

RECLAIMING OUR NATION'S YOUTH



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The cornerstone of our democracy is an educated citizenry. And in today's economy, education is a currency that is just as important as the dollar. However, an alarmingly high number of our young people are ill prepared to carry out their civic responsibilities or to compete in the 21st Century global economy.

Over 5.2 million (17 percent) young people between the ages of 18 and 24 do not have a high school diploma. Approximately 4.4 million young people within the same age span are neither in school, working, or have a degree beyond high school. Further, 1.4 million teens between the ages of 16 and 19 are neither in school nor working.

Individually, each of these young people are at risk of long term unemployment, living in poverty, and engaging in criminal activity. Collectively, they represent a generation of lost potential.

But we can change that.

Young people who have not completed high school may be at risk, but they are not a lost cause. Efforts across the country demonstrate that we can reengage these young people and support their success. We cannot afford to lose the potential financial contribution of these young people to our economy. But more importantly, we must reengage the nation's disconnected youth to sustain the civic fabric of our democracy.ⁱ

A PERMANENT RECESSION FOR THE NATION'S DROPOUTS

The economic consequences of dropping out are severe for our youth and detrimental for our country. The best stimulus package for our students is a diploma.

- Young people who have not completed high school are more than three times as likely to be unemployed as college graduates.ⁱⁱ
- Only one-third (37 percent) of high school dropouts nationwide are steadily employed, and they are more than twice as likely as high school graduates to live in poverty.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Nearly 7 out of 10 State prison inmates do not have a high school diploma.^{iv} Each young person who fails to finish high school and goes on to a life of crime costs the nation between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million.^v

CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED YOUTH

There is no system in place to identify young people who have dropped out of high school, assess why they left, and connect them to the supports they need to succeed in school and work. Many young people who have dropped out of school face a variety of challenges – undiagnosed and/or untreated mental health problems, lack of affordable housing, violent neighborhoods, etc. (see table 1 below).^{vi} The complexity of the issues in their lives calls for a comprehensive response; however, persistent gaps in services impede our ability to reconnect our disadvantaged youth.

FEDERAL POLICY SOLUTIONS: THE RAISE UP ACT

Several pieces of legislation have been introduced that focus on improving the nation's graduation rate, including the Every Student Counts Act, Graduation Promise Act, Graduate for a Better Future Act, Innovation in Secondary School Reform Act, Success in the Middle Act, and Promoting Innovations to 21st Century Careers Act. These important proposals focus primarily on young people who are currently in school.

Legislation is also necessary to reengage out-of-school youth in education, work and career preparation, and postsecondary education. The RAISE UP Act (Reengaging Americans in Serious Education by Uniting Programs Act) challenges every high school dropout to attain a high school diploma, a postsecondary credential, and a family supporting career – and provides them with the support to succeed.

Under this legislation, broad local partnerships would integrate existing, often disparate services, into an intentional dropout recovery system at the local level. Funds would be used to bring together stakeholders, including school districts and community colleges, businesses, mental health agencies, community based organizations, and young people themselves. Youth who have dropped out of school would receive comprehensive services, including education assistance, career and work preparation, and wraparound services ranging from drug treatment to housing.

MODELS THAT WORK:

Youth Opportunity National Grant Program

Between 2000 and 2005, 36 high poverty communities were awarded grants from the Department of Labor to provide a range of services, such as education and employment, to youth ages 14 to 21. The purpose of the program was to increase the education and employment outcomes of disadvantaged youth. As a result, the number of out-of-school youth who were neither in school nor employed declined by 15 percent.^{vii} While the degree of success varied across grant sites, this initiative provides evidence of the potential impact of comprehensive approaches for disconnected youth. Unfortunately, funding for this initiative has been eliminated.

