of the student body—eat dinner together and then study, with tutors to help them.

Recognizing the fundamental need for Maya Angelou students to transform their lives from one based in the streets to one of meaningful and productive pursuits, the school offers an interdisciplinary humanities class focused on the theme of transformation of self, family, community, and beyond. Over 35 weeks, students explore this theme through both academic modalities (reading, writing, discussing) and visual and performing arts (photography, creative writing, performing).

Because so many of its students have witnessed or experienced violence or had behavioral challenges in other school settings, the school has three mental health professionals and two residential assistants on staff. All students participate in group counseling, and those students for whom it is appropriate receive individual counseling.

When the school investigated why several students were falling asleep in class, it discovered that they were homeless —and this led Maya Angelou to start a residential program.

Finally, because financing can pose a barrier to college and because economically disadvantaged youth need work experience, every Maya Angelou student gains job experience and much-needed income at one of two student-run businesses: Untouchable Taste Catering and the Student Technology Center. Students also gain work experience through internships in the private sector. Maya Angelou students learn to save and invest the money they earn at their jobs and internships: each student is required to save a portion of each paycheck from the periods during the year when they are working full-time.

The school carefully tracks and benchmarks its progress with its highly challenged population, making adjustments when called for. For example, when data revealed that the greatest loss of students occurred during their first 180 days at Maya Angelou, the school developed and is piloting a small, intensive, one-year academy focused on literacy and self-management skills for students reading at second- to third-grade levels. Youth enter the school with previous attendance rates hovering around 50 percent; seniors at Maya Angelou maintain a 92 percent attendance rate. Students enter with a GPA of 1.0 and graduate with a GPA of 2.7 to 3.0. The school graduates 60 percent of its students, three-quarters of whom go on to college.

SECONDARY/POSTSECONDARY BLENDS

PCC Prep: Accelerating the Transition to College

Despite their aspirations to go to and graduate from college, many young people who begin the journey do not complete it. As detailed above (see "A Leaking Pipeline to Self-Sufficient Adulthood," page 4), the likelihood of completing a postsecondary credential remains extremely low for young people who are low-income, African-American, English language learners, or ethnic minorities. The creation of secondary/postsecondary "blended" or hybrid institutions represents a significant step forward in addressing this crisis.

These institutions allow young people to complete high school and earn an Associate's degree within a small, supportive learning environment that looks and feels much more like college than high school (and, in many cases, they are indeed on college campuses). They embody the notion that intellectual challenge and academic rigor, coupled with the opportunity to save time and tuition dollars, are powerful motivators for young people. The creation of an accelerated path to two credentials (high school and postsecondary) within a context of sustained guidance and support makes this a particularly promising model for older, vulnerable youth. **Portland Community College's "PCC Prep"** is a comprehensive program focused on helping dropouts to move as quickly as possible onto a pathway to a college credential.

As the operator of an alternative high school for dropouts in the early nineties, Oregon's Portland Community College came face to face with two problems: few of its students were enrolling in the college upon graduation from the high school, and the school was receiving ongoing complaints—some substantiated, some not—from college faculty about teenagers disrupting the adult learning environment. This was troubling news for a school that sought to use the college environment as a

more adult learning setting for high school dropouts. Rather than give up on dropouts, PCC devised a new approach that more effectively uses the college—and the promise of a college credential—as a "hook" for better outcomes for its population.

PCC's new strategy rapidly and intensively prepares dropouts for entry into college-level work, then immerses them in the college's adult environment while they simultaneously complete a high school diploma and take college credit-bearing courses. Through Gateway to College, high school dropouts with at least an eighth-grade reading level (or a seventh-grade reading level and a willingness to take catch-up literacy courses) enroll in a first-term program in close-knit learning communities of 20 students. They are exposed to an intensive curriculum of college preparatory courses designed to bring their writing, reading, math, study, and college and career-planning skills up to college level. With the close support of faculty and resource specialists, a carefully designed curriculum, and the draw of impending college coursework, these former dropouts can prepare quickly for the college experience.

