



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH RESPONSE TO THE ADMINISTRATION'S REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Jobs for the Future
July 31st, 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jobs for the Future has worked with the federal government, states, school districts, higher education, and community partnerships for nearly a decade to improve outcomes for off-track and out of school youth (those youth who are two or more years off-track from graduation and those that have already opted out of school). As a result, JFF has cultivated promising and proven design elements that can increase the number of these young people who succeed in pathways through postsecondary credentials and good careers.

In our response to the U.S. Department of Education's Request for Information, we are pleased to highlight key elements from the successes of this collaborative work in communities and make recommendations for the design of the proposed Performance Partnership Pilots or other efforts to improve outcomes for disconnected youth. A summary of these highlights and recommendations follows:

Two overarching considerations in selecting pilot sites:

- 1) The collaborative supports and implements interventions in a state or community that **create promising or proven, evidence-based pathways** for disconnected youth to and through postsecondary credentials and family-sustaining careers.
- 2) The **collaborative works successfully together** to plan, strategically leverage resources, and create the political/community will to implement, sustain, and scale such pathways.

While many successful sites combine both collaborative efforts and promising or proven pathways implementation, we have highlighted stellar examples of each individual element to allow for a deeper dive into each.

Examples of sites implementing promising, evidence-based interventions and pathways to credentials and careers for disconnected youth:

- ✓ **CCTA in the Rio Grand Valley: District-led Re-engagement Success**
 - Info: <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/back-track-college-texas-school-district/1128>
- ✓ **New York City's Transfer Schools: School/CBO Partnerships for Rigorous College and Career Preparation Opportunities**

- Info: http://www.metisassociates.com/images/pdf/reports/Metis_06-10_LearningtoWorkEvaluationReport.pdf
- ✓ **Postsecondary Success Initiative: YouthBuild, NYEC, and The Corps Network Increase College Readiness and College-going for Disconnected Youth**
- Info: <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/pathway-recovery-implementing-back-track/1352>

Examples of impactful collaborative efforts:

- ✓ **Philadelphia’s Project U-Turn: A Model Multi-sector Collaborative**
- Info: <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/mobilizing-cross-sector-collaborative-sy/987>
- ✓ **National Fund for Workforce Solutions: Regional Collaboratives for Economic Impact**
- Info: <http://dev.jff.org/projects/current/workforce/national-fund-workforce-solutions/142>

Program design elements for reconnecting youth on a pathway to success

Although disconnected youth are a heterogeneous population of young people, there appear to be common elements across successful and promising programs that improve outcomes through collaborative efforts and comprehensive pathways for specific segments on the disconnected youth population.

Elements critical to program designs that improve outcomes for disconnected youth:

- ✓ **Pathways to postsecondary credentials with clear on-ramps for students from multiple entry points**
 - Clear sequences of courses and navigation/supports to help students persist across transitions to postsecondary and career success
- ✓ **Acceleration, not just remediation**
 - Rigorous, college-ready curriculum and instruction paired with opportunities to make up for lost time, including the opportunity to earn college credits in high school through dual enrollment, and contextualized learning, where appropriate
- ✓ **Navigation and supports for postsecondary and career success**
 - Academic, career, financial, and social supports and counseling provided before and during transitions between institutions.
 - Planning informed by academic goal-setting/needs and real-time labor market information about strong and growing regional industry sectors
- ✓ **Strong community partnerships**

- Collaborative efforts between key state and community stakeholders to leverage and align resources; lead planning; build and sustain public and community will; implement comprehensive, supported pathways for disconnected youth; and provide counseling, navigation, and connections to postsecondary education and the labor market [More below on partnerships]
- ✓ **Data-based decision making and course-correction**
 - Strategic use of data, including early warning indicator systems and other academic and career information, to inform the design of pathways and to course-correct as implementation proceeds
 - Data-sharing facilitated to the maximum extent practicable to align planning, goals, and pathways implementation.

STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration between key state and community stakeholders is essential to fully leverage public and private sector expertise and resources in support of comprehensive pathways for disconnected and off-track youth.

Effective partnerships for improving secondary and postsecondary education and career outcomes for disconnected youth include:

- ✓ Secondary and postsecondary education institutions;
- ✓ Intermediary organizations focused on youth and community outcomes;
- ✓ Community-based, youth-serving and philanthropic organizations;
- ✓ Federal, State, and local youth programs (e.g., Workforce Investment Act programs, Juvenile Justice, Housing, Child Welfare, Health, Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Childcare);
- ✓ Elected officials, business and civic leaders; and
- ✓ Other experts in the field of youth development, education, and employment

Leveraging federal, state and local resources

One of the most important roles of a collaborative is to strategically leverage expertise and resources towards the goals of the collaborative. Given the Performance Partnership Pilot's focus on maximizing federal resources, we have listed below the federal programs that have typically been leveraged, or could be leveraged, within effective community collaborative strategies.