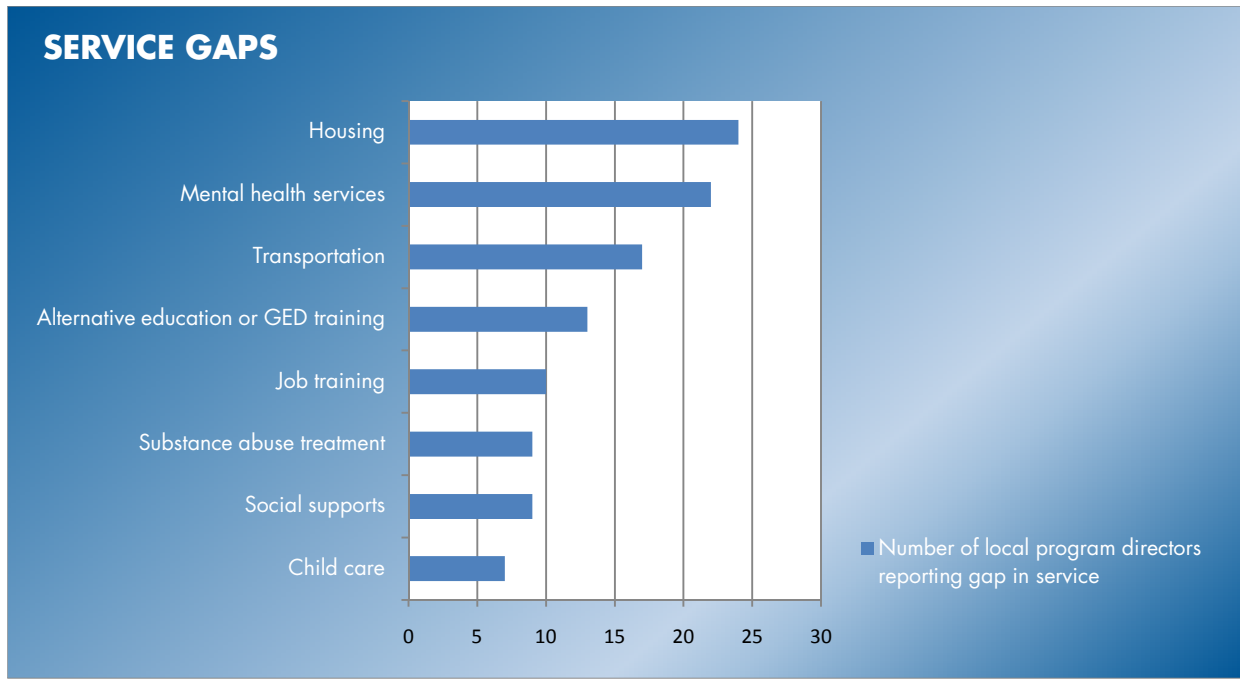
Youth Opportunity Baltimore

Youth Opportunity Baltimore has served over 4,300 young people through a comprehensive system of partnerships offering an array of services and opportunities. Five “youth opportunity centers,” four high schools, and more than twenty youth serving organizations work together to provide comprehensive education opportunities, employment preparation, support services, and leadership development. Participants made 44% more in post-enrollment earnings compared to those who enrolled but did not participate in the program. Additionally, recidivism declined by 14 percent, and 90 percent of employers reported that youth in the program had positive math and reading skills and would recommend the program.^{viii}

CONCLUSION

Disadvantaged youth rarely fit nicely into the silos of programs we have to support them. Myriad stakeholders – community organizations, businesses, government at all levels, and many others – have a role to play in preparing our young people for the future. With smarter, better systems that facilitate local leadership and take a comprehensive approach, we can help the nation's disconnected youth get back on track, earn a diploma, and ensure the strength of our economy and our democracy for years to come.

Table 1: GAPS IN SERVICES MAKE RECONNECTING YOUTH A CHALLENGE



Source: GAO (2008). *Disconnected youth: Federal action could address some of the challenges faced by local programs that reconnect youth to education and employment*. GAO-08-313. Washington, DC: Author, page 26.

Note: GAO interviewed 39 local program directors to investigate gaps in services. Directors identified the top three services they believed were insufficient or lacking in their communities. These data only include services that were mentioned by more than three directors.

NUMBERS OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH 2007

Location	Youth (18-24) without a high school diploma ¹	Percent	Number Teens (16-19) not attending school & not working ²	Percent	Number Youth (18-24)- not attending school, not working, and no degree beyond high school ²	Percent
Alabama	95,000	21%	29,000	11%	82,000	18%
Alaska	14,000	18%	5,000	11%	14,000	17%
Arizona	130,000	22%	36,000	11%	109,000	18%
Arkansas	48,000	18%	17,000	11%	53,000	19%
California	712,000	19%	182,000	8%	573,000	15%
Colorado	82,000	18%	19,000	7%	61,000	13%
Connecticut	42,000	13%	12,000	6%	35,000	11%
Delaware	16,000	19%	4,000	8%	11,000	13%
DC	11,000	15%	4,000	11%	9,000	13%
Florida	317,000	20%	92,000	10%	252,000	16%
Georgia	202,000	22%	61,000	11%	170,000	18%
Hawaii	11,000	9%	6,000	9%	17,000	14%
Idaho	26,000	18%	7,000	8%	23,000	15%
Illinois	212,000	16%	57,000	8%	182,000	14%
Indiana	117,000	19%	29,000	8%	92,000	15%
Iowa	40,000	13%	10,000	6%	29,000	10%
Kansas	41,000	14%	10,000	6%	32,000	11%
Kentucky	72,000	18%	23,000	9%	72,000	18%
Louisiana	108,000	23%	32,000	12%	91,000	19%
Maine	17,000	15%	4,000	6%	17,000	15%
Maryland	80,000	15%	26,000	8%	67,000	12%
Massachusetts	84,000	13%	22,000	6%	64,000	10%
Michigan	155,000	16%	45,000	7%	146,000	15%
Minnesota	71,000	14%	13,000	4%	48,000	10%
Mississippi	71,000	23%	19,000	10%	64,000	21%
Missouri	100,000	18%	30,000	9%	81,000	14%
Montana	15,000	16%	6,000	10%	14,000	14%
Nebraska	25,000	13%	6,000	5%	19,000	10%
Nevada	49,000	24%	16,000	13%	43,000	20%
New Hampshire	16,000	14%	4,000	5%	11,000	9%
New Jersey	113,000	15%	33,000	7%	96,000	12%

¹ Sex by Age by Educational Attainment for the Population 18 Years and Older. Census File B15001 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates." *American FactFinder*. 2005-2007. Bureau of the Census. Web. 4 August 2009.

² Kid's Count Data Across States (2007). Kids Count Data Center. Retrieved August 4, 2009, from The Annie E. Casey Foundation website: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Default.aspx>.

New Mexico	45,000	22%	10,000	8%	37,000	18%
New York	324,000	17%	81,000	7%	270,000	14%
North Carolina	156,000	18%	47,000	9%	136,000	15%
North Dakota	7,000	9%	2,000	4%	7,000	8%
Ohio	179,000	16%	43,000	6%	149,000	14%
Oklahoma	73,000	19%	19,000	9%	64,000	17%
Oregon	60,000	18%	17,000	9%	50,000	15%
Pennsylvania	170,000	14%	50,000	7%	160,000	13%
Rhode Island	15,000	13%	4,000	6%	10,000	9%
South Carolina	80,000	19%	25,000	9%	77,000	18%
South Dakota	14,000	17%	3,000	7%	10,000	12%
Tennessee	98,000	18%	29,000	9%	95,000	17%
Texas	516,000	21%	135,000	9%	419,000	17%
Utah	45,000	14%	11,000	6%	38,000	11%
Vermont	7,000	11%	2,000	5%	5,000	9%
Virginia	110,000	14%	30,000	7%	100,000	13%
Washington	109,000	18%	30,000	8%	87,000	14%
West Virginia	27,000	16%	10,000	10%	32,000	20%
Wisconsin	77,000	14%	18,000	5%	65,000	12%
Wyoming	8,000	16%	2,000	6%	7,000	13%
Total:	5,212,000	17% (average)	1,427,000	8% (average)	4,395,000	14% (average)

Notes:

ⁱ Disconnected youth are young people who are not in school and are not working.

ⁱⁱ Calculations based on National Center on Education Statistics (2008). *Digest of Education Statistics*. Table 382. Accessed at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_382.asp.

ⁱⁱⁱ Swanson, C. (2009). *Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap: Educational and Economic Conditions in America's Largest Cities*. Bethesda, Maryland: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center.

^{iv} Harlow, Caroline (revised 2003). *Education and Correctional Populations*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

^v Snyder, Howard and Melissa Sickmund (1999). *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, p. 82. Available on-line at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/toc.html>.

^{vi} GAO (2008). *Disconnected youth: Federal action could address some of the challenges faced by local programs that reconnect youth to education and employment*. GAO-08-313. Washington, DC: Author.

^{vii} Employment and Training Administration (2008). Evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative, Executive Summary. *Employment and Training Occasional Paper 2008-12*. Washington, DC: Author. Available on-line at http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/YO%20Summary%20and%20Implication.pdf.

^{viii} Mayor's Office of Employment Development and the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board - Youth Council, *Changing Minds: Changing Lives, Baltimore's Youth Opportunity Story*, Available on-line at http://www.yobaltimore.org/Documents/impact_yo_impact_report.pdf.

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