PCC Prep's system of multiple entry points to a college education rests on a carefully orchestrated front-end process.

After completing these courses in this first term, students move out of their small learning communities and into mainstream college classes that count toward both a high school diploma and an Associate's degree. Their college coursework is in career "pathways" that are aligned with Oregon's career learning frameworks and the college's degree and certificate programs.

While students begin their program experience in their cohort on one campus, once they enroll in mainstream college courses they fan out across the city to any of four campuses that offer a range of courses in the state-endorsed career pathways. To ensure their success in their selected college degree program, students continue to receive intensive, one-on-one, academic advising and support from their Gateway to College resource specialist. Fully integrated into college life, they shed the former identity of "high school dropout."

This balance of support and independence has proven to be effective with older adolescents who are employed and who seek both direction and independence: 83 percent of students entering in 2001-2002 achieved the reading level required to enroll in college-level courses, and 60 percent of students completed all college preparatory requirements and went on to enroll in a full college-credit-bearing course of study. These former dropouts earned an average of 20 college credits in the first year.

Recognizing that the "pull" of college might be similarly successful with a less selective population of dropouts, PCC Prep offers two other campus-based programs to meet the needs of young people with very low basic skills or who need to earn a high school credential more quickly than Gateway to College allows. One option is the YES (Youth Empowered to Succeed) GED completion program. Depending upon their level of academic achievement, YES students who earn their GED can move directly into mainstream college classes or enroll in Gateway to College as further preparation for college-level work. While these students continue to be grouped until they complete their GED, they also benefit from the college setting and the promise of entry into college-level courses upon completion of their certificate.

The other option is the Multicultural Academic Program, which is geared to the needs of non-native English speakers. MAP students receive intensive English-language instruction and move at their own pace through three well-defined levels in order to achieve the level of English speaking, reading, and writing proficiency required to enter the Gateway to College high school completion program.

This system of multiple entry points to a college education rests on a carefully orchestrated front-end process. All students participate in a series of diagnostic assessments that allows program staff to identify which of the multiple entry points are appropriate for individual students, who enter with a wide range of literacy levels and life circumstances. In all three programs, while students are carefully coached and monitored throughout their experience, the environment of the college campus sets a tone of seriousness and focus that is difficult to achieve in a traditional high school or GED program.

Portland Community College is replicating Gateway to College through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Early College High School initiative. Riverside Community College in Riverside, California, and Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland, have received planning and start-up grants to take their successful alternative high schools to other parts of the country. PCC is currently seeking additional community colleges to replicate the program.

EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Youth VOICES: Building Skills Through Community and University Connections

Low-income young people need what most middle-class young people get as a matter of course from their schools and communities: a full complement of extracurricular activities, private lessons, travel opportunities, and summer learning experiences. Their less advantaged peers need the same array of formal and informal opportunities in the 12 or so waking hours each day they spend outside of school settings, to gain skills and develop interests that can help them advance toward postsecondary credentials and career opportunities. The best of these programs "hook" young people by appealing to their passions and giving them opportunities for civic engagement in their communities and for internships that combine work and learning.

These programs are especially critical for low-income youth who attend large, impersonal high schools that tend to limit their offerings to core academic subjects in response to tightened budgets and heightened pressures to raise the percentages of students who can meet state standards. For young people who have left school or are hanging on by a thread, quality after-school programs can be a lifeline that brings them back to school or prevents them from disconnecting altogether. Yet, as young people move through adolescence, available programming is in increasingly short supply (Tolman et al. 2002).

Although small in size and few in number, a scattering of high-quality programs around the country are effective in using time and resources outside of the usual school building and school day to engage young people in intensive, purposeful learning that connects them with their futures. **Youth VOICES** in Philadelphia adds a key element—a connection to postsecondary education—to the mix of academic skill-building, leadership development, and career exploration that characterizes the most cutting-edge, after-school programs for older youth.