These include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Workforce Investment Act-Youth and Adult Formula Funds
- ✓ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- ✓ Adult Education

- ✓ Community and Development Block Grant
- ✓ Social Services Block Grant
- ✓ Community Services Block Grant
- ✓ AmeriCorps
- ✓ Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education funds
- ✓ Title I and II of ESEA (including School Improvement Grants)
- ✓ High School Graduation Initiative
- ✓ Higher Education programs, including federal student aid
- ✓ Race to the Top
- ✓ Investing in Innovation
- ✓ Promise Neighborhoods
- ✓ Title V of ESEA

State and local partner agencies also play a pivotal role in strategically leveraging resources across systems and incenting positive behavior and state/local policies for increased education options. This should be encouraged through the pilot.

Reducing barriers to creating and implementing pathways

Youth who are disconnected are, by definition, outside the country's organized systems for education and training. At the same time, many of these young people are eligible for a variety of services offered by different agencies and through different funding streams.

Far more educators would replicate what works if eligibility criteria, uses of funds, and reporting/accountability requirements were aligned and simplified across programs and agencies. Similarly, federal policies should persist in encouraging connections between K-12 and higher education data, as well as across state agencies. Performance Partnership Pilots can help remove such federal policy barriers.

Provisions that should be potentially eligible for waiver are:

- **Application processes:** multiple federal applications are more cumbersome and require more time and money
- **Eligibility criteria:** disconnected youth are found across multiple systems, and multiple funding streams are needed to address their academic, social, and work needs
- **Intake/enrollment processes/paperwork:** streamline intake for youth to encourage reconnection
- **Data management:** allow data systems to talk to each other as much as possible, while preserving privacy, in order to allow for outcome measurement and appropriate student enrollment
- **Reporting requirements:** allow communities to align disparate reporting requirements across systems to aim towards common goals—*but maintain a focus on serving the most at-risk students without creaming.*

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES

Effective community collaboratives succeed in increasing secondary, postsecondary, and employment outcomes for disconnected youth. The final outcomes that Performance Partnership Pilots are held to should focus on postsecondary credential attainment and career success; however interim measures are critical to keeping communities engaged and showing participants' progress along academic and career pathways.

Final outcomes measures should include:

- ✓ Postsecondary credential attainment (industry-recognized credentials; certificates; 2- and 4- year degrees),
- ✓ Further postsecondary educational attainment (e.g. Master's degree, additional credential work, etc.), and
- ✓ Employment outcomes (e.g. employment secured, salary/wage information at entrance to employment) should be the ultimate outcomes measured for these pilots.

Interim measures should include:

- ✓ High school credit accumulation and persistence
- ✓ College preparatory course credit accumulation in secondary school (e.g. dual enrollment, or developmental education courses taken prior to first year of postsecondary education)
- ✓ Cohort 4-, 5-, and 6-year high school graduation rates
- ✓ Enrollment in postsecondary education*
- ✓ Persistence and credit accumulation in the first year in postsecondary education and persistence into year 2*
- ✓ Passing grade of C or above in gateway math, English course in first year
- ✓ Enrollment in a program of study within the first year
- ✓ Stackable credentials earned in postsecondary education and training

ENSURING THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS ARE SERVED

To help ensure that programs retain a commitment to serving the most vulnerable populations while also increasing results (i.e. avoid creaming), there must be a balance between interim and final measures, as well as an emphasis both on program design elements that are effective with the most vulnerable populations and on improving results. When evaluating results, programs should be compared to other programs serving similar populations.

Technical assistance resources: Pilot flexibility should allow participants to use a portion of their blended funding for technical assistance to maximize outcomes from this complex community work.

Provide preference for existing, highly effective collaboratives: Communities that have shown a prior commitment to serving this population, and a willingness to come together to develop effective pathways and solutions, should receive preference for flexibility in taking on this complex work.

Provide preference for sites that align state and local policies in addition to federal policies: In order for collaboratives to maximize and sustain outcomes, to the extent possible, state and local policies should be aligned to the goals of the partnerships' work, and preference should be given to communities that have shown a commitment to leveraging state and local funds in addition to federal funds, as well as policies that encourage the success and sustainability of the initiative.