Profiles of Partnerships, Programs, and Practices to Illustrate the U.S. Employment and Training Administration's New Vision for Youth Services

Summary and Selected Profiles Prepared for Regional Forums Sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services

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SUMMARY

The number of high school age students who do not complete high school is receiving increased attention as a serious challenge facing our educational and workforce systems. Moreover, the magnitude of the problem is becoming clear at the same time as a consensus is emerging that education beyond high school is critical to economic self-sufficiency and success in today's knowledge-intensive economy. As recently as two decades ago, young people without education beyond high school could reasonably expect to get family-sustaining work in service or manufacturing operations; today they face lives of economic struggle, virtually shut out from jobs that would allow them to build assets and support children of their own.

The Office of Youth Services of the U.S. Employment and Training Administration has laid out a new strategic vision to serve this vulnerable group of young people in a demand-driven workforce system. In ETA's vision, WIA-funded youth programs will serve as a catalyst to connect these youth with quality secondary and postsecondary educational opportunities and high-growth and other employment opportunities. ETA has identified strategic opportunities and approaches in four focus areas:

- Alternative education;
- Business demands in high-growth industries and occupations;
- Neediest youth; and
- Improved performance.

This paper offers a series of profiles developed by Jobs for the Future of on-the-ground partnerships, programs, and practices that illustrate aspects of ETA's new vision for youth services. The intent is to provide the WIA youth system with illustrations of the feasibility and desirability of the directions set out in the ETA *Vision Paper* by looking to the field for examples of these strategic approaches in action.

To guide its work, JFF worked with ETA to establish three areas of inquiry that correspond to the strategic opportunities and approaches identified by ETA:

- Cities where the local workforce system collaborates with the school district to meet the needs of under-performing and out-of-school youth;
- Programs that engage business in providing employment and educational opportunities in high growth fields for out-of-school youth; and
- Practices that help systems to improve performance, particularly in literacy/numeracy, and use data for case management, tracking outcomes, and program improvement.

ETA's commitment to the neediest youth is reflected here through the deliberate inclusion of places, programs, and practices particularly targeted to these populations.

Outline of the Report

The paper begins with overarching field-based observations that emerged from the profile development work. The full report contains eleven profiles, each of which aligns to one of the areas of inquiry outlined above. The profiles in the full report are presented both in brief, to give the reader a sense of the range of places and programs profiled, and in full. This summary includes the field-based observations and three full profiles.

The profiles have been designed to illustrate the extent to which the ETA vision builds on and helps to create the conditions for promising practice in the field. In identifying the programs and practices to profile, JFF relied on multiple key informants and national databases. Given the intent of the product and its scope, the criteria for selection were both recognition and credibility in the field. The programs and practices profiled here should therefore be viewed as promising rather than proven. Nevertheless, they offer insights and information that both policymakers and practitioners can use as they move forward with implementing the ETA vision.

Field-based Observations

Our inquiry in the field produced some "good news" and a confirmation of the direction of the ETA vision. Specifically, we found encouraging examples of:

- Collaborations between local education and workforce systems directed at improving the quality and outcomes of alternative education;
- Schools and programs that engage employers in blending education and workforce development to offer older disconnected youth a second chance at education, workforce credentials, and good jobs; and
- Performance improvements in the youth workforce investment system through the use of data for case management and program improvement, and through the development of new approaches and materials for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of out-of-school youth.

We drew five field-based observations from our analysis of encouraging examples that align to ETA's strategic vision. It is our hope that these emergent lessons will be useful to ETA in the implementation of its vision, provide some direction to policymakers, and help to delineate fruitful areas for further research.

1. **Collaboration between workforce and education systems can lead to more strategic and better targeted use of resources for alternative education, particularly if the alternative education programs are well-organized and supported.**

In the cities we examined, collaborations between youth workforce development and alternative education systems are opening doors to new possibilities for targeting resources and integrating services to meet the needs of out-of-school youth. In

Portland, Oregon; Boston, Massachusetts; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, systemic collaboration between the workforce system and an organized and supported alternative education network is leveraging comprehensive workforce development and academic skill development services for out-of-school youth. Strategic use of limited resources allows the partnerships to provide the type of comprehensive programming that will increase the likelihood that out-of-school youth will acquire the academic and career-related skills they need for economic self-sufficiency.

All three partnerships benefit from alternative education programming that is well-organized and supported through provider-driven networking and/or through state and district policies that promote and sustain a coherent array of alternative learning options. The systemic approach to alternative education programming in these cities allows the partnerships to broker services across sites and impact a larger number of youth.

For example, in Portland, where supportive state policy, district infrastructure, and active alternative school providers have created a well organized system of alternative education, the Youth Opportunity (YO) Center is staffed by four major alternative education providers, and five alternative schools serve as additional YO sites in the community – ensuring that YO services are integrated with academic programming.

The strength of the alternative school system in Portland has also enabled alternative providers to influence and help the district's large comprehensive high schools, particularly ones struggling to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks. For example, students participating in Roosevelt High School's partnership programs with Open Meadow Alternative Schools have made significant academic gains in literacy and math. These include gains of close to three grades in reading for incoming ninth-grade students who were identified as at risk of academic failure and who participated in a summer orientation program and 36 hours of following-up tutoring, compared to less than a one grade-level gain for Roosevelt students overall.

Collaboration between the youth workforce investment system and alternative providers in Boston led to the organizing of providers into a Youth Services Provider Network that meets regularly to ensure that services are streamlined and coordinated. All 13 providers in the network collaborate to ensure that WIA youth receiving services in any network program can access "career explorations" that four of the programs provide in key Massachusetts industries. In addition, alternative providers use a common supplemental literacy/math curriculum – the Aztec curriculum – at both the YO Center and the alternative schools. Common use of the Aztec curriculum has resulted in a more strategic diagnostic and placement process between the YO Center and alternative programs and more concentrated support for youth with low literacy and numeracy skills. The first year of full implementation saw improvements in program retention and close to a 50 percent increase in graduation rates at alternative sites.

2. **State and local policies play a key role in advancing quality alternative education and supporting cross-sector collaboration.**

Alternative schools and programs in the communities profiled benefit from state and local policies that provide stable funding and promote collaboration across sectors, which enables the alternative system to serve as a springboard for coordinated workforce investment in out-of-school youth.

Oregon state policy promotes the development of a wide range of alternative learning options. Statutes require school boards to maintain learning situations that are flexible with regard to environment, time, structure, and pedagogy. Statutes also describe a mechanism by which alternative options receive a high proportion (80 percent) of state per-pupil funding. In Philadelphia, Youth Council policy requires the community providers of WIA youth programming to link the services they offer youth to education programs. WIA-funded services are defined as "companion programs" and WIA providers wrap employment opportunities, educational support, and social support around the district's alternative education programs.

3. **Education programs that connect out-of-school youth to high-growth industries:**

    - **Have specific roles for employers in providing quality assurance and on-the-job training;**
    - **Are characterized by structures that allow for relatively short initial training followed by advancement possibilities; and**
    - **Are operated by a range of organizations with strong connections to business and education.**

Programs that engage out-of-school youth in pathways to high-growth fields are operated and sponsored by a diverse array of organizations, including civil rights, faith-based, community based, and business associations. While sponsorship is diverse, the mission across these programs is similar: to provide employment opportunities for low-skilled, typically low-income individuals. Out-of-school youth constitute the majority of the population served by the programs profiled in this inquiry.

These programs also share similar characteristics: specific roles for employers; responsiveness to the market needs of the local economy; connections to the education sector; and structures that offer intensive, relatively short initial training for immediate skilled employment as well as further advancement and training in the form of postsecondary credentials or employer training programs.

For example, drawing on its partnership with local employers and trade unions, Taller San Jose Tech, a program of a community-based social service center, offers training to out-of-school youth, over 90 percent of whom test at a fifth-grade math level and sixth-grade reading level. This training prepares them for employment in two local industries with high demand for skilled employees: construction trades and information technology. Over 75 percent of the youth who co-enroll in an on-site diploma-granting alternative school complete their degrees. The school provides personalized instruction in a curriculum that meets all of the state's competency requirements. The staff also

encourage and support graduates to pursue postsecondary credentials in their chosen industry.

Employer partnerships ensure the quality and credibility of the training through an advisory board that oversees the curriculum and certification requirements, assesses program outcomes, and serves as ambassador for the program in the community by building employer networks. Employers participating in the networks make annual commitments to place a specific number of Taller San Jose participants in full-time employment. Of the graduates, 86 percent are employed within 30 days of graduation. At six months after graduation, 93 percent are employed.

Focus: HOPE in Detroit, Michigan, similarly engages industry professionals to serve as industry advisors, influence curriculum and certification decisions, provide sites for internship experiences and employ graduates for the three employment programs they operate: Machinists Training Institute (MTI), the Center for Advanced Technologies (CAT), and the Information Technologies Center (ITC). Each program offers intensive, modular training supported by employment partnerships that ensure marketable credentials and provide permanent employment placement for graduates.

The MTI program, the "heart and soul" of Focus: HOPE according to program staff, specifically designed its first-level module to respond to the dramatic decrease in the age of participants and the retention and training concerns for the out-of-school youth population. The modular structure provides exposure to machinists/technology careers through an intensive training program and ameliorates the "cultural confusion" out-of-school youth can experience in a workplace environment

Students in Focus: HOPE programs can earn college credits/degrees as well. Those who progress beyond the first module of the MTI program can earn up to 30 articulated college credits. Students in the CAT program, a partnership with six companies, an engineering society, and five universities, can earn both Associate's and Bachelor's degrees. MTI graduates enter the workforce earning an average wage of $11.00 per hour. CAT graduates who earn a B.S. degree enter with an average starting annual salary of $55,000. CAT is also the largest producer of minority graduates in manufacturing engineering, according to the National Science Foundation.

4. Educators have begun to adapt adolescent literacy and/or adult literacy/numeracy programs for out-of-school youth.

Older out-of-school youth with low literacy and numeracy skills require programs that address their specific needs. Rather than develop entirely new curricula, educators concerned about the growing population of out-of-school youth have begun adapting curricula originally designed for younger adolescents or youth with more age-appropriate skills to more appropriately serve older, disconnected youth.

For example, PCC Prep has adapted the college's developmental math course to focus less on "brushing up" skills for adults who have been out of school for a few years, and

more on teaching skills to young people who may have a wide range of experience in math. In addition to building basic math skills, the curriculum for out-of-school youth incorporates study and college preparatory skills, and enables youth to gradually and systematically take charge of their own learning. The results have been promising. Eighty-eight percent of students showed progress toward college-level math proficiency by passing a Gateway to College math class and qualifying for a higher-level math course.

The National Center on Education and the Economy adapted its Ramp-Up to Advanced Literacy program for use in alternative education programs by making the materials more flexible, streamlining the curriculum so that youth in short-term programs can make progress quickly, and adding more instruction and content to the teachers' notes – recognizing that the capacity in the field is not that of the regular K-12 system. At the same time, NCEE kept the curriculum's link to real-world problems and its powerful emphasis on motivating and engaging learners . Early reports on use of the curriculum have been promising. One alternative education program serving primarily English language learners reported that all the students went up at least one level in ESL.

5. **To improve their performance, systems use data for case management and program improvement and to track outcomes for out-of-school youth.**

There are promising examples of communities that are using data to both drive improved program performance and ensure that all youth receive services to achieve secondary and postsecondary success. In Hartford, Connecticut, for example, a collaboration between YO and school district staff to identify and engage youth who are at-risk of dropping out has led to the development of Hartford Connects, a Web-based case management and reporting system that a variety of partners are expanding to help improve educational and employment outcomes for youth. Hartford Connects links the Hartford Public Schools, city departments focused on youth, and 15 to 25 community-based agencies, including YO Centers, WIA youth programs, and community- and faith-based initiatives.

Although still in the early stages of development, the initiative is already improving access and coordination of services for re-engaging dropouts. Participating service providers meet monthly to review information on dropouts generated by the Hartford Public Schools MIS system and determine which agency has the best leverage to reach out to each individual youth, based on services, geographic location, and personal connections. While a primary focus is on re-engaging youth in high school, partners have identified alternative options for those young people who have indicated they are unwilling to return to a Hartford Public Schools high school. These options include a newly created Diploma Plus program and a credit retrieval program for adjudicated youth who are behind in credits.

In Portland, Oregon, Worksystems, Inc., which manages the city's workforce investment system, has significantly revised its performance management system to include the implementation of additional interim performance measures for assessing the progress

of youth toward outcomes and providing enough information for managing program performance. The focus in designing these measures was to help ensure that all case managers have ongoing, workforce development-focused contact with youth, and that all populations – in-school, out-of-school, older, and younger youth – progress appropriately toward identified outcomes.

The revised and improved data management system allows the Portland YO program manager to look at data daily, weekly, and monthly, and to work intensively with programs to identify which youth are and are not being served, the barriers to service, and strategies that can be put in place to better engage those youth. It has played an instrumental role in the Portland YO system's rebound from early poor performance. The Portland YO system is now recognized as a high performer by meeting and surpassing U.S. Department of Labor performance targets.

The regional Youth Council recently approved a Worksystems proposal to implement interim measures similar to the YO measures in order to provide the WIB and its provider network with useful and timely information for the management of WIA youth programs.

Conclusion

Taken together, the field-based observations strongly suggest that ETA's direction as outlined in its *Vision Paper* is both feasible and desirable. We found field-based examples of the strategic approaches described in the *Vision Paper* across all four of the focus areas. The field-based observations described here and in the following profiles of partnerships, programs, and practices indicate that strategic opportunities can be leveraged to ensure that out-of-school youth receive the education and training they need to succeed in today's economy.

In particular, the move to improve the quality and outcomes of alternative education programs through cross-sector collaboration between the K-12 and workforce investment systems appears promising. ETA's new common performance measures will be critical to ensuring that outcome measures are aligned between the two systems. An investment in research that strategically defines and assesses the impact of cross-sector collaboration on outcomes for out-of-school youth would provide valuable information on the efficacy of fostering and supporting such collaborations. Moreover, such research would tell us much about the effectiveness of programs for out-of-school youth operating at the nexus of the K-12 and workforce investment systems and the extent to which these programs move youth onto pathways to economically self-sufficiency and satisfying adulthoods.

PROFILES

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Portland, Oregon

Portland, Oregon's extensive network of high-quality alternative education programs for youth who have dropped out of school more closely approximates a "system" of alternative programming than can be found in most communities. This system has served as a springboard for coordinated youth workforce investment services: leveraging the infrastructure of educational options for out-of-school youth, the local workforce investment system provides young people in alternative settings with access to significant workforce development opportunities. Moreover, alternative schools with youth workforce development programming have begun collaborating with district comprehensive high schools in the provision of supplemental services to help students meet state standards and to help schools achieve Adequate Yearly Progress, as specified in No Child Left Behind. This profile discusses the key features of Portland's emerging second-chance system for youth.

Leveraging the Workforce Development System for Out-of-School Youth

Portland's youth workforce investment system leverages the city's comprehensive "second chance" system of alternative schools for out-of-school youth by co-locating services and integrating resources with alternative schools and programs. The workforce system has begun to move toward a "systems view" of resource utilization, going beyond disparate funding configurations and institutional, organizational, and program interests.

The development of a youth workforce investment system integrated with the existing alternative schools is made possible by a powerful network of alternative providers that are grounded in the community, have a track record of reaching youth who have dropped out of school, and can provide youth with career development and career ladder programming. Both Youth Opportunity and Workforce Investment Act contract services are built upon an extensive network of alternative programs reaching the population of young people targeted by WIA.

The extent to which Portland has decentralized Youth Opportunity programming is unusual. After a shaky start, when YO services were centralized in a single site but outcomes were poor, the Portland workforce investment system was revitalized under new staff and engaged the city's network of alternative education and service providers in fundamentally reorganizing the YO system to better leverage the network. This network of providers successfully advocated for building the YO network of services on the existing alternative system. As one provider put it, "We have six youth competing for each slot in our programs. We have the youth for a critical mass of hours during the day; it made sense to build the workforce investment system on our network."

Today, Portland has a Youth Opportunity Center staffed by four major providers, along with eight additional YO sites in the community, five of which are alternative schools. Each provider in the network has a lead staff person responsible for case management of youth within its program and, in some areas, for one portion of the YO services for the entire network. For example, a staff person at one organization is the lead for community service programming and coordinates all programming for youth participating in that service across the network of providers. The system requires very close coordination and mutual accountability among providers, as well as a strong degree of trust that a youth referred to another site will receive the required services.

In addition, WIA formula-funded services are co-located and integrated with alternative providers. All thirteen youth service providers are in the alternative network, and WIA funds leverage the significant additional resources required to support a high-impact, successful program. For example, two organizations in the network of WIA-funded youth workforce programs are nationally recognized for their success in achieving education, training, and employment outcomes for at-risk, disadvantaged youth: Portland Youth Builders is a demonstration site for YouthBuild's National Schools Initiative, and Open Meadows Alternative School has been recognized by the Department of Labor and the National Youth Employment Coalition's PEPNet.

The cost of achieving such positive outcomes in these two programs averages about $20,000 per youth, per year. WIA and YO funds provided through Worksystems, Inc. (the regional WIB) support 27 percent of this actual cost, with the rest funded through Average Daily Membership (ADM) and private foundation funding. In this way, WIA funds have allowed these programs to provide comprehensive academic, career development, and employment and training services to disadvantaged youth and, as described below, enabled them to serve as key service providers to large high schools not meeting AYP goals.

The WIB has set out a five-year strategic plan to ensure that all WIA services target the geographic areas of highest need and continue to leverage other systems and sources of dollars. This plan builds on the current collaboration between the alternative providers and the workforce investment system and envisions a more advanced level of collaboration. For example, the plan states that future contracts will require youth workforce system contractors to commit to: collaborative resource development, sharing of best practice curriculum integrating academic and real-world applications, and the use of Workforce Case Managers who focus on providing collaborative service: "delivering youth to services rather than services to youth." In addition, programs funded will be required to develop articulated credit programs with postsecondary institutions that give college credit to youth involved in secondary educational programs.

Ensuring Quality and Access

Portland has organizations, frameworks, and strategies in place that support the attainment of quality in alternative schools and programs and that ensure access to programming for youth in need of services.

For example, Portland Public Schools has a service contract with alternative schools and programs that requires them to establish measurable and specific Annual Student Performance Objectives in three areas: student attendance and retention; student conduct; and academic achievement. The district must approve the program's/school's objectives, and it has contracted with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to establish and maintain a Student Application and Progress Monitoring System database. Each school/program is required to measure student academic growth or lack thereof and account for students' scores in reading and math using Computer Adaptive Testing at entry and exit. The school/program must conduct satisfaction surveys and use the Social Skills Rating System questionnaires, or similar instruments, to measure changes in student behavior.

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory prepares an annual report on student outcome measures for the board of the Portland Public Schools. A subcommittee of the board annually reviews the outcomes with the Director of Education Options, holding schools accountable to negotiated objectives for improving outcomes. WSI reviews the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory data, in addition, to collecting its own data on literacy gains.

In addition, the Coalition of Metro Area Community-Based Schools, a network of Portland's contract alternative schools, advocates for schools and services for out-of-school youth, plans collaborative programming, and shares curricula. Several years ago, the coalition, until then a loose network of providers, accessed city funding to create promotional materials on the range of second-chance options. The process of developing common materials served to coalesce the network for the purposes of advocacy for second-chance opportunities, while creating an outreach mechanism to ensure that students have access to the programs.

In recent years, the coalition has played a key role during annual budget negotiations, helping protect core services from budget cuts. For example, during one year's negotiations, the alternative providers collaboratively determined which programs could afford to take a cut and which could not, and it made recommendations to the district accordingly. The coalition has also brought students to budget hearings to testify about the value of the alternative schools, and it has negotiated collectively with the district regarding the number of slots to be funded annually.

Helping High Schools Meet Adequate Yearly Progress Goals

The overall result of a strong state policy framework (described in detail below), district infrastructure and accountability mechanism, and WIA investment in alternative schools is a broad array of alternative schools and programs that have begun to influence how Portland's large, comprehensive high schools operate. Over the last two years, the alternative schools have begun developing collaborative relationships with the district's comprehensive high schools to assist those schools to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress goals.

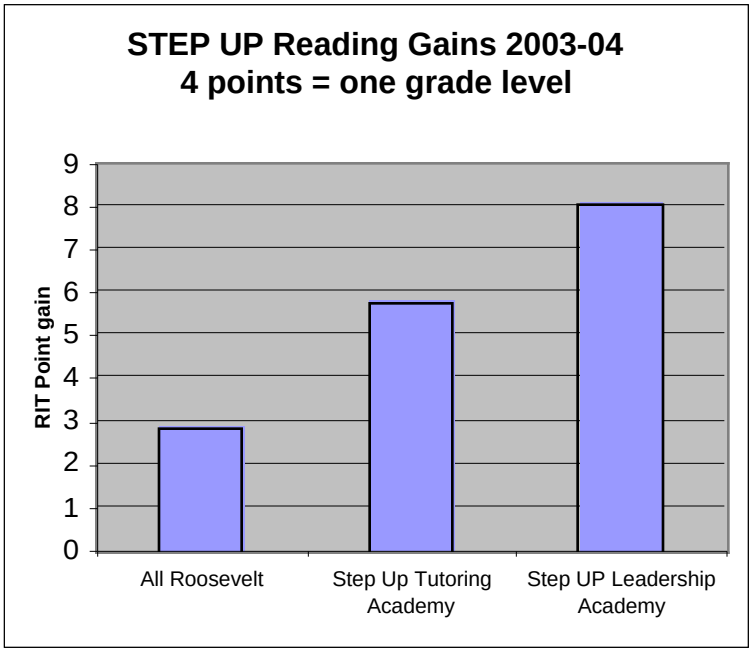
The most developed partnership is between Open Meadow Alternative Schools and neighboring Roosevelt High School. Using "supplemental services" funding under No Child Left Behind, Open Meadow developed "Step Up Leadership Academy," a summer orientation program for Roosevelt's incoming ninth-grade students who had been identified as at risk of academic failure. Offered in the summer of 2003, the program was designed as a "week of students' being successful," in the words of a Roosevelt administrator. It was run collaboratively by Open Meadow and Roosevelt staff. Students participated in ropes courses, diversity training, intensive leadership development, and team building to help them develop the habits, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for success in high school. At the end of the week, parents engaged in activities with their children and the staff of Roosevelt and Open Meadow.

Through this initiative, each student forged a strong relationship with at least one Roosevelt or Open Meadow staff person. During the school year, Open Meadow conducted two follow-up activities: weekly tutoring by Open Meadow teachers certified in content areas; and mentoring by upper-class Roosevelt students. Staff also continued outreach and support to the parents. Through a second program, the Step Up Tutoring Academy, Open Meadow provided tutors for any Title I-eligible students in the school.

All students who participated in Step Up have stayed in school and are making significant academic gains that are directly attributable to the program. Students who participated in one semester of the Leadership Academy gained close to three grade levels. The average reading skill gain for Leadership Academy students was two grade levels; for Tutoring Academy students, it was between one and two grade levels; for Roosevelt students overall, it was less than one grade level. Math gains were similarly impressive: Step Up students fell far short of the eighth-grade math benchmark at the beginning of the program and were on grade level at the end of ninth grade.

By the end of the 2003-2004 school year, 100 percent of the Leadership Academy students were still attending school. Those who had not transferred to another school continued to participate in Step Up throughout the year.

The graph shows the reading skill gains from the Degrees of Reading Power Assessment administered by Roosevelt at the beginning and the end of the 2003-2004 school year:



- Average gain for Step Up Leadership Academy students was 8.1, or the equivalent of two grade levels.
- The gain for students in the Step Up Tutoring Academy was 5.8
- Roosevelt's all-student average was 2.9.

Step Up students who were tutored in math showed accelerated skill gain on the Oregon Statewide Mathematics Knowledge and Skills and the C.A.T. Math Survey 6+. Participants showed an average 7.5-point gain, or close to two grade levels. The group average was well below the eighth benchmark (231) at the start of the program, and it was at benchmark at completion of the first year.

Plans are in place to expand the program in the summer of 2005 to eighth-grade students preparing to enter Roosevelt. With funding from Portland's Children's Investment Fund, Open Meadow will run "advocate groups" for those students to help them prepare for high school. In addition, because Roosevelt is restructuring into autonomous small schools in 2004-2005, Open Meadow will run three summer leadership camps for incoming ninth graders and provide after-school tutoring for each of the small schools.

College Connections for Out-of-School Youth

In Portland, the integration of education and workforce development extends beyond the K-12 system to the postsecondary system. Portland Community College (PCC), the area's largest community college, has played a key role in the provider network and workforce investment system through:

- Developing a set of PCC-operated programs to launch out-of-school youth onto pathways to college, and
- Developing dual enrollment partnerships with other second-chance providers.

PCC Prep is Portland Community College's combined high school/college program: high school dropouts earn both a high school diploma and community college credit. Gateway to College, PCC Prep's flagship program, clusters youth in small learning communities of 20 students; they take an intensive first-term curriculum of college preparatory courses designed to bring their writing, reading, math, study, and career planning skills up to college level. Students then move into mainstream college classes that count toward both the high school diploma and an Associate's degree. They participate in customized, career pathway coursework that appeals to their need for both direction and independence. Throughout, a PCC Prep resource specialist provides intensive academic and personal counseling and support.

PCC Prep offers multiple entry points for a diverse population. To enroll in Gateway to College, students must attain an eighth-grade reading level (or a seventh-grade level and a willingness to take additional catch-up literacy courses). Older students with very

low skill levels enter PCC Prep's GED program, where they can earn a GED and transition into college-level courses. Limited English proficient students attend the Multicultural Academic Program and concentrate on developing language skills and then they transition to Gateway to College.

PCC also offers dual enrollment opportunities to youth in second-chance learning environments across the network. For example, Portland YouthBuilders has an articulation agreement with PCC. Students who successfully complete the Portland YouthBuilders program receive up to 11 credits in PCC's construction department. As stated above, the strategic plan for the youth workforce investment system articulates a requirement that contractors develop dual credit and dual enrollment opportunities for youth in their programs.

State and Local Policy Framework that Supports Programming

The strong collaboration and integration of WIA and the alternative schools is made possible by the support alternative schools receives from state and local policy. Portland benefits from a strong state policy framework that promotes the development of a wide range of alternative learning options. Oregon statutes and administrative rules describe the responsibility of district school boards to maintain learning situations that are flexible with regard to environment, time, structure, and pedagogy. With this framework, alternative schools can be developed and operate with significant autonomy and a high proportion (80 percent) of Average Daily Membership, or per-pupil, funding (see box).

Portland Public Schools has taken a proactive stance regarding state statutes and rules. The district maintains an office of Educational Options, and it has created a handbook that provides concrete guidance on proposing educational options. According to that handbook, the district encourages "cooperative efforts among educators, families, and the district to propose innovative yet proven ways to enhance the district's educational program and student achievement policy." Alternative education options are one of several educational options described in the handbook, which also includes neighborhood schools, focus options, and public charter schools.

Oregon State Policies Regarding
Alternative Learning Environments

- *Broad definition of alternative programming.* "Alternative education" is defined as meaning a "school or separate class group designed to best serve students' educational needs and interests and assist students in achieving the academic standards of the school district and the state." According to state statute, students placed in alternative education programs are those whose educational needs and interests are best served by participation in such programs and include youth with erratic attendance or significant disciplinary problems, who are expelled or suspended, or who do not meet or who exceed state standards.
- *Responsibility of districts to maintain flexible learning options.* District school boards must maintain learning situations that are flexible with regard to environment, time,

structure, and pedagogy. The Oregon Board of Education is required to define the accountable activities and allowable credit for activities in alternative education programs, adopt a process for registering private alternative programs, and establish standards for a safe educational environment and instructional program that provides students with the opportunity to make progress toward achieving state academic content and performance standards.

- *Requirement of district to notify parents and/or students of options.* District school boards must adopt policies and procedures for notifying students and parents or guardians of the availability of appropriate and accessible alternative programs. Districts must also adopt procedures for parents or guardians to request the establishment of additional alternatives within the district.
- *Types of programs/relationship to district.* Oregon has two kinds of alternative learning programs: public and private. Public schools are created, approved, operated, and evaluated by local school districts. Private programs operate on contract with school districts and register with the state annually regarding which students they serve and the need they intend to fill. The contracting school districts approve the sites and evaluate them according to a menu prepared by the state.
- *Financing.* State administrative rules stipulate that every student in a contract alternative school is funded at a minimum rate of 80 percent of ADM. Weights in state funding add dollars for up to two additional categories per student: English Language Learner, special needs, pregnant/parenting, and "residential" (i.e., in a residential program). In addition, state rules describe two ways that a school may be funded: based on enrollment or attendance. The rule describes how districts recover general fund dollars from the state to allow alternative schools/programs to structure services differently than in regular schools; a formula translates the intensity of the service to the traditional time-on-task framework. For example, one hour of one-on-one tutoring earns the same dollars as if the student were in multiple hours of classes.
- *Credit Options.* Students may earn credit in a variety of ways, such as showing classroom or equivalent work (e.g., a supervised independent study, career-related learning experiences, project-based learning), demonstrating competency or mastery via passing exams, providing work samples, or providing documentation of prior learning activities/experiences (e.g., certification of training).
- *Staffing.* A private alternative education program is not required to employ only licensed teachers or administrators, but this is likely to change under NCLB. Teachers/administrators of private alternative programs are not considered district employees. Any Oregon teaching license is valid for teaching all subjects and grade levels in an alternative education program.
- *Individualized benchmarks.* The alternative programs must teach to state content and performance standards, at the appropriate benchmark (not necessarily grade level). Programs must assess students, then set appropriate performance standards.

Pathways to Credentials for Out-of-School Youth: Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS) Dayton, Ohio

In response to employer demand, Improved Solutions for Urban Systems offers out-of-school youth an opportunity to gain employment training and education through a system of industry focused charter schools. These innovative charter schools, for students between the ages of 16 and 22, integrate industry certified high skilled training with academics, youth development, and significant community service initiatives to serve youth.

Several key features make this program illustrative of employer-led, educationally grounded programs that prepare out-of school youth for skilled employment in high demand occupations:

- Mutually beneficial employer partnerships;
- Innovative blend of education and employment training;
- Infrastructure for scale and replication; and
- Significant contribution to low-income communities.

Traditionally, schools and workforce sectors are seen as compatible but distinct. ISUS blurs this divide. Through developing and managing multiple charter schools, ISUS combines employment and schooling so that young people who have experienced difficulties in school and often with the courts system can earn a high school diploma and college credits while progressing toward nationally recognized certification for occupations in high-demand industries, including construction, computer technology, and manufacturing.

Program features, including the relationships with industry and community partners, are discussed below. Details about the program begin with a description of the youth it serves and how they come to serve others as a result of the training they receive.

Target Population and Emerging Outcomes

The founder of ISUS describes participants through the labels they typically carry. "We serve 'underachieving, over age, drop-out, kicked out, discipline problems, ex-offender,' you name it," she says. In short, ISUS serves youth, ages 16 to 22, who "no one else wants." To the point, the juvenile court system provides a common source of student referrals. Of the 51 students enrolled in ISUS in 2003, 32 had a criminal record. Each one had a history of trouble in school. For most of the youth at ISUS, troubles in school resulted in their leaving school altogether – a disturbingly common story in a district that loses almost half (48 percent) of its students before graduation.

Regardless of their pasts, ISUS offers a pathway to a brighter future for over 350 youth annually. It enables them to gain a long-term view of what they want for themselves and to set them on the path of achieving their goals.

- On average, students advance 2.3 grades each year they are enrolled in ISUS schools.
- 66 percent of the students, most of whom are high school dropouts, graduate with a high school diploma in the two-year high school program.
- Many students earn college credits while enrolled in high school.
- An alumni survey revealed that 85 percent of students secured employment after graduation.

In serving themselves by gaining credentials and marketable skills, the youth enrolled in ISUS schools also serve their communities. ISUS maintains a dual focus: helping youth progress toward successful futures while rebuilding their communities. Students in the computer technology program build and refurbish computers that they then provide to low-income families purchasing ISUS homes. In addition, the students hold week-long computer camps for children in the communities they are helping 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. Through these endeavors, ISUS students diminish the "digital divide" that disadvantages many low-income school children.

Significant contributions emerge from the construction program as well. ISUS training programs rebuild and renovate homes on a developer model. For example, 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. 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. The quality of their work has been recognized by industry associations and earned coveted industry awards. This process will be replicated in a similarly blighted community with the construction of 60 homes.

As the title of one review of the school put it, "[ISUS] gives kids a last chance to look ahead." The programs that give youth the capacity to move ahead are described below.

Training Programs

ISUS charter schools have their roots in a program designed to rebuild urban neighborhoods and replenish an aging construction workforce by training youth in the construction trades. The original program, founded in 1992, developed students' core academic and critical thinking skills through intensive training in the trades and hands-on experience building and renovating houses in low-income communities.

However, the youth in the program found their ability to advance in the construction trades was limited by their inability to complete postsecondary degrees or credentials. To improve their employment ability, ISUS's founder and director recognized, would require strengthening the educational foundation for these formerly disconnected youth. She turned her attention to building industry-specific charter schools for out-of-school youth as a pathway to employment and postsecondary degrees or certification.

Through operating charter schools, ISUS has an infrastructure for replication. Replication allows for schools to respond to the particular requirements and training of multiple industries in multiple communities. Using charter schools as vehicle for industry training programs offers the potential to operate on a scale that could significantly improve the lives of youth, communities, and the education and workforce system.

ISUS has expanded to two industry-related schools that train youth for employment in three industries. A third school opens in January. Each of the schools has employer partners who support curriculum, training, and employment placement in the relevant industry. Notably, each school also has a postsecondary partner who offers advanced courses and industry related credentials for interested students.

Construction
This school, the oldest of the charter schools, opened in 1999. Skilled industry professionals train youth for positions in a broad array of construction trades. This school enrolls 218 students. Youth simultaneously work toward National Center for Construction Education and Research certification and earn college credits in Sinclair Community College's Engineering and Technology Division.

Technology
To integrate the technology curriculum that students are exposed to, ISUS combined the computer and manufacturing technology programs into a second school that currently enrolls 97 students.

Computer Technology
This program in the technology school teaches skills for repairing and building both hardware and software. Since 2000, it has trained out-of-school youth through education and training in the growing information technology field. Under the tutelage of industry professionals and industry certified teachers, youth work toward A+ and Net+ certifications. Through courses at Sinclair Community College, they gain further instruction, college credit, and certification opportunities in the areas of computer technology and engineering.

Manufacturing Technology
The manufacturing program, which opened in 2003, provides youth with training for the automated manufacturing industry. Youth gain a high school diploma and postsecondary credits while simultaneously working toward industry certifications.

Recently, the manufacturing program received a grant that would enable the youth to produce machinery used in computer-assisted design systems for building homes. With

this grant, the youth in this school will build the "Intelligent Building Systems" for home construction; manufacturers in Ohio and from out of state have contracted with the manufacturing school for the production of the CAD systems. These partnerships are particularly unique and give the youth more advanced skills training: as subcontractors, they managing contracts, customer relations, and quality control and assessment. ISUS schools are integral to multiple aspects of the market.

Education

ISUS schools blend academics, employment training, and experiential learning to create an engaging educational environment that orients students toward life-long learning. Students learn academic subjects in the context of their chosen trades and integrated with industry-certified curricula. In addition, 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.

Graduation requirements are rigorous: students must pass all core academic subjects, averaging no less than a C in the Sinclair Community 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. Upon completion of the two-year program, students obtain both a high school diploma and college-level training and credits in a career path. ISUS is "high school plus."

Partnerships

Partnerships with employers and a local community college are integral to the design of the schools and the students' success. Industry partners supplement learning through internships, support with curriculum and certification, and potential permanent placement for students. Community college support enables students to earn college credits while in high school and earn postsecondary credentials to secure advanced employment upon graduation.

Employer Partners

Employer partnerships are key to ISUS' goal of providing education and training that prepares youth for skilled employment. This partnership means employer support and sponsorship in the design of the school. With employer support, each school can provide youth with the training and certification necessary to compete in the market for skilled employees. ISUS offers an industry-approved and recognized curriculum, industry-certified instructors, and a mechanism through which industry associations certify ISUS teaching staff to administer certification tests.

In return for their participation, employers have a guarantee of well-educated, skilled employees. Because of their confidence in the ISUS training, employers offer youth internships and apprenticeships and permanent placement after graduation. The success of the ISUS schools is the result of partnerships with employers and industry

associations willing to "roll their sleeves up" to build the capacity of out-of-school youth and enable youth to build up their communities.

As an additional benefit to employers, the construction and manufacturing charter schools serve as suppliers. Both the construction school and the manufacturing program partner with employers to provide products and services from which the school generates revenue and the youth generate income. Youth in the construction arena build paneling that they sell to contractors. These youth also install the paneling to contractor specification on work sites. ISUS's new contract to produce machinery for the CAD systems is expected to be a clear illustration of the mutual benefits that accrue to employers and the students through supplier relationships.

Postsecondary Institution Partners

Through its postsecondary partners, ISUS schools become "high schools plus." Partnerships with local colleges afford past dropouts the opportunity to earn college credits in high school. Through partnership with Sinclair Community College, students enrolled in the construction and technology schools gain advanced certification opportunities. The health-focused school opens in January with Kettering College of Medical Arts as a partner for both training and employment placement. These partnerships, in a sense, enable youth who have been discounted as high school students to gain the experience and perceptions of themselves as college students.

Conclusion

Through ISUS, out-of-school youth transform themselves from the source of a problem to the source of a solution for employers and their community. With education and training, these youth replenish a diminishing skilled workforce, serve as suppliers for local industry, and renovate blighted communities. As they change themselves, these youth themselves become change agents.

Building a Data-Based Case Management System: Hartford, Connecticut

YO! Hartford, Hartford's Youth Opportunity initiative, has created Hartford Connects, a dynamic, secure, Web-based case management and reporting system that a variety of partners are expanding to help improve an educational and employment outcomes for youth. This system links the Hartford Public Schools, youth-focused city departments, and 15 to 25 community-based agencies, including YO Centers, WIA youth programs, and community- and faith-based initiatives. The system allows for:

- Real-time tracking of youth enrolled within the city's Future Workforce Investment System programs, including tracking of success and completion measures,
- Improved coordination of services for youth, and
- The provision of a range of information about youth in order to identify issues and trends that support the development of programs to meet real needs.

The potential power and reach of this secure database and case management system is greatly enhanced by the YO initiative's collaborative relationship with the Hartford Public Schools and by the collaboration among programs in the Future Workforce Investment System, a mayor's initiative to coordinate services to youth and young adults. The FWIS includes the Mayor's Office, Capital Workforce Partners (which houses the region's Workforce Investment Board), and Hartford's Department of Health and Human Services. These partners have also developed a series of protocols to address confidentiality and ensure that access to information is contingent on the consent of parents and students.

Hartford's YO initiative and the Hartford Public Schools

Hartford Connects grew out of an initial collaborative the YO staff developed with Hartford Public Schools and individual high schools to identify youth who are at-risk of dropping out and track youth in YO-eligible areas to immediately engage them in YO services. This collaboration supports, for example, efforts of YO providers to focus on the key transition years of eighth to ninth grade and ninth to tenth grade, which data indicate are periods of particularly high dropout rates. The school department's management information system generates lists of youth who, because of attendance or achievement levels, are at risk of school failure and dropout. YO staff then work at high schools to review MIS reports to identify at-risk youth and connect them to YO services.

In early 2004, this collaboration was expanded through the merger of the YO database on Hartford Connects and the Hartford Public Schools' database (called SASI). Today, authorized YO staff have desktop access to the following information from the school district on all YO-enrolled youth:

- Student demographics;
- School history (i.e., which schools attended and for what years);
- Current schedule; and
- Attendance.

With this access, YO case managers can use school-based data in their case management efforts. Plans are underway for authorized Hartford Connects users to get access to report cards, progress reports, and standardized test scores.

Expanding Database Use to Other Youth-Serving Agencies

The Mayor's Office, Capital Workforce Partners, Hartford Public Schools, and the city's Department of Health and Human Services are the lead partners in an effort to create and implement the Hartford Future Workforce Investment System. The FWIS has ten strategies, all aimed at increasing the number of young people who finish high school, attend and finish college, attain a living wage job, and engage in long-term, career-focused employment.

Examples of actions to achieve these outcomes include:

- Engaging a broad array of youth-serving agencies to reengage youth throughout Hartford – not just those living in YO eligible census tracts – who are at risk of dropping out of school;
- Enlisting these youth-serving agencies to use the Hartford Connects database system as a tool to help manage their youth services;
- Coordinating services for youth through common use of the database and collaboration among case managers; and
- Using this common platform to identify gaps in services for youth ages 14 to 24.

Engaging a Broad Array of Youth Service Providers

The enlistment of a broad array of youth service providers in re-engaging dropouts has begun. Meeting monthly, these providers review the lists generated by the Hartford Public Schools' MIS system and determine which agency has the best leverage to reach out to each individual youth based on services, geographic location, and personal connections. While primary focus is on re-engaging youth in high school, Capital Workforce Partners, YO staff, and the Hartford Public Schools have identified alternative options for those young people who have indicated they are unwilling to return to a Hartford Public Schools' high school. These options include the newly created Diploma Plus, a credit-retrieval program for adjudicated youth who are behind in credits.

Enlisting Youth-Serving Agencies to Use Hartford Connects

The partners engaged in Hartford's FWIS have developed a theory of understanding to enlist major youth-serving organizations to participate in the system and use the Hartford Connects database. In a memorandum, the partners ask these organizations to supply:

- Information on the type of services offered, and particularly which services meet WIA program requirements;
- Program descriptions and curriculum outlines;
- A sample assessment tool used by the agency;
- Professional development plans for youth-serving staff;
- The number of referrals the agency will accept;
- Recent evaluations of the agency's programs; and
- Resumes, an organizational chart, and a list of the board of directors.

The memorandum also requires agencies to agree to and comply with confidentiality rules.

To date, a number of youth-serving organizations have agreed to use the database, including Our Piece of the Pie (Southend Community Services), SAND (South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation, a youth service agency), the Urban League, Safe Schools/Healthy Students (a program of Hartford Public Schools), and the Capital Workforce Partners Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program. Other agencies are signing memoranda of understanding on an ongoing basis.

Coordinating Services

The system is designed to allow each agency to customize its use of the database, and a private consulting firm has been engaged to help agencies merge their databases with the Hartford Connects system. When the system is fully operational, five "screens" on the database will be open to all authorized users across agencies. These screens will provide basic information such as demographics, previous school history, employment history, occupational skills training history, and parental information. All users will also be able to see which organizations are working with a particular young person. In addition, each agency will have a password that allows access to the database for managing data on their own participants. This level of data may include case notes as well as quantifiable information.

The organizers of the Hartford Future Workforce Investment System will provide technical assistance and training for utilizing the Hartford Connects system. They will also coordinate referrals and follow-ups to participating agencies.

Identifying Gaps in Services

According to its organizers, the ultimate goal of the system is to improve the quality of services received by Hartford's youth so that more young people finish high school, attend and finish college, attain a living wage job, and engage in long-term, career-focused employment.

About Jobs for the Future

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.