"Voices is about getting your voice heard yet so much more. It's also about changing people and communities for the better as well as creating bonds." —VOICES participant

Like a number of his peers, the young man quoted above enrolled in Youth VOICES to do structured, community-based, research projects under the tutelage of Temple University students who travel to community organizations to offer the program. Through these projects, students ranging in age from 14 to 21 learn critical thinking, computer, and research skills, while honing their leadership and communication skills.

A unique collaboration among the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia at Temple University, Youth Employment Services (YES), and several youth-serving organizations, VOICES grew out of UCCP's broad commitment to community economic development. The community groups with which UCCP partnered repeatedly expressed concern about their young people's lack of foundation, critical thinking, and technological skills and also about how disconnected so many of them were from their own communities. In response, UCCP decided to add a specific focus on youth development.

The community research and other learning activities at the center of VOICES are grounded in a skills-based curriculum taught by trained university students in after-school and summer classes. The curriculum is designed to help young people assess the situations they encounter in their communities and their lives by looking at issues of power, examining stakeholders in the community, and exploring their own potential to play a role in community change. The university students, close in age and often sharing similar backgrounds to the youth who enroll, act as both instructors and mentors to the young people, opening the possibility of a more promising future that includes postsecondary credentials and career opportunities.

To further break down the barriers to university experience, VOICES brings participating youth together at Temple from across the different program sites. The young people have an opportunity to experience the university in its traditional role as an intellectual hub as they discuss their work with their peers from different sites, collectively struggle with challenges, and share victories. This human, physical, and intellectual connection to the university can have life-changing consequences for some youth. For example, two former youth participants are now VOICES instructors and Temple students.

At the same time that VOICES connects youth to the university, it reconnects them to their communities. The VOICES curriculum is designed to contextualize skill-building by focusing on community issues that matter to young people. The youth begin by mapping their communities, identifying specific community strengths and burning issues. They then select a community issue to investigate. The work culminates with presentations of findings in a public forum geared toward bringing about change in

community attitudes and behavior. One student team, for example, investigated the treatment of the elderly in their community. The students spent time at three nursing homes, observing daily life and completing oral histories with elderly companions. They also conducted community surveys on attitudes regarding the elderly and looked at research on commonly held stereotypes and misconceptions. As a culminating event, they produced a variety show in collaboration with their elderly companions, making a videotape of the event to use as a community education tool.

VOICES has proven successful in a variety of settings that target older youth. It was initially piloted at the Philadelphia YouthBuild Charter School as a class to help youth construction teams link their renovation of local buildings to the underlying community issues and political realities that led to the poor conditions in the first place. Encouraged by the success of this course, VOICES' founders looked for ways to reach more youth with the program. They revised the curriculum to support a ten-week, after-school program and a more intensive, full-day Summer Academy launched in 2001. In partnership with YES, they began to offer the after-school program in two of the city's three Youth Opportunity Centers in fall 2001, later expanding to include the third center and a beacon school. Program leaders are in the process of making VOICES into a year-long learning experience comprised of two after-school modules, each ten to twelve weeks long, and the Summer Academy, an intensive, full-day, six-week program that offers youth opportunities to go deeper with their civic projects and to participate in structured internship experiences.

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After serving over 150 low-income youth of color in summer and after-school programs, program leaders have evidence that VOICES is succeeding in keeping older (16 to 21 years of age) and often disconnected youth engaged in learning experiences that help them reconnect to their communities. For example, in 2002, 84 percent of the participating youth completed the program. Numerous small group and one-on-one discussions with participating youth have revealed that the university students are key to getting and keeping the youth's attention and to opening doors to new possibilities for them.

EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT BLENDS

Improved Solutions for Urban Systems: Rebuilding Communities/Rebuilding Lives

There is a growing consensus among experts across the fields of youth employment, juvenile justice, education, and youth development: disconnected older youth need programs that offer comprehensive employment, training, and education leading to postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market. In addition, effective programs provide: caring adults who have a strong stake and interest in the labor market success of the youth; wraparound support services either directly or through collaborating organizations; and long-term follow-up support.

The increasing public focus on educational outcomes and quality provides an opportunity to improve programs serving older youth who are out of school and out of work—and to gain more political and financial support for them. At this point, the societal investment in these young people is relatively small. For example, in 1998, the federal government appropriated $16 billion to support those enrolled in college but less than $1.7 billion for employment and training programs for out-of-school youth.

Because of strong evaluation data and concerted advocacy campaigns, the three largest national youth employment programs—YouthBuild, Job Corps, and Youth Conservation Corps—have been able to garner continuing support but at far below the level required to reach both the quantity and quality needed to impact the postsecondary attainment of vulnerable youth. **ISUS Trade and Technology Prep** in Dayton, Ohio, affiliated with YouthBuild, is emblematic of the kind of programming for older, out-of-school youth that deserves additional support.

ISUS—short for Improved Solutions for Urban Systems—Trade and Technology Prep, a charter school for 300 students between the ages of 16 and 22, combines educational innovation, youth development, and community development to engage dropouts and near-dropouts. ISUS students earn a high school diploma and college credits, while making progress toward nationally recognized certification in either the construction or computer industries.

The school has its roots in a program designed to rebuild urban neighborhoods, reclaim dropouts, and replenish an aging construction workforce through homebuilding. The original program, founded in the early nineties, developed students' core academic skills, critical

thinking, and construction-related skills, while building a sense of responsibility and pride-in-work among the highly at-risk student body. As they worked alongside of, and learned from, journeymen and master craftsmen to gut and rebuild 13 abandoned houses on a street in Dayton, students came to see how much they could accomplish. The neighborhood, although bleak, had some promising infrastructure nearby, including a hospital. Over time, these former dropouts completed and sold all 13 homes for progressively higher prices as revitalization began to take hold and positively influence local businesses as well as the housing stock.

By 1997, ISUS founder Ann Higdon had turned her attention to building a pathway to support ISUS graduates, few of whom appeared to be completing a college certificate or degree even if they continued on into postsecondary education. She developed a partnership with Sinclair Community College, a nearby institution with a longstanding commitment to reaching underserved populations. At the time, the college had just launched a construction-training program. After a successful pilot program involving 18 ISUS students, both parties agreed to develop an ongoing partnership.

Ohio's enactment of a charter school law in 1998 gave ISUS an opportunity to deepen and stabilize its program. ISUS applied for and was awarded a charter for the ISUS Trade and Technology Preparatory Charter School. Now at its full size of 300, the school enrollment is 65 percent African-American and 30 percent of Appalachian heritage. All the students are underachieving (average reading level is sixth grade upon entry), most are dropouts, and many have been involved with the juvenile justice, foster care, or social welfare systems. ISUS is guided by the concept of "High School Plus," where "plus" means college-level training in a student's chosen career path. All youth alternate between high school academics, college-level technical courses, and hands-on skills practice. They can earn a high school diploma and college credits and make progress toward National Center for Construction Education and Research certification or the computer-related A Plus and Net Plus certifications. In addition to its construction trades program, the school offers two other training programs—computer technology and manufacturing technology—in partnership with the community college.

Graduation requirements are rigorous: students must pass all core academic subjects, averaging no less than a C in the college technical courses; pass all five parts of the Ohio Proficiency Exam; achieve a 4 (out of a possible 6) on *Work Keys*, a career readiness assessment; and maintain at least a 90 percent attendance rate during their final year. To help students meet these high standards, the school keeps classes small (13 to 14 students) and makes it a priority for teachers and counselors to know students well. Academic subjects are taught in the context of the student's chosen trade, and learning is hands-on. Instruction in mathematics, for example, might use pouring concrete footings as an opportunity to teach geometry, measuring lumber dimensions to teach fractions, and reading and preparing blueprints as an exercise in ratio and proportion. Each participant, with the assistance of instructors, moves at his or her own pace to attain competency in academic, technical, and self-management skills.

