

Youth Connections to the Workforce

“Truly effective youth employment programs help young people develop their own capacity to manage the responsibilities of adult life, including making a good living for themselves and their families.”¹

Far too many young people are not prepared for college, work, and life. By 2010, the largest portion of America’s labor force will be comprised of our current teens and young adults.² Between 2000 and 2015, about 85% of newly created jobs will require education or training beyond high school.³ In addition, if current enrollment patterns continue, by 2020 U.S. employers will need 14 million more workers who have some college education than our current educational institutions are likely to produce.⁴ *Nearly all current and future graduates will need two or more years of postsecondary education and training to be economically successful.*⁵

Public/Private Ventures, a national nonprofit that works to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs, identified **five core elements for supporting successful youth development** (note that not every program or intervention needs to provide all 5 elements):

- Adult support and guidance
- Engaging activities in non-school hours
- Variety of work experience opportunities that connect what is learned in schools to what is needed for successful employment
- Opportunities for young people to have a say in what they do and how it is done
- Support for youth as they transition through key phases in life.

Starting in the Schools

There is a clear link between educational success and labor market success, but the reverse is also true. Students that look forward to future labor market success are more likely to work hard in school and prepare themselves for the workforce. The lack of direct connection between employers and high school students reinforces that idea that school is irrelevant to work. Also, the student perception that employment opportunities are limited and that they can only hope for low-wage jobs increases the belief that school is disconnected from work. These and other family, school, neighborhood, labor market, and attitudinal factors can limit motivation to achieve in school.⁶

Society also benefits when students complete high school with college and job-ready skills. It costs less to provide services upfront to increase a young person’s ability to maintain a meaningful job, pay taxes, be productive, and contribute to society than to pay for the costs of a dropout who turns to crime or drugs.⁷

Problem: Many students do not have opportunities that help them to understand how school connects with work and do not have opportunities to explore potential career options.

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—School-based activities that promote youth connections to the workforce.** School-based career exploration in the middle and high school grades can be accomplished in conjunction with employers through field trips, career fairs, and interviewing or shadowing employers. Students can also be connected with paid and unpaid internships, work experiences and apprenticeships. Students who participate in service learning also may learn “real world” skills and become invested in their communities as young adults.⁸

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy—Career & Technical Education (CTE).*** Traditional CTE schools and programs are one way to encourage career connections for students and to increase students' work skills. CTE programs combine education in specific occupational categories with some work-based learning or work experience such as cooperative education or internships. They have been shown to modestly reduce dropout rates and improve post-high school employment outcomes and earnings. Most CTE schools and programs receive little federal funding.
- ❖ ***Promising Strategy—Alternative Schools.*** There are a number of new alternative school models that explicitly connect schoolwork to career exploration and career-preparatory training. For example, the *Metropolitan Career and Technical Center* (The MET Center) in Providence is a national model in alternative high schools focusing on career development and exploration. Other national examples include the *Henry Ford Academy* in Dearborn, MI which provides intensive career development work with a math and technology focus for all students attending the school, and the *High Tech High School* in San Diego, CA where students use technology in all their classes to learn and demonstrate skills.⁹

Providence Innovation—Students in the Providence School District can access a number of schools and programs that focus on career preparation and workforce technology skills training, including Hope Technology High School and the Health, Science Technology High School. Additionally, all high schools in Providence offer career/tech courses.

Possible Providence Action Steps—Starting in the Schools

- Develop and expand formal connections between schools and local employers.
- Increase opportunities for public school students to participate in proven effective school-based career-building activities.
- Expand after-school activities (including PASA) to include opportunities to learn about careers.
- Link youth to internships and after-school and summer jobs in fields with career potential.
- Expand access to career-based alternative schools.
- Increased state and local funding for CTE programs will enable more students to improve

Career Development Programs for In-School Youth

Youth Career Development Programs are those programs that “help prepare young people, especially vulnerable young people, for good jobs and potentially satisfying careers.”¹⁰

Effective and high quality youth employment programs include some combination of the following elements (note that these elements can be found in ineffective programs as well): career classes in middle school; summer jobs for low-income youth; opportunities to learn applied math or computer skills; soft skills training (getting to work on time, appropriately dressed, ready to offer exemplary customer service); help with college applications; tutoring; and transportation to job sites.¹¹

Problem: Many youth lack the skills to find and succeed in meaningful jobs while they are in high school and after they graduate.

❖ **Proven Strategy—Increase access to quality youth career development/ employment programs.** Youth development programs that focus on explicitly providing training in either hard or soft work skills, career exploration, or connecting youth with meaningful after-school and summer work experiences like internships can be important tools for connecting youth to the workforce.¹² National examples of quality programs include: The Harlem Children’s Zone in New York City provides career development for youth through The Renaissance University for Community Education (TRUCE) and the Employment and Technology Center (ETC) programs [www.hcz.org]. The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection in Syracuse and Rochester, NY also operated effective employment and college preparatory programs [www.hillside.com/Who/hwsc.htm].

Successful career development programs engage youth through:

- Financial incentives or paid work experience.
- Strong social supports that include caring adults.
- The ability to change community norms that undermine motivation to succeed.

Source: Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

National Best Practice Model: The Chicago After School Matters (ASM) initiative offers teens hands-on job training in the arts, sports, technology, communications, and science. Participants learn new skills, work with experts, earn stipends and have fun. Through its innovative programs, Chicago teens take part in engaging activities that provide skills that translate to the workplace. Through positive relationships with adults and peers, they are exposed to educational and career opportunities in their neighborhoods and the city at large. By coordinating city resources and anchoring the programs around clusters of public high schools, parks and libraries, ASM enriches the lives of teens and helps to revitalize Chicago’s communities. ASM offers a *Ladder of Opportunity* for teens, providing a progression of programming that allows for deliberate skill development and authentic work experience over time.

Rhode Island/Providence Innovation: In 2007, the Rhode Island Governor’s Workforce Board provided funds for the first time through Workforce Solutions of Providence/Cranston to support 17 new programs that will provide explicit career development services, work support services, and job experiences to approximately 1,000 youth in Providence and Cranston. These programs are being operated by a variety of organizations selected through a competitive bidding process (including community-based organizations, private employers, schools, and housing authorities).

Rhode Island/Providence Innovation: The One-Stop employment center of Workforce Solutions of Providence/Cranston and netWORKri contains a Youth Career Center that will be expanding in July 2007. At the redesigned Youth Career Center, youth will be provided with such services as: career and labor market exploration; resume writing; peer-to-peer mentoring; GED classes; homework help and tutoring; basic computer skills training; job readiness training; leadership skills; life skills; and support groups. In the past, approximately 800 youth per year have used the Youth Career Center, though this number is likely to increase after the redesign is finished in July 2007.

Rhode Island also receives federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to run comprehensive long-term programs for economically disadvantaged youth with employment barriers (both those who are in-school and out-of-school). These programs are higher cost and usually serve a smaller number of youth than shorter term, less comprehensive programs. However, the more comprehensive, longer-term programs are often cost-effective if they are designed based on best practices and have evaluation results that demonstrate improved outcomes for participating youth.

Providence Innovation: The Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has built a network of public and private community partners, after school providers, city departments and neighborhoods to work together to increase and expand quality after school programming, strengthen the capacity of after-school providers, and leverage resources to create better programs for youth of Providence. PASA is an initiative of Mayor David Cicilline and is managed by The Education Partnership with funding from the Wallace Foundation, Bank of America and other corporate and foundation partners. PASA's mission is to expand and improve after-school opportunities for all the youth of Providence by building a system of "neighborhood campuses" called AfterZones. PASA serves more than 1,000 middle school youth, providing them with a variety of arts, dance, theater, leadership and varied sports and recreation opportunities. PASA is currently piloting a partnership with the Providence Police Activities League and Recreation Department to hire and train 10-12 high school youth to work in three recreation centers for and with a recreation center director and police officer.

Problem: Lack of sufficient meaningful summer jobs and internships for youth.