ISUS is guided by the concept of "High School Plus," where "plus" means college-level training in a student's chosen career path.

Recognizing that the students need more than academic support to achieve these standards, ISUS strives to create a healthy "family atmosphere" in the school. Every day, whether they are at the school or on the worksite, students stop for twice-daily "family meetings" to air and resolve grievances and to salute one another for good deeds, thoughtfulness, and excellence.

Sixty percent of ISUS students achieve the graduation requirements in two years, despite entering the school facing numerous challenges to success. Ann Higdon and her staff continue to shape the community college partnership to improve both the graduation rates and postsecondary success of their students. The school recently installed an academic assessment and tutorial data software program aligned with the Ohio proficiencies. The system allows students to track growth and gains in core academic subjects.

The school maintains its dual focus on both rebuilding communities and helping at-risk youth progress toward successful futures, while expanding to include trades beyond construction. For example, students in the computer technology program build and refurbish computers that they then provide to families purchasing ISUS homes. In addition, the students hold week-long computer camps for children in the communities they are helping to revitalize. Children who complete the camp receive refurbished computers if they agree to come back for an hour each week to work with ISUS students who teach them to use their computers.

On the strength of its reputation, ISUS was invited by the Cincinnati school district to open a charter school in 2002-2003. In addition, ISUS was awarded four additional charters to open more schools in Dayton. These will be Trade and Technology Prep campuses, each with a different career focus.

Building One System for Youth Development and Opportunity[9]

This paper has called for a far richer diversity of educational programming to prevent dropping out and to recover dropouts. In cities where up to half of the high schools are losing half or more of their kids, following this advice means, in effect, creating a very different kind of educational system. Such a system would be comprised of a variety of learning options, at least some of which could be customized to address the particular strengths and challenges of various groups of young people at high risk of school failure. The four programming types featured in this paper could help to anchor such a system.

It is, of course, difficult to imagine how to get there from here. Young people today are caught in wide policy and institutional gaps among mainstream high schools, fragmented second-chance programs, postsecondary institutions, community organizations, and workforce development agencies. A myriad of entities bears some responsibility for the development of youth into young adults, but the lack of any coordinated infrastructure makes it difficult to *hold these entities collectively responsible* for the well-being of young people. There is no governmental infrastructure even to count the numbers of young people who fall off the educational pathway, let alone advocate for better coordinated, higher-quality learning options to get them back on track.

A more effective system would be comprised of a variety of learning options, at least some of which could be customized to address the particular strengths and challenges of various groups of young people at high risk of school failure.

This dual task—tracking the trajectory of youth and providing more options for their success—will require much stronger coordination of resources, information, regulations, and policy across the usual divides of K-12, postsecondary education, and community programming. Allowing for, and promoting, a wide variety of options for secondary schooling and pathways to postsecondary education requires an infrastructure and policies that both address quantity and quality issues and stay abreast of the progress of the most vulnerable youth.

In this final section, we suggest strategies to build on current openings and reform processes to remove barriers to the development of more, and more effective, learning options, including those that bridge the gaps among high school, "second-chance" programs, and postsecondary attainment. We close with a discussion of strategies for building political support for a system of youth opportunity founded on the premise of postsecondary credentials for all by their mid-20s.

Policies to Support Effective Learning Environments

Develop accountability mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of learning environments for dropouts.