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Increase the number of available jobs and internships for youth through partnerships with local businesses.** Strong and substantive partnerships are essential to increasing the employment rates of local youths. Private employer involvement in youth training and career development can be beneficial to both employers and youths, however effective and sustained employer involvement often depends on significant support and technical assistance from the public sector.¹³

Providence Innovation: The Institute for the Study & Practice of Nonviolence and the Providence Police department have partnered for Summer 2007 to connect 60 Providence youth with summer jobs through the local Chamber of Commerce businesses.

- ❖ **Untested Strategy—Encourage businesses to hire local youth through tax credits or other incentives.** While tax credits have been used to varying degrees of success to encourage employers to hire certain groups of adult workers (like former cash assistance recipients), there is little evidence on the use of incentives to encourage employers to hire youth in greater numbers. More exploration is needed regarding whether there are tax credits or other incentives that would be effective for accomplishing this goal in Providence.

Possible Providence Action Steps—Career Development Programs for In-School Youth

- Expand access to high-quality after-school and summer youth career development programs, jobs and internships.
- Generate more funding for these programs.
- Evaluate existing youth development/career development programs for effectiveness (and build on successes).
- Increase advertising for existing services and programs (including the Youth Career Center at the One Stop).
- Link successful youth leadership programs with youth career resources in order to increase access and effectiveness for Providence youth (especially minority, low-income and at-risk youth).
- Incorporate career development/exploration into existing youth programs.
- Develop and expand partnerships with local businesses to encourage youth employment.
- Explore tax credit and incentive options for expanding youth employment opportunities.

Programs for Out-of-School Youth (also referred to as “second chance” training programs)

For the purposes of this report, out-of-school youth are youth ages 16-24 who have either dropped out of school or who have completed high school and who are not meaningfully connected with the labor force.

Problem: Some out-of-school youth have high school diplomas but need additional training to successfully transition into the labor force or higher education programs.

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Work-based learning programs.** Programs that provide work-based learning opportunities for disadvantaged youth that have completed high school or have received their GED credential but who need further training to be successful in the labor market can be effective in building necessary skills and knowledge. For example, national Year Up programs target low-income urban high school graduates and GED recipients, ages 18-24, preparing them for college and placing them in entry-level information technology jobs. Acceptance to Year Up involves an intensive admissions process. Program participants receive 6 months of intensive training in technical, professional and business communications, followed by 6 months of work experience in an internship position at a local business [www.yearup.org].

Rhode Island Resource: Some students who participate in Year Up in Rhode Island receive college credit at New England Tech, Johnson and Wales University or CCRI for their course work during the program. Year Up serves about 70 Rhode Island young people a year, two-thirds of whom are Providence residents.

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Apprenticeship Programs.** Workers who complete apprenticeships generally earn more than workers who did not participate in a formal job training program. Many trade apprenticeships in Rhode Island require participants to have a GED or high school diploma and to be 18 years old (although some accept apprentices as young as 16 years old). Rhode Island currently has 1,400 active apprentices.

Rhode Island Resource: More information regarding licensed apprenticeship opportunities in Rhode Island can be found through the Providence/Cranston Workforce Solutions office, the Bureau of Apprenticeship & Training, the State Apprenticeship Council, or an employer or union directly [www.dlt.ri.gov/apprenticeship].¹⁴

Rhode Island Innovation: Employers in Rhode Island who start or increase apprenticeship programs in their companies can receive the Employers' Apprenticeship Tax Credit. The tax credit is limited to machine tool and metal trade or plastic processing apprenticeships [www.dlt.ri.gov/esu/taxcredits.htm].

Barriers Providence Youth Face in Accessing Apprenticeships: Anecdotal evidence suggests that Providence youth face multiple barriers in accessing appropriate apprenticeship opportunities. First, there are a limited number of apprenticeship opportunities in the state. Second, most apprenticeship opportunities are limited to traditional construction and manufacturing trades. Third, young people may not know about existing opportunities or may need help in applying. Fourth, racism and sexism have historically presented barriers for certain groups in accessing traditional apprenticeship opportunities, and these problems may continue to act as barriers for certain groups of youth.

Problem: **Some out-of-school youth need assistance in attaining their GED, building basic literacy and numeracy skills, and additional job training services before they can transition into the labor force or higher education programs.**

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy—Work-based learning combined with educational remediation.*** Programs that provide work-based learning opportunities combined with educational remediation services for disadvantaged youth that have not completed high school or received their GED credential and who need further training to be successful in the labor market can be effective in building necessary academic and career skills and knowledge. For example, the national YouthBuild program serves at-risk and out-of-school youth through programs that integrate work-based and classroom-based learning opportunities; focus on construction trade. Participants alternate a week of working building or rehabilitating affordable housing and a week of school-based instruction for a diploma or GED [www.youthbuild.org].¹⁵

Providence Resource: YouthBuild Providence currently serves 30 local youth, though the program will be expanding in future years. The program is coordinated by the Providence Plan with funding from the United Way of Rhode Island.

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy—Vocational training combined with educational remediation.*** The longest-running national program and most well-known example of this type of long-term intensive vocational and remedial educational program for out-of-school youth is Job Corps. Job Corps is a no-cost residential education and vocational training program administered and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor that helps low-income young people ages 16 through 24 get a better job, make more money, and take control of their lives. At Job Corps, students enroll to learn a trade, earn a high school diploma or GED and get help finding a good job. Job Corps provides career counseling and transition support to its students for up to 12 months after they graduate from the program [www.jobcorps.org]. The Rhode Island Job Corps program is located in Exeter and offers programs in six vocations: business technology, construction, culinary arts, health occupations, information technology and manufacturing. Through hands-on vocational training followed by 6 weeks of work-based learning with businesses all over Rhode Island, low-income youth in Rhode Island are offered the opportunity to increase their skills and connect with local employers. After completing the

program, the majority of participants continue on to employment, about 30-40% go to college and 5-10% join the military. Forty-three percent of Rhode Island participants in the past year were from Providence.

Possible Providence Action Steps—Programs for Out-of-School Youth

- Expand existing successful work-based learning and apprenticeship programs that target at-risk young people.
- Support the creation of new work-based learning and apprenticeship programs targeted towards out-of-school youth.
- Develop and provide easy access to a referral list or clearinghouse for youth who need job training, basic educational services, or jobs, internships and apprenticeships.
- Work to reduce barriers to accessing apprenticeship opportunities for women and minorities.
- Advocate for expanding the Employer's Apprenticeship Tax Credit to other industries with high growth potential.

Higher Education as a Pathway to Career Success

Higher education is becoming a necessity for economic success. *College graduates earn on average 70% more than high school graduates while high school dropouts are four times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates.*¹⁶

Problem: May youth face multiple barriers to attending and succeeding in college. Many young people are not academically prepared to succeed in two-year post-secondary education programs (much less four-year programs), lack either motivation or support, have inadequate information, or do not have the financial ability to pay for school or for related costs such as child care. They may also be unaware of available supports and services. In addition, Pell Grants, which provide many low-income youth with the means to attend college, are restricted to students with no history of incarceration or drug-related convictions, presenting a barrier for otherwise potentially successful students.¹⁷

There is a gap in college access between higher and lower income students and minority and White students. Only 20% of students from families with incomes below \$25,000 ever complete an associate's degree or higher, compared to 76% of those with incomes above \$75,000 and 45% of those whose families earn between \$25,000 and \$75,000.¹⁸ Minority youth more likely to be low-income than their White peers, and they are also less likely to graduate from high school and go on to college. Only 18% of African Americans and 9% of Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 29 years old in the U.S. have earned a B.A.¹⁹

❖ **Promising Strategy—Youth programs that do explicit college access and retention work.**

Providence/Rhode Island Resources: While there are other organizations that work with youth and assist with college access and educational success, this list focuses on some of the ones targeting Providence youth that have college access or retention as a primary focus.

College Access Programs:

College Planning Center of RI at the Warwick Mall
College Guide Program at the Swearer Center, Brown University
College Vision
Educational Opportunity Center at CCRI
Educational Talent Search (ETS)
RI Children's Crusade
Upward Bound at RIC
Project Open Door at Hope Arts High School with RISD

College Retention Programs:

Access to Opportunity at CCRI
College Readiness Program at CCRI
Preparatory Enrollment Program (PEP) at RIC
Talent Development (TD) at URI

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Dual enrollment and early college high school programs.** Programs and alternative schools that enable students to work towards both their high school degree and an associates degree (or to earn college credits) at the same time can be effective in motivating students to work hard and in removing barriers many students face to attending and succeeding in college. These programs “have the potential to improve graduation rates and better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers by engaging all students in a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, removing financial and other barriers to college, and compressing the number of years to a college degree.”²⁰ For example, the national *early college high school* initiative funds small schools designed so that students can earn both a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor’s degree [www.earlycolleges.org]. The Excel Program in New York, NY is an early college high school that targets immigrants, their children and students at-risk of dropping out. Another similar program that targets high school dropouts is the Portland Community College (Oregon) College Bound program that allows students to work towards their GED while earning college credits.²¹

Rhode Island Resource: For more information about financial aid for Rhode Island students, contact the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority [www.riheaa.org].

Possible Providence Action Steps

- Increase post-secondary education scholarship funding for Providence residents.
- Increase opportunities for Providence youth to connect with and enroll in local colleges and universities.
- Explicitly focus outreach and target assistance to low-income minority residents and to youth who would be “first generation” college students.
- Promote the early college and dual enrollment models in Providence public schools.
- Support the expansion of programs that help Providence students access higher education.

National Resources

- (1) *America's Workforce Network* (www.usworkforce.org)—Links to job and training-related websites.
- (2) *American Youth Policy Forum* (www.aypf.org)—Offers free publications about policies and practices that contribute to the development of healthy and successful young people.
- (3) *Career Academy Support Network* (<http://casn.berkeley.edu>)—The Graduate School of Education at the University of California Berkeley has a clearing house of materials on career academies on their website.
- (4) *Forum for Youth Investment* (www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)—The Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, technical assistance, training, network support and partnership opportunities needed to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement.
- (5) *Jobs for the Future* (www.jff.org)—Offers resources to organizations that help young people make successful transitions to employment.
- (6) *National Youth Development Information Center* (www.nydic.org)—Information on research, program development, federal and state policy concerning youth, funding opportunities and statistics.
- (7) *National Youth Employment Coalition* (www.nyec.org)—Shares information on policies and programs, provides networking opportunities for individuals and organizations, and analyzes activities at the national, state, and local levels.
- (8) *Promising and Effective Practices Network of the National Youth Employment Coalition* (www.nyec.org/pepnet)—Gives examples of quality youth employment programs and a self-assessment process that can help programs make continuous improvement in their services.
- (9) *Public/Private Ventures* (www.ppv.org)—Conduct research, program development and evaluation to find and support effective policies and programs for the country's disadvantaged youth.
- (10) *U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration* (www.doleta.gov)—Contains some funding and program information.

¹ Clymer, C., Edwards, K, Ponce, J., & Wyckoff, L. (2002). *Supporting youth employment: A guide for community groups*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

² Demographics of America's Future Workforce

³ Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspective on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce.

⁴ Pennington, H. (2004). *Fast track to college: Increasing postsecondary success for all students*.

⁵ National Commission on the High School Senior Year. (2001). *Raising our sights: No high school senior left behind*. Princeton, NJ: The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

⁶ Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

⁷ The Forum for Youth Investment. *Helping young people to be ready by 21*. Retrieved April 18, 2007 from www.forumfyi.org

⁸ Clymer, C., Edwards, K, Ponce, J., & Wyckoff, L. (2002). *Supporting youth employment: A guide for community groups*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

⁹ Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute P.

¹⁰ Clymer, C., Edwards, K, Ponce, J., & Wyckoff, L. (2002). *Supporting youth employment: A guide for community groups*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

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¹² Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

¹³ Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute P.

¹⁴ Apprenticeship Office, RI Department of Labor and Training.

¹⁵ Clymer, C., Edwards, K, Ponce, J., & Wyckoff, L. (2002). *Supporting youth employment: A guide for community groups*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

¹⁶ Pennington, H. (2004). *Fast track to college: Increasing postsecondary success for all students*.

¹⁷ Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

¹⁸ Pennington, H. (2004). *Fast track to college: Increasing postsecondary success for all students*.

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²⁰ www.earlycolleges.org

²¹ Edelman, P., Holzer, H.J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute P.