The design of accountability measures that make sense for schools and programs targeting the most vulnerable youth is a key challenge that program leaders face in garnering political and financial support. At this point, many alternative programs are caught in a bind: if they do not graduate most of their students, questions arise about whether they are worth the investment, but if their completion rates are high, they may be accused of being "diploma mills" with watered-down standards. This debate is likely to become more polarized in the next few years as second-chance schools and programs garner more of the public dollars through, for example, charter laws and as states and localities try to survive a protracted fiscal crisis.

As we've described, some schools and programs are mediating the tensions between holding students and holding them to high standards, especially for students who are both older and further behind than the typical high school student. What is needed are new governance and accountability mechanisms that would strengthen these programs and multiply the options for the most vulnerable youth. Given the tensions that these programs operate under, and the populations that they serve, a reasoned analysis of effectiveness needs to be grounded in data on four levels: barriers faced by the student population; quality of programming; student outcomes; and the program's capacity to use data for continuous improvement.

Any strategy for assessing program effectiveness should take into consideration several key elements:

- Does the strategy offer what research tells us is necessary in terms of the quality and comprehensiveness of programming, especially given the particular barriers faced by the target population? For example, effective programs incorporate workforce preparation and work experience, high standards of achievement, clear pathways to postsecondary education and other training, and extensive wraparound services. High completion rates from lower-quality programs are not likely to represent the life changes required to put dropouts back on a pathway to positive long-term outcomes.
- Are there intermediate benchmarks that can indicate if the program is working with youth facing multiple barriers to success? While graduation rates are a critical measure of a program's effectiveness, they are not the only one of value. The progress students make in attending daily, in gaining competencies, or in changing attitudes can be important measures of effectiveness. This is especially critical with a population that may require more than one attempt to complete the program.
- What are the program's long-term outcomes? Ultimately, postsecondary credentials, job placement, and advancement are the key determinants of a program's effectiveness. Following up on youth who have left the program prematurely provides useful information on whether short-term participation leads to any gains in competencies or helps youth to make positive life choices. Information from both those who complete and those who drop out can also provide important insight into how to best improve the program.
- What are the staff's capacity and commitment to gathering and using data for continuous program improvement? Effective programs use their experience and data to continuously hone and refine their programs to better serve their youth.

Certainly, developing and implementing performance measurement systems and using the data to guide program change carries a price tag—for purchasing the necessary hardware and software, for training staff, and for staff to maintain the system and provide data in a timely manner. As one program leader bluntly stated, "Everybody wants data, but no one wants to pay for it." Both the quality and longevity of alternative programs for vulnerable youth depend on an investment in this area.

Adopt the principle that money can follow the learner.

When students leave the "first-chance" public education system, their alternative for educational advancement consists of a disarray of programs that are severely underfunded. Alternative schools and programs for the most vulnerable youth have long been the product of almost heroic, isolated efforts to provide engaging education in the face of inadequate resources and limited policy supports. The quality and quantity of these schools have suffered from underinvestment. Any strategy to redress underinvestment must incorporate the best that the second-chance system has to offer, while guaranteeing that youth in these schools and programs get a first-class education.

The schools described in this paper all rely on funding mechanisms that allow money to follow the student into other educational options. Two schools—ISUS and Maya Angelou—are charters, a status that grants them a stable funding stream and more autonomy than they would have as district high schools. To meet the considerable needs of their target populations, both have supplemented their per-pupil state funding with in-kind support (i.e., from a community college), federal dollars, and private funds. While there is ongoing public policy debate on the equity of charter schools regarding who they serve and who is "left behind," they represent one mechanism for stable funding for schools that serve vulnerable youth.

Through a different mechanism, PCC Prep receives per-pupil dollars from the district because of its status as a dropout recovery program. Every dropout who PCC Prep successfully recovers brings additional per-pupil resources into the district.[10] This mechanism for calculating per-pupil reimbursement serves as an incentive to the district to find and serve dropouts.

Several states have created special statutes to allow money to follow vulnerable students to alternative environments run by non-profit agencies or community-based organizations. For example, in a few Midwestern states, organizing has led to statutes ensuring not only that dollars follow students to alternative programs but also that a high percentage (90 to 95 percent) of per-pupil dollars will do so. Under "children at risk" statutes enacted in Wisconsin and Minnesota in the mid-1980s, students in

districts with large numbers of vulnerable youth can choose alternative environments run by non-profit agencies or community-based organizations; the schools get per-pupil funding as long as students meet the at-risk criteria delineated in the law. Besides creating a more stable funding stream for alternative education, these statutes create a flow of resources to community-based, youth-serving institutions.

States could potentially go beyond public education dollars in identifying funds to educate disconnected youth by, for example, having young adults spend their final year of incarceration in comprehensive education, training, and service programs. Tapping existing juvenile justice dollars, this option would ease reentry and increase the options and postsecondary access available to recently released young adults.[11] Some YouthBuild sites successfully operate programs entirely populated by formerly incarcerated youth. This strategy also holds the promise of future savings in likely reduced recidivism rates.

Along with higher standards comes increased public-sector responsibility to create alternatives that help all young people reach a common goal.

This particular pot of funds is quite deep relative to funding for education: between 1985 and 2000, the increase in state spending on corrections was nearly double that of the increase in funding directed to higher education ($20 billion vs. $10.7 billion); the percentage increase in state spending on corrections was 166 percent, compared with 24 percent for higher education. As spending for corrections has burgeoned, the burden for higher education costs has shifted to students who can ill afford it.

Create a governance structure that can ensure the success of all youth.

One starting point for accomplishing the ambitious agenda described here would be for a city to develop a community-wide human investment strategy. This would bring together education, mayoral, and youth employment leaders to develop and oversee a governance and accountability structure that ensures that youth who have left the public school system, or who are on their way out, are counted and that they have enough learning options to get them back on the road to postsecondary credentials and economic self-sufficiency.

As currently configured, most urban districts lack the capacity to manage and ensure the quality and equity of multiple and variable learning environments. This is for two reasons. First, large, unwieldy urban school districts survive on the bureaucracy of uniformity and standardization and a lack the policies or infrastructure to promote variability. Second, many districts do not keep accurate records of the number of dropouts or consistently track the progress of youth who do make it into alternative settings.

A citywide board could be charged with setting and holding all schools accountable for performance benchmarks, identifying effective schools and programs, redirecting funding to promote and expand more effective programs, and growing the policies and funding sources that support small schools, blended institutions, and innovative youth programming.

Building Political Will for Systems Change

Ultimately, broad-scale expansion of the types of learning environments that put dropouts and other vulnerable youth back on pathways to postsecondary credentials and family-supporting wages will not happen without a great deal of public support and political will. At this point, the demand for alternative learning environments comes from at least two sources: first, from the families of and advocates for the young people who are leaking from the pipeline through high school and college; second, from the families of and advocates for those who are not necessarily struggling but seek a faster, or more focused, route to a postsecondary credential. The concern of this paper has been with the former, but part of the policy opportunity for addressing the dropout crisis stems from the interests of the latter. The choice movement, which has spawned some new and creative alternatives for vulnerable youth, was spearheaded by middle-class parents seeking effective alternatives through high school and into higher education for their children.

The past decade has also been a period when the standards-based movement changed the rules of the game, with the unintended potential for increasing the numbers of young people who drop out. Young people must now meet more stringent promotion and graduation requirements, including passing exit examinations in a number of states, in order to get a high school diploma. This opens up the possibility of making a fairness argument: that along with higher standards comes increased public-sector responsibility to create alternatives that help all young

people reach a common goal. In making such an argument, the selection of an end goal is of paramount importance. The most transformative agenda would call for a fully developed system of youth opportunities, programmatic options, and pathways, leading all young people to a postsecondary credential by their mid-20s.

Particularly powerful strategies for leveraging support for such an agenda include: organizing efforts coupled with accountability tools to exert public demand for change; policy work on targeted issues; and public communications.

Community-based organizations that serve low-income, immigrant, and ethnic-minority communities are in a position to organize young people and the families and other adults who support them to put pressure on the system for more varied and effective learning environments leading to postsecondary credentials and career opportunities. With adequate funding to build the needed capacity, these groups could leverage key provisions in the No Child Left Behind legislation about school performance, adequately prepared teachers, and the kinds of choices young people should have if their schools persistently fail them.

Similarly, policy organizations could play a key role in pushing for targeted policies that create enabling conditions for supporting and sustaining innovative and effective models as they expand to achieve scale. For example, "watchdog" organizations like California's Budget Project, which tracks expenditures of state dollars in relation to the needs of low-income youth and their families, could be powerful allies in helping to redirect public dollars to effective programming for dropouts and other disconnected youth. Advocacy and policy organizations, such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund or Building Blocks for Youth, can add weight by pushing for policies that support proven strategies and models that maximize choice, options, and supports for low-income and minority youth. Rigorous research that identifies which kinds of learning environments and community strategies produce better outcomes for vulnerable youth can play a key role in building support among policymakers for strong models.

Finally, a communications strategy aimed at the broader public could help to make the dropout crisis much more visible and a system of opportunities for urban youth more central to the public policy agenda.

The messages should target false assumptions about youth, while building on the public's longstanding belief in and commitment to educational opportunity. For example, while overall violent youth crime has decreased by 41 percent and youth homicides by 68 percent, the public believes that juvenile crime is increasing and overwhelming believes that youth violence is a big problem facing the country. At the same time, there is strong belief among the public in young people's capacity to change, and support is solid for prevention and education programs, as long as they include a focus on holding young people accountable for their actions (Soler 2001).

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Endnotes

[1] *From the Margins to the Mainstream* seeks practical answers to the question of how communities can take advantage of breakthrough possibilities offered by emerging, powerful learning environments—inside and outside of the school building, school day, and school year. It seeks to develop policies and practices that increase the impact and visibility of learning environments that succeed in getting young people onto a pathway to high school diplomas and college-level studies and that engage them in contributing to their communities. The initiative is supported by grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and Atlantic Philanthropies.

[2] By age 22 to 24, another 10 to 15 percent of young people have completed high school through a GED or other alternative certificate/diploma. However, the GED's currency in the labor market is lower than that of a diploma, and students with GEDs drop out of college at even higher rates than those with regular high school diplomas.

[3] On average, there are 134 male dropouts for every 100 female dropouts (Sum, Mangum, and Taggart 2002).

[4] See http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2000

[5] These statistics refer to young people who have neither a high school diploma nor a GED certificate.

[6] The comparable employment rates for young white and Latino dropouts from poor families are 45 percent and 39 percent respectively.

[7] The United States spends $10 billion a year on juvenile justice, but most of this money is used for incarcerating young people, despite the fact that research has shown that confinement in locked facilities is the most expensive (costing $35,000 to $50,000 per year) and least effective of adjudication options. Recidivism studies repeatedly find that 50 to 70 percent of incarcerated youth go on to commit additional crimes (Mendel 2000).

[8] Specifically, we reviewed: research on the nature of learning and understanding; research on adolescent development; studies of resiliency and prevention; evaluations of youth development; and research on alternative and second-chance programs; as well as emerging research on small schools, comprehensive school reforms, middle schools, career academies, service learning, community-based schools, and arts-focused after-school programming.

[9] Some of the ideas in this section are explored further in "Building One System for Youth Development and Opportunity," a paper presented to the American Youth Policy Forum Hilary Pennington of Jobs for the Future (Pennington 2002).

[10] The district keeps a portion and passes the rest on to PCC Prep.

[11] Quality, comprehensive education/employment programs cost an estimated $15,000 to $20,000 a year per participant, compared to $35,000 to $50,000 a year for incarceration.

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Jobs for the Future seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers.