



# The Youth Opportunity Guarantee

A Framework for Success

LAURA TATUM, INDIVAR-DUTTA-GUPTA,  
COSETTE HAMPTON, HUIXIAN (ANITA) LI,  
AND PETER EDELMAN

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# Acronyms, Abbreviations, & Initializations

**ACE**—Access College Early  
Scholarship

**ACS**—American Community Survey

**ASAP**—Accelerated Study in  
Associate Programs

**AYPF**—American Youth Policy  
Forum

**BA**—Bachelor of Arts

**BOA**—Boston Opportunity Agenda

**BPS**—Boston Public Schools

**CCLB**—Conservation Corps of Long  
Beach

**CCTA**—Complete College  
Tennessee Act of 2010

**CEW**—Georgetown Center on  
Education and the Workforce

**CNC**—Computer numerical control

**CPI**—Arkansas Career Pathways  
Initiative

**CRAFT**—Community Restitution  
Apprenticeship-Focused Training

**CSS**—Community Service Society  
of New York

**CTE**—Career Technical Education

**CUNY**—The City University of New  
York

**DACA**—Deferred Action for  
Childhood Arrivals

**DOL**—U.S. Department of Labor

**ECHS**—Early College High Schools

**ESSA**—Every Student Succeeds Act

**FAFSA**—Free Application for  
Federal Student Aid

**FWS**—Federal Work-Study

**GtC**—Gateway to College

**GED**—General Educational  
Development

**GSA**—Gay-Straight Alliance

**GPA**—Grade Point Average

**HEA**—Higher Education Act of 1965

**HS**—High School

**I-BEST**—Washington State's  
Integrated Basic Education and  
Skills Training

**IDEA**—Individuals with Disability  
Education Act

**IT**—Information Technology

**ITIN**—Individual Taxpayer  
Identification Number

**JSA**—Jobseeker's Allowance

**JVS**—Jewish Vocational Service

**LBCC**—Long Beach City College  
(California)

**LBSU**—Long Beach State University  
(California)

**LBUSD**—Long Beach Unified  
School District (California)

**MSCC**—Motlow State Community  
College (Tennessee)

**MTSU**—Middle Tennessee State  
University

**NSC**—National Skills Coalition

**OBF**—Outcomes-Based Funding

**OECD**—Organisation for Economic  
Co-operation and Development

**OY**—Opportunity Youth

**OYC**—Opportunity Youth  
Collaborative

**OYIF**—Opportunity Youth Incentive  
Fund

**P-TECH**—Pathways in Technology  
Early College High School

**PACE**—Pathways for Advancing  
Careers and Education

**PIC**—Boston Private Industry  
Council

**POS**—Programs of Study

**PYD**—Positive Youth Development

**PYN**—Philadelphia Youth Network

**REC**—Re-Engagement Center

**RVTS**—Regional Vocational and  
Technical High School

**SIF**—Social Innovation Fund

**SNAP**—Supplemental Nutrition  
Assistance Program

**STEM**—Science, Technology,  
Engineering, and Mathematics

**STWOA**—School-to-Work  
Opportunities Act of 1994

**TAA**—Trade Adjustment Assistance

**TAACCCT**—Trade Adjustment  
Assistance Community College and  
Career Training

**TANF**—Temporary Assistance for  
Needy Families

**UI**—Unemployment Insurance

**VISTA**—Volunteers in Service to  
America

**WBL**—Work-Based Learning

**WIOA**—Workforce Innovation and  
Opportunity Act

**YAP**—Youth Advocate Programs

**YCC**—Youth CareerConnect

**YEF**—Youth Entrepreneurship Fund

**YTTF**—Youth Transitions Task Force

**YVP**—Youth Voice Project



# Introduction & Summary

**T**oday, many youth across the United States struggle to achieve their educational goals and secure a good job. Millions of youth and young adults fall behind academically or face unemployment between the ages of 16 and 24, a critical period for brain and identity development and for launching a career trajectory.<sup>1</sup> The consequences are enduring for them and for our nation. It is time—long past time—for bold solutions.

Youth are forced to navigate underfunded and unconnected secondary, postsecondary, and workforce systems, and they face too few realistic options to advance academically and professionally. Sixty-five percent of all U.S. jobs will likely require postsecondary education and training beyond high school as of 2020, but far fewer young people attain such a degree.<sup>2, 3, 4</sup> Youth unemployment rates are double that of the prime-age U.S. population. An estimated 4.6 million youth ages 16 to 24 are disconnected or “Opportunity Youth”—neither in school nor working.<sup>5, 6</sup> Major disparities persist in young adults’ educational and employment opportunities, and many challenges faced by all youth are exacerbated for youth of color, immigrant youth, LGBTQ youth, and girls and young women, among others.

The status quo is not working for America’s youth and young adults. It falls short for employers, who struggle to hire and retain the workers they need, and damages our economy, which will have to rely increasingly on today’s younger workers to support an aging population. Any serious national economic agenda must address this challenge in an ambitious and viable way.

In states and communities across the country, serious solutions are being designed and implemented. Practitioners, policymakers, young people, system leaders, elected officials, employers, and others are working to solve youth education and employment challenges. We continue to innovate, learn, and improve. As a nation, we have many good ideas but uneven and inadequate political will, and our progress is inconsistent and insufficient.

For the benefit of youth, families, employers, communities, and our nation, we need a visionary national strategy for systemic reform. We need to build on and weave together emerging and tested solutions into a comprehensive framework that addresses these challenges at scale. This report offers such a strategy, for policymakers and stakeholders at all levels, to truly ensure all young people the opportunity of long-term labor market success.

## A Youth Opportunity Guarantee of Education, Training, & Employment

This report introduces a Youth Opportunity Guarantee of Education, Training, and Employment (“Youth Opportunity Guarantee” or “The guarantee”) to implement the vision of a system built to ensure all young people’s chances of long-term labor market success.

A Youth Guarantee has already been implemented in Europe—where all European Union Member States committed in 2013 to ensure employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship to all young people under 25—but our proposal is uniquely American.<sup>7</sup> Our strategy is developed from the ground up and draws on conversations with people across the United States. It is based on both existing and original qualitative data and existing and original analysis of quantitative data.

Our goal is for all young adults to attain good jobs, most of which require at minimum an associate degree or postsecondary certificate. As many but not all young people will go from high school to four-year-college to career, the guarantee emphasizes college-and-career pathways—with a range of postsecondary options—while recognizing numerous trajectories on the way to a good job and successful career. The approach acknowledges that youth have a variety of educational and professional interests and skills, and an array of options are needed to serve everyone.

Our system aims to guarantee to every young person ages 16 to 24 in the United States:

- High school or equivalent that prepares students for college and career;
- A range of postsecondary options that help lead to labor market success; and
- Quality career training, national service, or employment.

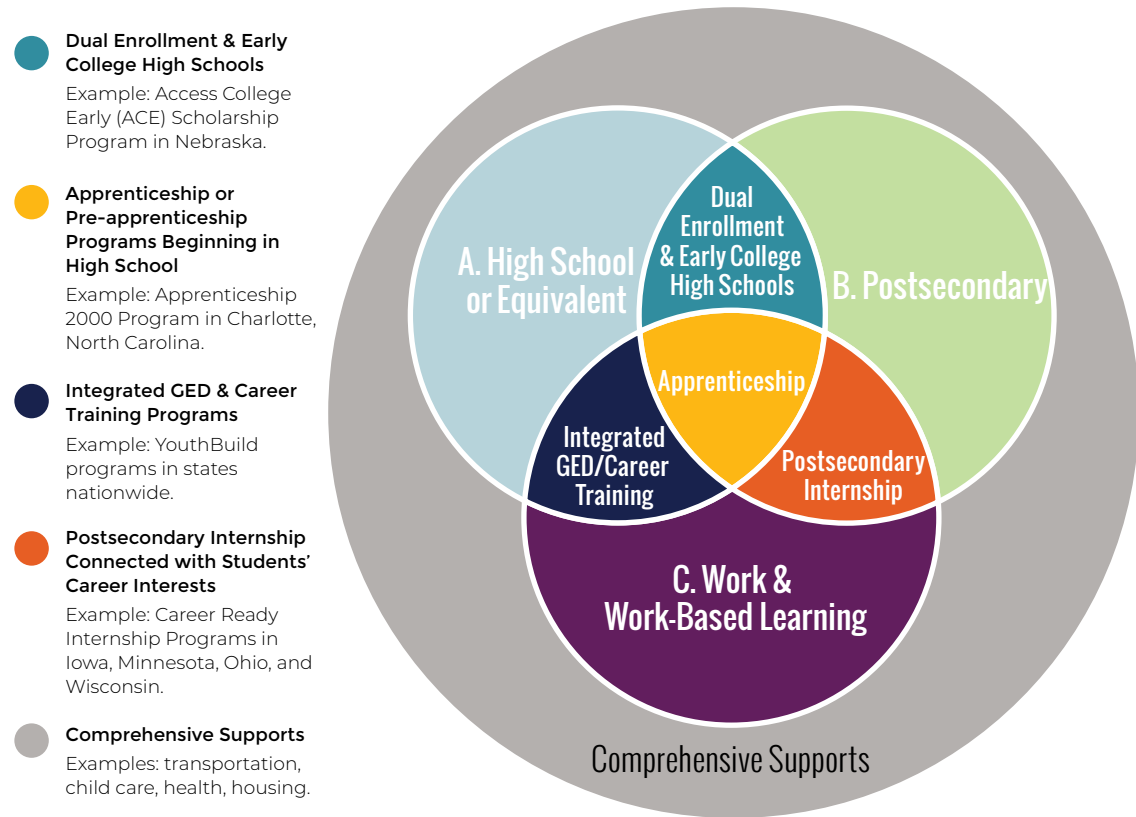
This guarantee may seem merely aspirational. In fact, it is essentially a reality for *some* youth in *some* parts of the country, and expanding those opportunities to *all* would promote our national economic prosperity. We believe the Youth Opportunity Guarantee is both ambitious and attainable.

The guarantee is a commitment to *all* young people ages 16 to 24 in the United States. It builds on our existing obligation to ensure access to primary and secondary education for all children in the U.S., including undocumented youth. It is based on evidence, practice, and our changing economy and education and employment systems. It is foundational to a broader agenda to achieve our nation’s value of ensuring a fair chance for every child, regardless of their background.

This report lays out these three components of the guarantee—high school, postsecondary, and work—in a manner that is seamless, not separate. The components can and should intersect rather than merely occurring in a sequence. Below, a diagram shows the overlap between: high school or equivalent, postsecondary, and work. For example, apprenticeship is shown at the center of the diagram where the three circles overlap. A high school student in an apprenticeship program may simultaneously be finishing high school, earning postsecondary credit, and gaining work experience.

**FIGURE 1. Seamless, not separate: High school, postsecondary, & work**

Overlap of high school, postsecondary, & work in a three-dimensional approach with comprehensive supports



Note: All of the programs noted as examples are discussed in this report.

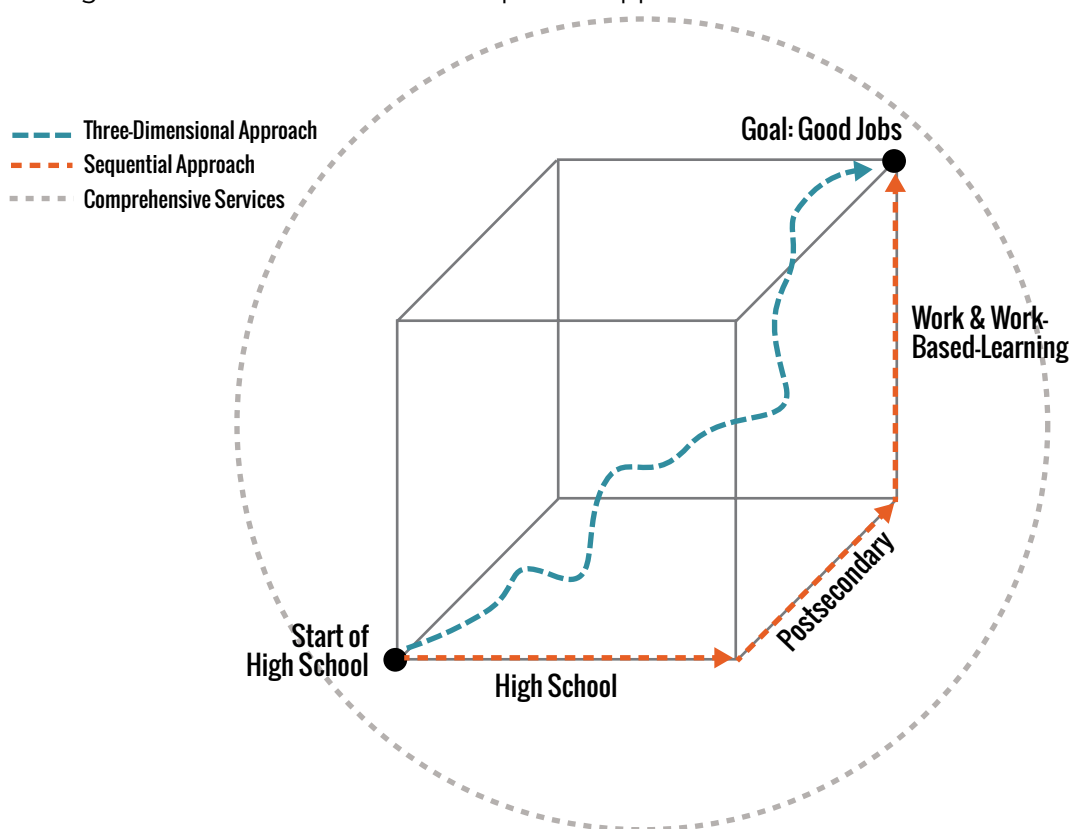
Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019.

There are various benefits to this crosscutting approach, which are discussed throughout the report. A primary benefit is that youth are less likely to disconnect in the transitions, such as between high school and postsecondary, if there is overlap rather than separation between the two.

The crosscutting approach can also save time and money for students, families, education systems, and other stakeholders, as visualized in the cube below (see Figure 2). The three dimensions of the cube are high school, postsecondary, and work. In a sequential approach, a young person would first complete high school, then postsecondary, then transition into work (depicted as the orange path in Figure 2). Instead, we seek to maximize opportunities for young people to move along two or more of these three dimensions—high school, postsecondary, and work—at the same time (depicted as the blue path in Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2. Seamless, not separate: High school, postsecondary, & work**

The three components of the Youth Opportunity Guarantee visualized as a cube, showing the three-dimensional and sequential approaches



Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019.

The paper makes the following goals and framework tangible. First we introduce key principles of the Youth Opportunity Guarantee: systems integration; equity; and youth-adult partnership. We then assess the education and employment situation for young people in the U.S. Next we explain in detail, with examples, the three components of the guarantee: high school or equivalent that prepares students for college and career; a range of postsecondary options that help lead to labor market success; and quality career training, national service, or employment. We provide three case studies outlining significant city and state progress towards increasing youth opportunity. Finally, we lay out recommendations for operationalizing the guarantee: cross-sector community commitment, significant federal and state support, and transparency and accountability.

As a nation, we have taken critical steps forward, but our progress is uneven and insufficient. Serious challenges and inequities persist. We must take the next step and commit to ensuring the educational and work opportunities needed to truly set up *all* youth for success.



## Methodology

**T**his report results from several streams of research. In addition to an in-depth literature review, this report is shaped by stakeholder engagement and site visits. We began the research process with extensive consultation with a wide variety of experts on youth employment. In person and by phone, we held individual or small-group discussions with service providers, young leaders, government officials at all levels, Congressional staff, academics, researchers, advocates, employers, and others. Interviewees shared key insights about youth employment and career pathways advances, challenges, and possibilities. These conversations helped to inform this entire report from the key principles to the elements of the guarantee to the recommendations to achieve it.

We conducted several in-person site visits of youth employment and career pathways programs around the country—in Tennessee, California, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. These site visits provided the opportunity to speak with a broad range of stakeholders from students to employer associations to community college officials.

In total, this report draws on insights resulting from engagement with well over 100 experts and stakeholders across the country.



# Key Principles of the Youth Opportunity Guarantee

**T**his section introduces key principles of the Youth Opportunity Guarantee: systems integration; equity; and youth-adult partnership. These concepts, which surfaced time and again during our discussions with stakeholders, are discussed further throughout the report.

## Systems Integration

---

A major reason for U.S. youth and young adults' struggles with educational and career achievement is the lack of connection and integration across key systems including secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. This disconnection makes it difficult for youth to transition between systems to achieve their aspirations. Therefore, the Youth Opportunity Guarantee emphasizes integration across systems to achieve a comprehensive web of supports and opportunities.

As a stakeholder explained, "Our systems are so siloed, so we have young people who are existing between systems. They have disengaged from the education system but not attached to the workforce system; they are in between. Or they have completed high school, but we have failed to design a system that worked to connect them to anything after high school. How are we effectively knitting together bridges between these big public systems?"

Stakeholders have increasingly recognized that successfully resolving youth employment challenges at scale requires local- or regional-level collaboration between systems to help youth complete high school and postsecondary education and transition into good jobs via cohesive education-career pathways, and to reconnect Opportunity Youth to education and career. The cross-system public and private engagement should include K-12 education, postsecondary, employers and the workforce system, government, unions, foundations, community-based

organizations, young leaders, and other civic leaders. Such collaboration requires a focus on equity, as discussed in the next section.

To be sure, youth systems must begin even before a child's birth. Prenatal care, early nutrition and education, and many other supports in a young child's life are critical to their long-term success. This report focuses primarily on the teen and young adult years. Regardless of how well supported young people are before they reach this time of life, what happens during these crucial years has enormous consequences for their adult lives. Yet our nation fails millions of teenagers and young adults—jeopardizing their futures as well as our nation's economic future.

These systems should operate primarily at the local or regional level, with federal and state government support and funding, because education systems and labor markets are organized locally and regionally and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. In any given region, the degree and certificate programs available should be aligned with the demands of the regional economy.

Consistent with a growing consensus described below, the Youth Opportunity Guarantee is a community-driven approach in which leaders of many systems come together to develop a variety of pathways, integrating education and work through career technical education and work-based learning, into the local labor market's high-demand, good-paying jobs. We draw on the successful or promising efforts of organizations and collaborations across the country working to achieve this vision. Young people and their experience with these systems must be the overarching focus of reforms if we are to secure a fair chance for them.

## FEDERAL LEGISLATION

Distinct federal laws set up distinct systems serving youth and young adults through our K-12 public education, higher education, career technical education, and workforce development systems, among others. These laws include the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Higher Education Act (HEA), the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), respectively. The separate laws lead to separate funding streams, reporting requirements, data systems, outcome measures, and more.

To take one example, public agencies, K-12 and postsecondary education institutions, and nonprofits struggle to stitch together funds from various federal and state funding streams to deliver a combination of necessary supports to Opportunity Youth. An Aspen Institute report discusses the difficulty of combining resources available through the WIOA, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Education & Training funds, and federal Pell Grants: "A major challenge is that most of these funding streams are constructed to operate independently of each other, as if a person would only experience one problem—or need one kind of support—at a time. Such is not the life of an Opportunity Youth."<sup>8</sup>

In recent years, federal policymakers have achieved advances in integration across systems when reauthorizing these laws. Perhaps most importantly in the context of this report, the Perkins Act, HEA, and WIOA now share a definition of career pathways, essentially: a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that align with the skills needs of industries in a state or regional economy and prepare an individual to be successful in a full

range of secondary or postsecondary education.<sup>9</sup> Additional systems alignment improvements in reauthorizations of these laws are noted throughout this report.

## SYSTEMS INTEGRATION EFFORTS

In recent years we have seen many important efforts led by a variety of actors at the federal, state, regional, or local level to improve systems integration. These initiatives often focus on in-school youth, through career pathways, or Opportunity Youth. Some would say we have both a career pathways movement and an Opportunity Youth movement. These are great strides forward. We can build on this progress to achieve a universal, integrated system serving all youth.

The career pathways approach, which is rooted in systems integration, has grown considerably in recent decades and is required to achieve the guarantee of high school that prepares youth for college and career. Career pathways are designed to connect (1) secondary and postsecondary education; and (2) education and work. As Nancy Hoffman and Robert Schwartz explain, career pathways systems seek to “cross two long-standing American divides—the gap between secondary and postsecondary education as well as the gap between what education provides and employers say they need.”<sup>10</sup>

### BOX 1.

#### CITY GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL:

“With respect to youth employment, it can feel like the summer youth employment program is all we talk about. It is a major part of the city budget. But we need an overall local youth employment strategy. What’s our goal, and how do we get there?”

Source: Anonymous. 21 February 2018.

A central catalyst of the career pathways approach was the Pathways to Prosperity report published by the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2011.<sup>11</sup> The report identified our nation’s excessive emphasis on “a single pathway to success: attending and graduating from a four-year college after completing an academic program of study in high school” although earning a Bachelor’s degree is not the only avenue into a good job, and only 30 percent of young adults successfully complete this pathway. The authors recommended creating a broader set of career-focused pathways into well-paying careers, beginning in high school and leading into a variety of options for postsecondary education or training resulting in an industry-recognized credential and a good job. Now, the Pathways to Prosperity Network is working in 14 states to help state and regional leaders create pathways from grades 9-14 to help young adults earn credentials and secure good jobs in fields including health care, Information Technology, and advanced manufacturing. Successful implementation requires a partnership between the K-12 education

system, postsecondary institutions (especially community colleges), employers, intermediaries, and state policymakers.

Similarly, systems integration efforts focused on Opportunity Youth bring together a variety of entities to strengthen systems to reconnect youth to education and/or employment. The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions’ Opportunity Youth Forum focuses on cross-sector collaborative community approaches to solving problems faced by Opportunity Youth. This effort came out of the Obama Administration’s White House Council for Community Solutions’ report Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth, which highlighted the need for this approach.<sup>12</sup> The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions’ Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) supports collaboratives and backbone organizations in 24 communities using a cross-sector collective impact approach to improve education and employment pathways for

Opportunity Youth. Participating system leaders include schools, community-based programs, postsecondary institutions, employers, youth leaders, and government agencies.<sup>13, 14</sup>

## Equity

---

Equity is an essential component of the Youth Opportunity Guarantee; we envision a system based on and in pursuit of equity. We focus particular attention on low-income youth, youth of color, LGBTQ youth, immigrant youth, girls and young women, youth with disabilities, and youth who have had engagement with the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Some of the challenges faced by these groups are noted below. These communities are not discrete but overlap, as multiple identities often intersect in one person. Many other groups also face increased barriers and warrant further attention; we highlight these specific groups to illustrate a selection of challenges and solutions.

The Youth Opportunity Guarantee focuses on inequity in systems of education, employment, and juvenile and criminal justice in particular. To develop solutions that connect youth to historically inaccessible opportunities, the guarantee is explicit in acknowledging how interlocking systems of oppression disrupt young people's educational and career trajectories.<sup>15</sup> We include strategies to ensure all young people are receiving the resources and institutional support they need in proportion to the barriers they face.

### YOUTH EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Living in high-poverty, economically distressed areas negatively impacts young learners' mental health and is associated with poor economic outcomes later in life.<sup>16, 17</sup> Areas with concentrated poverty tend to have reduced school quality, access to healthy food options, and availability of health care centers, in part because these resources are tied to the area's property tax base.<sup>18</sup>

Native American, Black, and Latinx young people suffer from higher poverty rates than White youth and the effects are concentrated due to segregation, with historic and ongoing causes including continued racial discrimination in lending to homebuyers.<sup>19</sup> Youth belonging to certain Asian subgroups also face high poverty rates.<sup>20</sup>

### LGBTQ YOUTH

LGBTQ youth face increased and unique barriers in pursuing education and employment. They are disproportionately involved in the child welfare system, experience homelessness at higher rates, are more likely to participate in survival crimes such as sex work, and face disproportionate juvenile justice system involvement.<sup>21</sup>

Schools are hostile environments unconducive to learning for many LGBTQ youth. One survey found that over half (59.5 percent) of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school in 2017. Seventy percent experienced verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation. Of transgender K-12 students, nearly a quarter (24 percent) were physically attacked and 13 percent were sexually assaulted.<sup>22</sup> Over 1 in 5 students who were out or perceived as transgender left a K-12 school because of mistreatment. These harmful and negative experiences at school are associated with worse educational outcomes. LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, anti-harassment policies that protect LGBTQ students, and other inclusive school policies can make a difference, but only 10.6 percent of LGBTQ students reported that their school or district had such policies or guidelines.<sup>23</sup>

One in five LGBTQ people report having experienced discrimination when applying for jobs and 22 percent have experienced discrimination in pay or when being considered for promotions; LGBTQ people of color are over two times as likely to have experienced discrimination when applying for jobs compared to white LGBTQ people.<sup>24</sup> More than three-fourths of transgender people have experienced workplace discrimination and transgender women of color in particular face countless barriers to finding safe employment; their unemployment rate is four times higher than the general population and they are overrepresented in the informal economy.<sup>25</sup>

## GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN

Girls and young women experience pervasive barriers to success in school and work. They take on a disproportionate amount of caregiving and work inside of the home.<sup>26</sup> Women complete postsecondary degrees more than men, but are disproportionately found in lower-paying majors.<sup>27</sup> Girls and young women, and especially those who are people of color or LGBTQ, also experience sexual harassment and assault at both school and work.<sup>28</sup>

About 40 percent of working women ages 18 to 29 faced gender-based discrimination at work.<sup>29</sup> This discrimination takes many forms such as: earning less than counterparts who are men, being passed over for meaningful assignments, being turned down for promotions, and being turned down for jobs altogether.<sup>30</sup>

Unequal pay is a prevalent form of gender-based discrimination. The gender wage gap emerges as early as 14 to 15 years old.<sup>31</sup> The ratio of women's and men's median annual earnings was 80.5 percent for full-time/year-round workers in 2017, unchanged since 2016.<sup>32</sup> Compared to white men, black women make 60 cents to the dollar, Latinx women make 53 cents to the dollar, and Asian women make 85 cents to the dollar.<sup>33</sup> However, women in some Asian subgroups make much less.<sup>34</sup>

## YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

While laws such as the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) are markers of progress, youth with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to education and employment. These barriers often take the form of wider structural inequalities, including non-inclusive work policies and practices; insufficient affordable, accessible transportation and housing; and a lack of access to necessary learning and work supports.

The magnitude of the obstacles are reflected in the significant gaps in high school and postsecondary graduation rates, as well as employment rates, between youth with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.<sup>35</sup> For example, youth without disabilities are almost twice as likely to be employed as youth with disabilities: for older teenagers, employment rates are about 31 and 17 percent respectively; and, for those in their early 20s, the gap is still substantial but narrower at about 67 percent and 40 percent respectively.<sup>36</sup> A notable pay gap also exists between workers with and without disabilities: workers with disabilities earn 63 cents to the dollar.<sup>37</sup> Though economic insecurity can therefore be understood as a result of disability, it is also a cause of disability as economic insecurity may limit access to health and preventative care, increase the risk of inadequate nutrition, and heighten exposure to environmental hazards and unsafe working conditions.<sup>38</sup>

## IMMIGRANT YOUTH, INCLUDING UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH

Young immigrants and the children of immigrants represent a full gamut of talents, needs, and aspirations. Immigrant youth may face challenges such as gaps in academic preparation, limited

language proficiency and work authorization, and difficulties in receiving recognition for foreign academic or professional credentials.<sup>39</sup>

Among immigrant groups facing the greatest obstacles are undocumented youth. They are often central to the economic security of their families yet face limited opportunities to earn an income and pursue further education. Undocumented youth are more commonly employed in more labor-intensive jobs and work longer hours.<sup>40</sup> Those who seek pathways into middle- and high-skill occupations have restricted options as undocumented people are, for instance, barred from receiving professional and occupational licenses in all but a handful of states; and from enrolling in public colleges and universities in several states, namely in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.<sup>41</sup> Financial barriers are also a significant reason why few undocumented youth attain further academic and professional credentials. Only 15 percent of undocumented people (aged 25 and older) graduate from college.<sup>42</sup> Many are the first in their families to attend, and most states require undocumented immigrants to pay out-of-state tuition for public universities.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has been an important protection for 800,000 undocumented young people by providing work authorization and temporary safety from deportation. However, many undocumented youth could not access DACA, and the future of the program is uncertain. The burden of fear and uncertainty around documentation status, and the potential for deportation, of themselves or close family members, weighs heavily on undocumented youth.

## YOUTH OF COLOR

Youth of color are disconnected from work and school at higher rates than white youth due to a variety of interconnected barriers. They experience disproportionately high rates of poverty and, throughout our history, have been denied equal access to jobs, health care, education, and investments in the communities where they live.<sup>43</sup> Native American (25.8 percent), Black (17.2 percent), and Latino (13.7 percent) youth face the highest rates of disconnection from work and education.<sup>44</sup>

Racial and economic segregation, which are deeply intertwined, limit educational opportunity, as local property taxes play a central role in funding public schools.<sup>45</sup> More than sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, education in the United States continues to be separate and unequal.<sup>46</sup> School districts with high levels of enrollment of students of color receive 15 percent less funding per student and are twice as likely to have inexperienced teachers as districts with predominantly White students.<sup>47</sup> Gerrymandered school districts institutionalize resource disparities along lines of race and class.<sup>48</sup>

Both students and teachers are harmed by limited resources at “high poverty” schools. Title I federal funding provides some financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families, but it falls short of the need. Students of color disproportionately attend these schools: 45 percent of Black students, 45 percent of Latinx students, 37 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students and 25 percent of Pacific Islander students attended high-poverty schools in the 2015-2016 school year.<sup>49</sup> About 48,000 Native American children attend schools that are overseen by the Bureau of Indian Education; many of these schools are in extreme disrepair, lacking basic infrastructure and educational resources.<sup>50</sup>

## BOX 2.

### ALEX FRANK, VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE:

Prison presents an unnatural social context which creates challenges for young adults to achieve these key developmental milestones. Instead, young adults in prison too often are left sitting in their cells with little to no opportunity to learn from past experiences, cope with underlying trauma, engage in meaningful accountability, and prepare for their future.

Source: Frank, Alex. "Why Reimagining Prisons for Youth Adults Matters." Vera Institute of Justice. 28 February 2017. Available at <https://www.vera.org/blog/why-reimagining-prison-for-young-adults-matters>

Although issues related to poverty and race are deeply intertwined, higher poverty rates among youth of color do not explain away the differences in rates of disconnection. Even youth of color in families with the highest income levels are more likely to be disconnected than white youth in families with high incomes. What's more—white youth in families with incomes at the poverty line are as likely to be disconnected as black youth in families with incomes at four times the poverty line and Native American youth in families at five times the poverty line.<sup>51</sup>

Youth of color also face harsher and more frequent disciplinary action in school and disparities in arrest rates and sentencing that contribute to the disproportionate rate of youth of color involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.<sup>52</sup>

### JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

Punitive school discipline policy contributes to the criminalization of youth—especially youth of color and LGBTQ youth. For example, disproportionate discipline of Black students contributes to significant overrepresentation of Black youth in the juvenile justice system. Nationally, Black girls are suspended six times more than White girls, and Black boys, three times more than White boys; due in part to disproportionate school discipline, Black youth are more than five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youth.<sup>53</sup>

Latinx and Native American youth are also substantially overrepresented in punitive interventions. Native girls, boys and Latinx youth are suspended three, two and 1.5 times as much as White youth, respectively; Latinx and

Native American youth are three times more likely to be taken into custody.<sup>54</sup>

Young people are disproportionately involved with the criminal justice system, which brings lasting consequences. Youth ages 18 to 24 make up only 10 percent of the population, but represent 21 percent of those entering adult prisons annually.<sup>55</sup> Young adults are more likely to be rearrested than any other age group.<sup>56</sup> They face difficulty transferring back to school after incarceration and face roadblocks to higher education. Youth with justice system involvement often struggle to seal and expunge records and may face barriers to occupational licenses, and face discrimination in hiring.<sup>57</sup>

## Youth-Adult Partnership

Youth are often denied engagement in various ways simply because they are young; in contrast, the Youth Opportunity Guarantee emphasizes the necessity of youth-adult partnership.

Youth-adult partnership is defined as a group of youth and adults working together for a common purpose, jointly identifying an issue and designing and implementing solutions.<sup>58</sup> The term is generally applied to efforts to benefit an organization or larger community.<sup>59</sup>

We use this term broadly to encompass a common theme from our conversations with stakeholders, including young leaders—that all efforts impacting youth, from the micro to the macro levels, must engage youth as partners. On a smaller scale that means, for example,

that a young person in an employment program should be supported in achieving their goals and engaged in decision-making processes affecting them. On a larger scale that means, for example, that youth should be engaged as partners in developing and improving policies affecting their lives. The need for youth-adult partnership, and examples of youth-adult partnership at various levels, are discussed below.

## THE NEED FOR YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

Alexis Andino's description of her experience as a teenager in the foster care system, published by American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), exemplifies the highly problematic lack of youth-adult partnership. She explains, "I constantly struggled to get the adults around me to truly hear me when I spoke about my needs, dreams and ideas on how the child welfare system could improve. Many times, I felt disengaged and unheard in my dependency case, which greatly affected my future." She discusses the need for foster youth to have a voice in their case and be engaged in decision-making, which is relevant for youth in foster care as well as other systems and programs:

### BOX 3.

#### AMANDA SHABOWICH, BOSTON YOUTH VOICE PROJECT:

"If you don't have young people at the table when you're talking about young people, then whatever you come up with is going to be flawed, it's going to be incomplete, and it's not going to be sustainable."

Source: Shabowich, Amanda. "The Boston Story: Multiple Waves of Collective Impact." Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Convening. 23 May 2017. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQQVevImNGw>.

*"Often, we [youth in the foster care system] are not given opportunities to advocate or have a voice in many areas of our life like where we will live, what school we will go to, or with whom we get to maintain relationships. For me, I felt like the adults in my life or my case workers always talked at me or about me, but not with me... As a foster youth, as we reach adolescence, we should be included in our case, meaning we should be actively involved in the planning and decisions made in our case. This is important because when we are not included we lose opportunities to shape our own futures and to gain the skills needed for when we are no longer in foster care."*

As illustrated by Alexis' experience, youth-adult partnership is essential for at least two key reasons—because it advances a young person's development and because it achieves better results. Engagement as a partner in the process would have provided Alexis the opportunity to develop her critical thinking and decision-making skills. Such engagement would also have made it more likely that Alexis' basic needs would be met and allowed her more control over her own future.

## YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP IN A PROGRAM

In contrast to Alexis' experience, youth-adult partnership in an employment or other program means that youth participate actively in setting their own goals and path, and adults support them in moving toward their goals. As Da'Quon Beaver from the Campaign for Youth Justice explained, "We should ask, 'How can we help get this young person to where they want to go?'"<sup>60</sup>

In the Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) model serving justice-involved youth and others facing significant challenges, youth in the program are engaged as partners. Staff members work with youth to design highly-individualized service plans based on the young person's assets, interests, and needs. This approach, which builds on a young person's strengths and leadership potential

and emphasizes positive relationships with adults, incorporates the concepts of positive youth development and positive youth justice.<sup>61</sup>

Relationships between young people and positive caring adults are central to a young person's success in school, work, and beyond—and can be particularly pivotal for youth facing the greatest barriers. These relationships can even be the primary influence on young people's ability to make change in their lives. These roles can be called advocate, mentor, coach, advisor, or other names but always involve an ongoing relationship with a caring adult who is committed to helping the young person achieve their goals. Edward DeJesus from YAP explains the importance of youth-adult relationships, and adult support in helping youth achieve their goals, in YAP's programs for youth:

*"We use a wraparound relational model because mere workforce development or job training isn't enough. A young person may get a job, lose the job, and still be disconnected. They need lasting connections to adults in the labor market. At YAP, we focus on building a connection between a young person and a positive caring adult/advocate—a paid culturally-competent community-based advocate who works with the young person and their family to help them access supports and meet their goals. We're not driving the bus—the young person and family are driving the bus. We help give them directions."<sup>62</sup>*

Youth programs can and should engage youth as partners and leaders in a variety of ways. For example, some youth-serving organizations include youth as decision-makers on their board of directors or a youth advisory board. Some engage youth in peer outreach, support, and mentorship. Some prioritize hiring former program participants into staff positions because their lived experience will prove invaluable in their work.

## YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP IN COMMUNITY, POLICY, & SYSTEMS CHANGE

Youth-adult partnership is also essential in community, policy, and systems change. Such partnership helps youth develop a range of skills important to their success. It also improves policy and program effectiveness as youth with lived experience contribute knowledge and expertise developed through their experiences. Examples of youth-adult partnership across the country include Opportunity Youth United's local coalitions, Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund collaboratives, and various city government councils and programs.

Opportunity Youth United, a national movement of young leaders, has organized 17 Community Action Teams (CATs) across the country. They are designed to be the local voice for Opportunity Youth.<sup>63</sup> In these coalitions, young leaders and youth-serving organizations engage in the political process and develop and implement community improvement projects. Each team is led by a local anchor organization.

The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions' Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, described previously, emphasizes youth-adult partnership in community initiatives across the country. As explained by the Aspen Institute, "Instead of designing programs and systems for them, OYIF collaboratives have strived to design systems change strategies in partnership with youth. This has meant not only enlisting and supporting young people to share their voices, but preparing adults to hear and listen to these voices and demonstrate a commitment to their ideas in future efforts. In fact, to be authentic, youth engagement must involve youth participating in youth-

adult partnerships that are designed to ensure that both young people and adults contribute to and learn from the experience.”<sup>64</sup>

Youth-adult partnership has been institutionalized through city government councils and programs in many states. In Pittsburgh, the Youth Participatory Budget Committee determines how to spend a portion of the city’s budget. In Park City, Utah, the Youth Council polled teens and advised the City Council on how to provide effective teen programming.<sup>65</sup> In Boston, the Division of Youth Engagement and Employment engaged youth as partners in redesigning the summer youth employment program’s application and matching process, ensuring consideration of criteria important to youth such as access to public transit.<sup>66</sup> In youth courts across the country, an alternative to school disciplinary proceedings and the traditional juvenile justice system, youth are sentenced by their peers for minor crimes or offenses.<sup>67</sup>

Youth-adult partnership should be central to policymaking and policy implementation processes affecting youth, including the Youth Opportunity Guarantee.



# Assessing the Education & Employment Situation for Young People in the United States

**C**urrent systems of education and employment preparation in the United States do not yet provide all youth a real opportunity for success. These systems do not yet sufficiently address inequities along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, citizenship status and disability, among other historically marginalized identities.

In recent years, the nation has witnessed economic recovery and progress in employment and educational attainment, but it has been inequitable and insufficient. The youth unemployment rate fell from 18.4 percent in 2010 following the Great Recession to 8.6 percent in 2018.<sup>68</sup> The high school graduation rate reached a record high of 84 percent during the 2015-2016 school year and postsecondary education among youth has been on the rise as well.<sup>69</sup> In 2017, 46.1 percent of people ages 25 to 29 had an Associate's or higher degree.<sup>70</sup>

A closer look reveals that wide demographic disparities remain, particularly with respect to high school graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, unemployment rates, earnings, and youth disconnection rates. We consider the education and employment situation for the overall youth population in the United States and then explore disparities specifically for Opportunity Youth.

Unfortunately, in many instances, data limitations prevent us from focusing on groups such as LGBTQ youth. For example, youth disconnection rates are derived from American Community Survey (ACS) data, but the survey does not currently ask questions about sexual orientation or gender identity, and respondents can choose only "male" or "female" as their sex.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, youth disconnection rates for LGBTQ youth cannot be gleaned from ACS data.

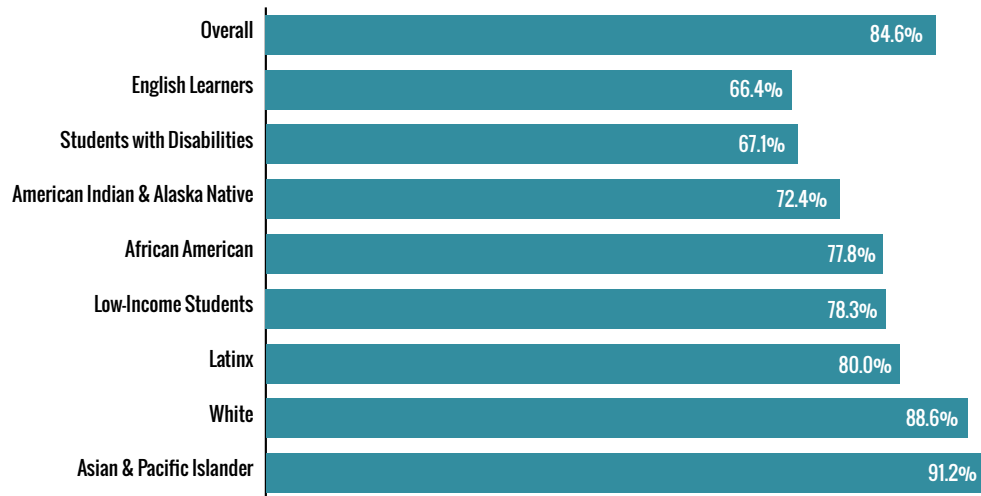
## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

The U.S. high school graduation rate has been increasing in recent years but high schools are not graduating all students at equal rates. Due to a variety of historic and systemic challenges, as shown in the graph below, English language learners (67 percent), students with disabilities (66 percent), and Native Americans (72 percent) fall more than ten percentage points behind the nation's overall high school graduation rate of 84 percent in the 2016-2017 school year;<sup>72</sup> African American and Latinx high school graduation rates are also below the overall rate, at 76 and 79 percent respectively. Of high schools enrolling at least 100 students, there were 2,425 high schools that had graduation rates of 67 percent or less in 2016.<sup>73</sup>

Youth who leave high school before graduating earn significantly less than those who were able to complete secondary education. In 2017, heads of households who had not attained a high school diploma or an equivalent certification by the age of 25 had a mean income that was more than \$17,000 less than those who had.<sup>74</sup>

**FIGURE 3. High school graduation rates are lowest for students with disabilities & English learners, and vary substantially across racial lines**

4-year high school graduation rates for various demographic groups, school year 2016-2017



Note: Low-Income students are those who met the state criteria for classification as “economically disadvantaged,” usually being those whose family incomes are below 150 percent of the poverty level. White does not include Hispanic White.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from “Table 1. Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by race/ethnicity and selected demographic characteristics for the United States, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia: School year 2016–17.” National Center for Education Statistics, retrieved 20 February 2019. Available at [https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds\\_datacenter/ipeds\\_datacenter\\_tables/ACGR\\_RE\\_and\\_characteristics\\_2016-17.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds_datacenter/ipeds_datacenter_tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2016-17.asp).

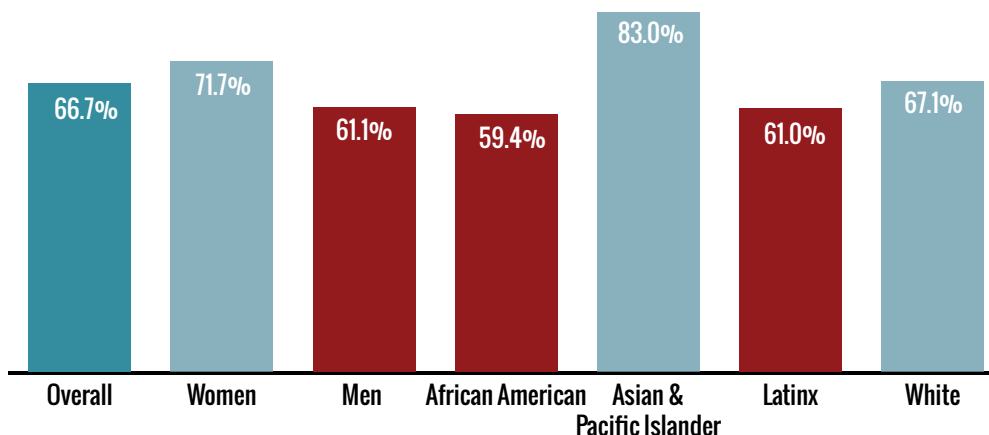
## COLLEGE ENROLLMENT & COMPLETION

College enrollment rates also vary substantially by race, ethnicity, and gender. Women (71.7 percent) are more likely than men (61.1 percent) to enroll in college right after high school;<sup>75</sup> Asian students (83 percent) have a much higher college enrollment rate than African American students (59.4 percent) and Latinx students (61 percent).<sup>76</sup>

Similar gender and racial disparities persist in college completion rates. African American and Latinx students’ completion rates are lower than the overall six-year completion rate;<sup>77</sup> completion rates are lower for men than women across all racial and ethnic groups.<sup>78</sup>

**FIGURE 4.** College enrollment rates for African-American, Latinx, & male students are lower than the national average

College enrollment rates of youth, ages 16–24, by gender, race, & ethnicity, 2017

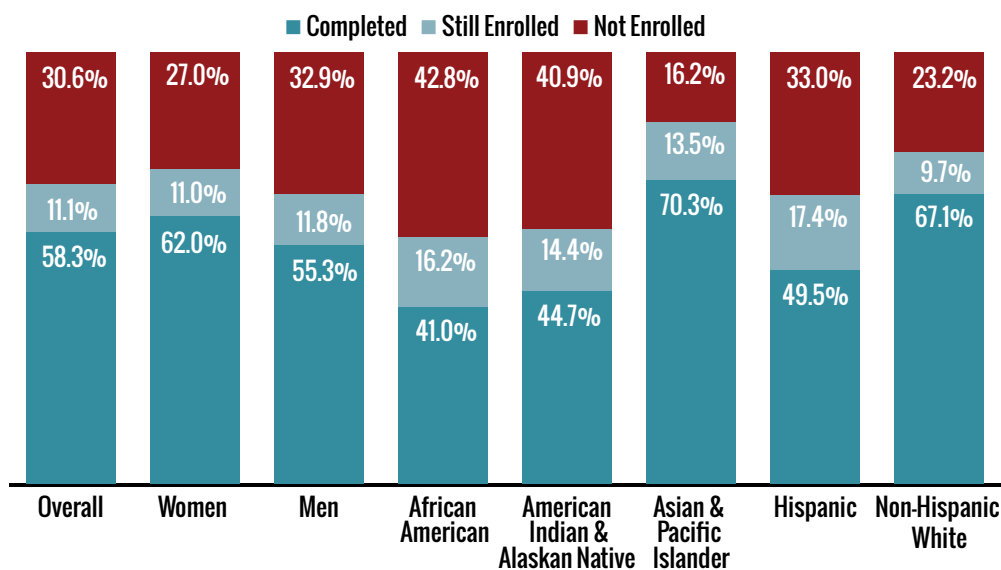


Note: College enrollment rate includes youth age 16–24 who graduated from high school between January and October 2017, and were enrolled in college in October. College enrollment includes two-year colleges and four-year colleges. The source does not contain data for American Indians and Alaska Natives. White includes Hispanic White.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from “College Enrollment and Work Activity of Recent High School and College Graduates Summary.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, 26 April 2018. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgsec.nr0.htm>.

**FIGURE 5.** College completion rates are lowest for African-Americans & lower for men

6-year college graduation outcomes by race & gender for the fall 2012 cohort (percent)



Note: Figures are for students who began postsecondary education in fall 2011. Students are not limited to those age 16–24. Figures include all postsecondary institution types: two-year and four-year institutions, public and private institutions, and nonprofit and for-profit institutions..

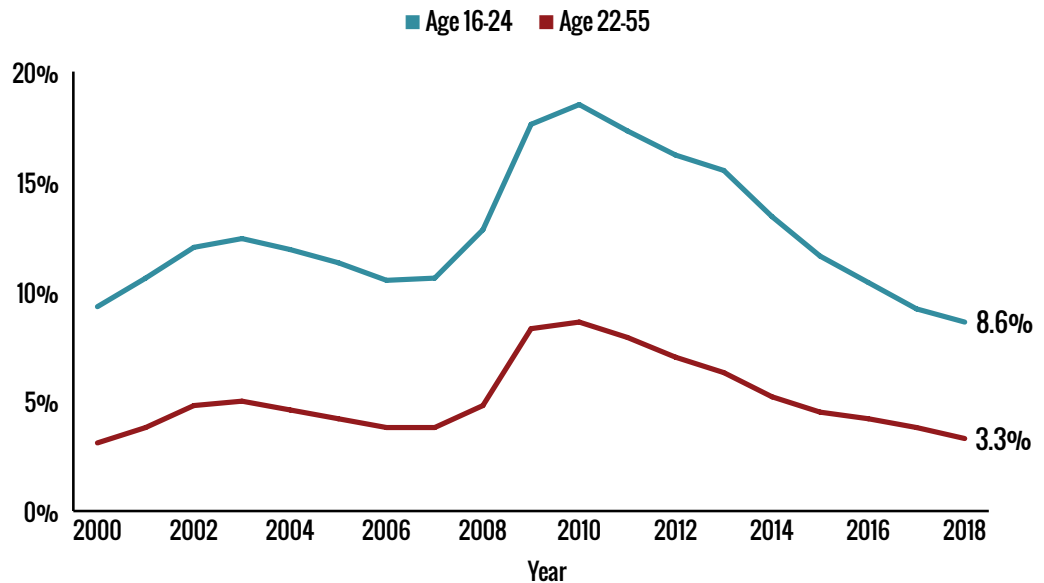
Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from Shapiro, Doug, et al. “Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates—Fall 2012 Cohort (Signature Report No. 16).” National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 18 December 2018. Available at <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport16/>.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

Young people today continue to face higher unemployment than the prime working age population. The unemployment rate for youth and young adults ages 16 to 24 has been halved since the Great Recession, standing at 8.4 percent as of the fourth quarter of 2018, with the rate noticeably higher for young men (8.9 percent) than young women (7.7 percent).<sup>79, 80, 81</sup> However, that rate is still more than double the unemployment rate for prime-age (25 to 55) working people (3.5 percent).<sup>82</sup> Youth unemployment has been consistently worse than prime-age unemployment since reliable data were first produced in 1948.<sup>83, 84</sup> Younger workers are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns, as less experience generally means less job protection. In particular, low-income youth, particularly youth of color, are frequently among the last hired and first fired in a slack labor market.<sup>85</sup>

**FIGURE 6.** Youth unemployment is consistently higher than prime-age unemployment

Seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for ages 16–24 & ages 25–55, 2000–2018



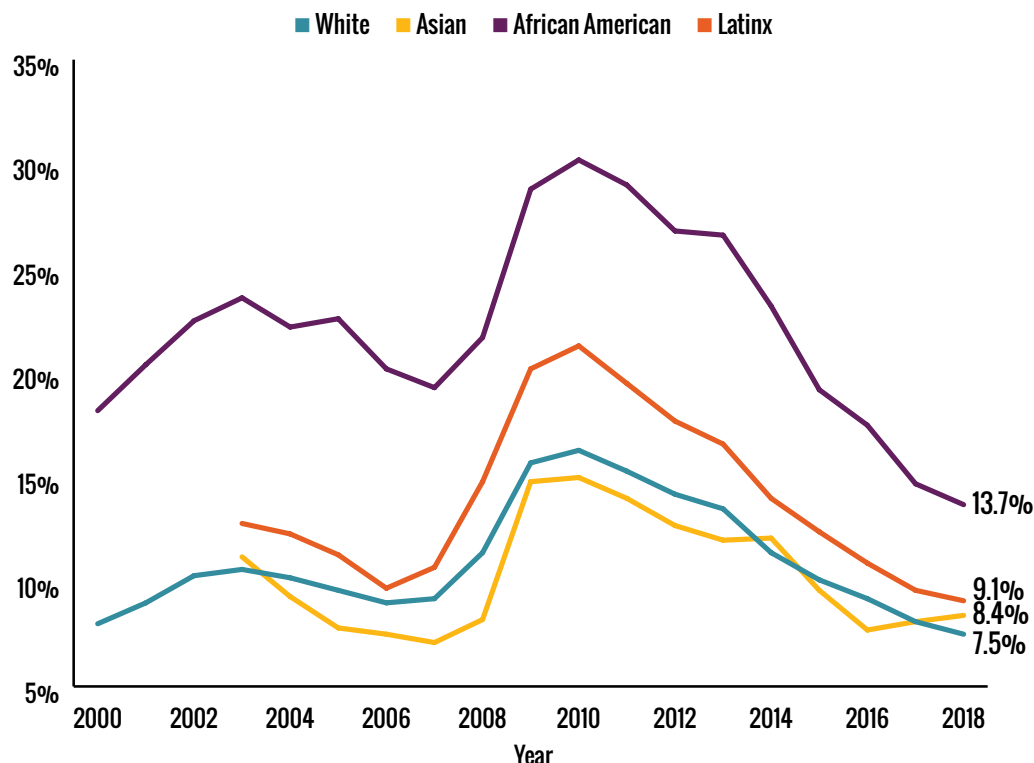
Note: The presented data are unweighted annual averages of quarterly data.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from “(Seas) Unemployment Rate - 16-24 yrs.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS14024887Q>; “(Seas) Unemployment Rate - 25-54 yrs.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS14000060Q>.

Significant racial disparities exist in unemployment among young people. As shown in the figure below, African-American youth unemployment is consistently higher, often almost double, that of white youth. Latinx youth unemployment is also higher than that of white youth.

**FIGURE 7. Youth Unemployment Rates Vary Substantially by Race**

Seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for ages 16–24 & ages 25–55, 2000–2018



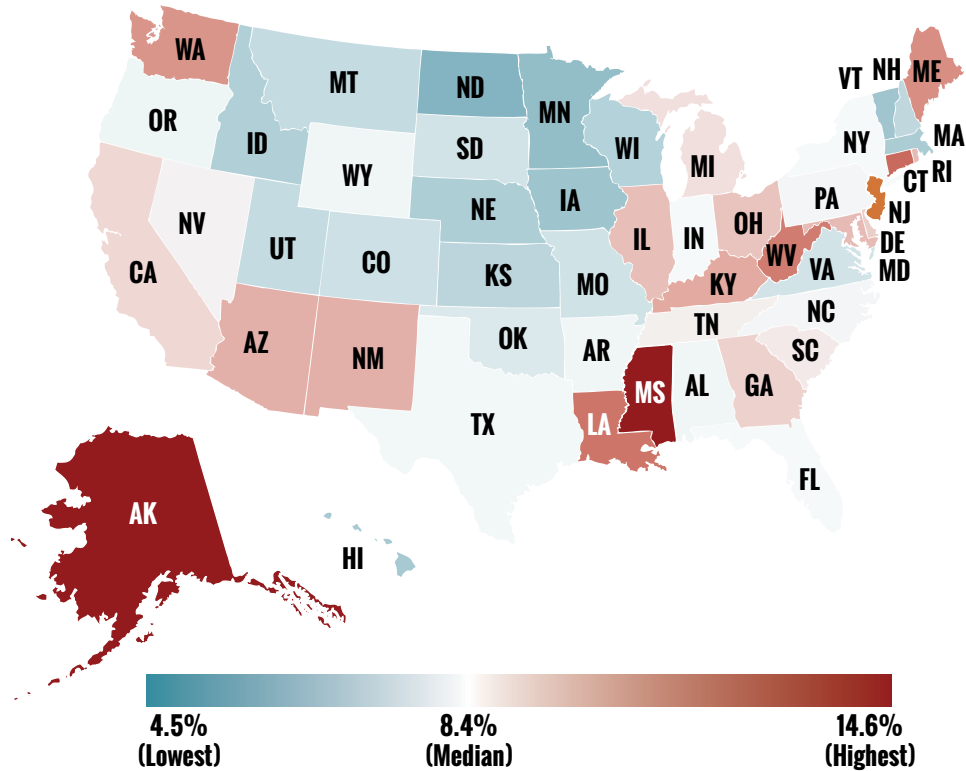
Note: The presented data are unweighted annual averages of quarterly data.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from “(Seas) Unemployment Rate - 16-24 yrs.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS14024887Q>; “(Seas) Unemployment Rate - 25-54 yrs.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS14000060Q>.

There are also considerable geographic disparities in youth unemployment, as shown in Figure 8. In 2017, the District of Columbia experienced the highest youth unemployment rate in the nation, at 14.8 percent, closely followed by Alaska at 14.6 percent.<sup>86</sup> Youth unemployment rates are lowest in North Dakota (4.2 percent), Nebraska (5.7 percent), and Iowa (5.7 percent).<sup>87</sup>

**FIGURE 8.** Youth unemployment rate by state

Rate of unemployment for ages 16-24 by state, 2018



Note: The unemployment rates used are preliminary annual unweighted averages estimated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The numbers on the scale represent the lowest, median, and highest state youth unemployment rates, respectively. See Table 1 in Appendix for the data.

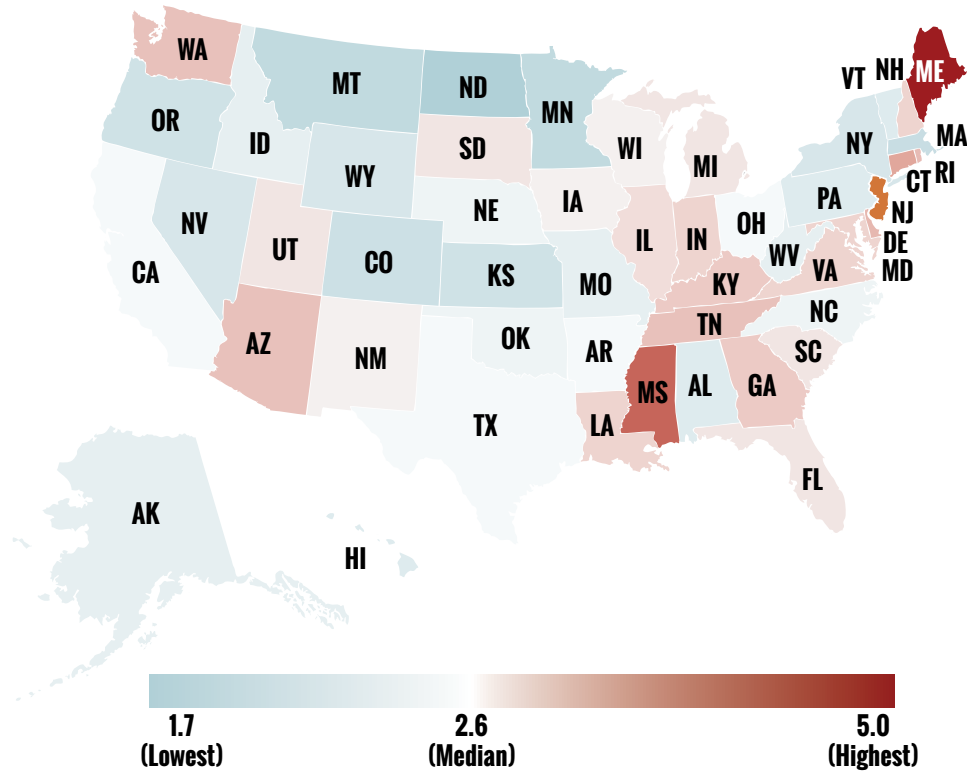
Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from “States: Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex and intermediate age, 2018 annual averages.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/lau/ptable14afull2018.htm>.

## YOUTH-TO-ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT RATIO

The youth-to-adult unemployment ratio, commonly used in the European Union, is useful in assessing youth unemployment relative to adult unemployment. To understand the extent to which youth unemployment surpasses adult unemployment, we calculate the youth-to-adult unemployment ratio by dividing the youth unemployment rate (ages 16 to 24) by the prime age unemployment rate (ages 25 to 54). As shown in Figure 9, significant geographical disparities exist across states. The youth-to-adult unemployment ratio is highest for Maine and Mississippi—where the youth unemployment rate is 5 and 4.2 times the prime age unemployment rate, respectively. Whereas, North Dakota and Montana have the lowest youth-to-adult unemployment ratio with youth unemployment being 1.7 times and 1.9 times that of the prime age unemployment rate, respectively.<sup>88</sup>

**FIGURE 9.** Youth-to-adult unemployment ratio by state

Ratio of unemployment rate of ages 16-24 to that of ages 25-54 by state, 2018



Note: The unemployment rates used are preliminary annual averages estimated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The numbers on the scale represent the lowest, median, and highest state youth to adult employment ratio values respectively. See Table 1 in Appendix for the data.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from "States: Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex and intermediate age, 2018 annual averages." Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/lau/ptable14afull2018.htm>.

## BOX 4.

### ANDREW SUM, BROOKINGS INSTITUTE:

Reduced work experience among high school and college students is worrisome not because it automatically indicates current economic hardship, but because it suggests a long-term negative effect on employment and earnings.

Source: Sum, Andrew, et al. "The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults." Brookings Institute, March 2017. Available at [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Youth\\_Workforce\\_Report\\_FINAL-2.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Youth_Workforce_Report_FINAL-2.pdf).

## EMPLOYMENT-POPULATION RATIO

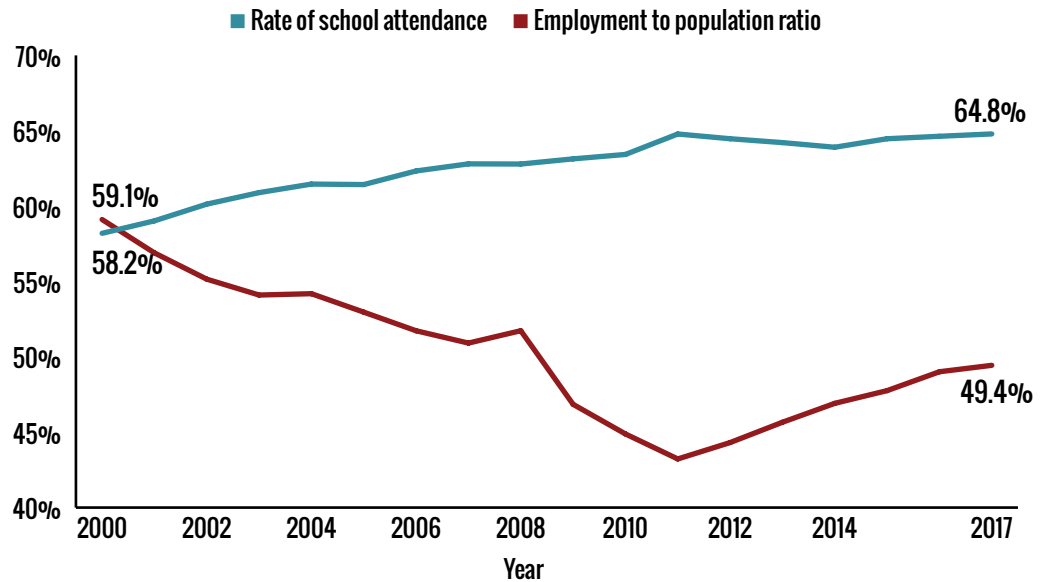
Looking beyond unemployment rates provides a richer picture of the youth workforce. The employment-population ratio measures the proportion of the civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 16 years and over that is employed.<sup>89</sup> The ratio among people age 16 to 24 is generally much lower than that of prime age (25 to 54) working people, as a larger share of young people are full-time students.<sup>90, 91</sup>

As shown in Figure 10, the share of employed youth has declined in recent years. This decrease must be compared with school attendance, as youth may opt to withdraw from work to focus on school. Education is seen as a young person's primary activity until high school graduation. There is some debate as to whether work interferes with high school students' academic success, although most agree that working 15-20 hours per week is unlikely to hinder academic achievement.<sup>92</sup> The graph indicates that the share of youth employed has declined more than the increase

in the share of youth in school. Furthermore, significant youth unemployment rates indicate a desire to work. These trends are concerning, as research suggests that working as a teenager predicts higher job quality in adulthood, while limited employment as a young person lead to long-term, reduced employment prospects and earnings.<sup>93, 94, 95</sup>

### FIGURE 10. Share of employed youth has declined more than the gains in share of youth attending school

Employment to population ratio and rate of school attendance for ages 16-24, 2000-2017



Note: Rate of school attendance includes data for both secondary and postsecondary education. School attendance is defined as having attended or enrolled in school for 3 months or more. Employment to population ratios have been expressed as percentages. A person is considered employed if they have worked for pay or profit, or worked a certain number of hours as an “unpaid family worker.”

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from Ruggles, Steven, et al. “IPUMS USA: Version 8.0 [dataset].” IPUMS-USA, retrieved 28 February 2019. Available at <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V8.0>.

## OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Opportunity Youth are young people ages 16 to 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor working. Youth become disconnected for a variety of reasons—they may have struggled in school and not received the support they needed to graduate. They may be facing caregiving responsibilities for a child or parent or other family member. They may have “aged out” of the foster care system without a clear path forward. They may have left college because they could not afford it. They may simply be unable to find and secure a job.

Though there is general agreement that “Opportunity Youth” refers to youth and young adults who are not in school or training or formally employed, estimates of this population can vary significantly. For the purposes of this report, we use Measure of America’s definition: teens and young adults between the ages of 16 to 24 who are disconnected from school and formal labor markets.<sup>96</sup>

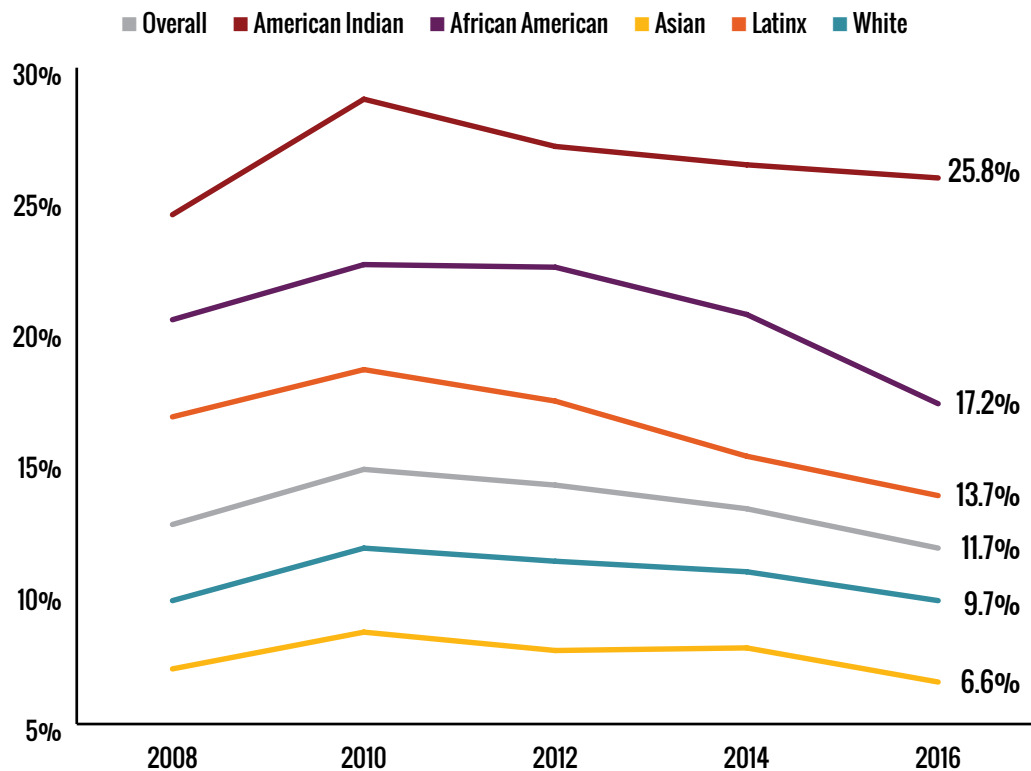
Coming out of the Great Recession, the youth disconnection rate steadily decreased from 14.7 percent in 2010 to 11.7 percent in 2016.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the overall economic recovery, major

efforts from the nonprofit, private, and public sectors at the national, state, and local levels contributed through the decrease in youth disconnection.<sup>98</sup>

Opportunity Youth are racially diverse. The graph below shows the change in youth disconnection rates from 2008 through 2016 for youth overall, and broken down by race. As noted above, the overall youth disconnection rate is 11.7 percent.<sup>99</sup> Native American (25.8 percent) and Black (17.2 percent) youth are the most disconnected racial groups. Latinx youth (13.7 percent) are disconnected at a rate of two percentage points higher than the overall rate.<sup>100</sup> Disconnection rates for White (9.7 percent) and Asian American (6.6 percent) youth are lower than the overall rates.<sup>101</sup> Further disaggregation of racial and ethnic groups reveals substantial diversity in rates of disconnection. For example, among Asian Americans, Hmong youth (15.1 percent) are more than three times as likely to be Opportunity Youth as Vietnamese youth (4.5 percent).<sup>102</sup>

**FIGURE 11. American Indian, African American, and Latinx youth are disconnected at higher rates**

Disconnected youth across the years by race, 2008-2016



Note: The presented data are unweighted annual averages of quarterly data.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Data from "(Seas) Unemployment Rate - 16-24 yrs." Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS14024887Q>; "(Seas) Unemployment Rate - 25-54 yrs." Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved 21 February 2019. Available at <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNS14000060Q>.

Opportunity Youth are more likely to have **SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT**.

Nationally, male and female youth disconnection are fairly similar, at 12.1 and 11.2 percent respectively.<sup>103</sup> Among racial and ethnic groups of Opportunity Youth, only Latinas have a higher rate of disconnection than their male counterparts.<sup>104</sup> The rates of disconnection for men and women are widest for African American youth; 20 percent of young African American men are disconnected, compared to 14 percent











of young African American women.<sup>105</sup> Parenting responsibilities often fall more heavily upon young women more than young men, and Opportunity Youth are more likely than connected youth to be mothers. More than a quarter of women who are Opportunity Youth are mothers (27 percent), compared to only 7 percent of the total female population ages 16 to 24.<sup>106</sup>

Opportunity Youth are more likely to have significant barriers to employment—such as a criminal record.<sup>107</sup> They are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty.<sup>108</sup> They are more than three times as likely to have a disability, as discrimination and inaccessible schools, workplaces, and transportation systems are still frequent barriers to employment and education for people with disabilities.<sup>109</sup>

Opportunity Youth are overrepresented in rural areas, towns, and urban areas. Almost one in five youth (19.3 percent) in rural areas in the United States are Opportunity Youth, compared to only 11.3 percent in the suburbs.<sup>110</sup> Towns (14.9 percent) and urban areas (12.7 percent) follow behind rural areas for highest concentration of Opportunity Youth.<sup>111</sup> Unsurprisingly, the rates are highest for states with high youth unemployment. About 17 percent of youth in Alaska, Louisiana and West Virginia compared to about 7-7.5 percent in North Dakota, Iowa, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Minnesota.<sup>112</sup> A Measure of America analysis ranked the 100 most populated metro areas by youth disconnection rates, which ranged from a low of 6.1 percent in Des Moines-West Des Moines, Iowa to a high of 20.7 percent in Bakersfield, California.<sup>113</sup>

#### FIGURE 12. States with highest and lowest rates of youth disconnection

Rate of disconnected youth by states, 2016

States with Highest Youth Disconnection		States with Lowest Youth Disconnection	
 Alaska	17.9% (16,800)	 North Dakota	7.0% (7,100)
 Louisiana	17.5% (99,700)	 Iowa	7.4% (29,700)
 West Virginia	17.3% (36,100)	 Massachusetts	7.4% (64,900)
 New Mexico	16.4% (42,800)	 Rhode Island	7.5% (10,600)
 Arkansas	15.0% (55,500)	 Minnesota	7.5% (47,500)

Source: Burd-Sharps, Sarah, and Kristen Lewis. "More Than a Million Reasons for Hope: Youth Disconnection in America Today." Measure of America, 19 March 2018. Available at <http://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2018/>.

The effects of youth disconnection can be long-lasting for Opportunity Youth and for our society. A Measure of America study found that the largest differences in earnings, employment, health outcomes, and homeownership between disconnected and connected youth occur when they are in their thirties. Compared to young people who experienced disconnection, those who remained connected: are 42 percent more likely to be employed, earn \$31,000 more annually, are 45 percent more likely to own a home, and are 52 percent more likely to report excellent or good health.<sup>114</sup> Given this divergence in earnings, the federal government would gain an estimated \$11,900 per year in tax revenue for each young person who remains connected—totaling \$55 billion (in 2018 dollars) in potential federal revenue gain per year if all youth remained connected.<sup>115</sup>



# What Should Be Guaranteed to Youth, & Why?

**T**his report introduces a Youth Opportunity Guarantee of Education, Training, and Employment (“the guarantee”) to implement the vision of a system built to ensure all young people’s chances of long-term labor market success. Our system aims to guarantee to every young person ages 16 to 24 in the United States:

- High school or equivalent that prepares students for college and career;
- A range of postsecondary options designed to lead into a good job; and
- Quality career training, national service, or employment.

The following three sections discuss each of these three parts of the guarantee. As noted above, this framework offers a three-dimensional approach, and the components of the guarantee overlap and intertwine rather than occurring in sequence.

Subsequently, we provide case studies and then discuss recommendations for operationalizing the guarantee.



## Guarantee of High School or Equivalent That Prepares Students for College & Career

A major reason for U.S. youth and young adults’ struggles with educational and career achievement is the lack of connection and integration across key systems, making it far more difficult for youth to transition between them to achieve their aspirations. As increasingly recognized in recent years, successfully resolving youth employment challenges at scale requires local- or regional-level collaboration between systems to help youth complete high school and postsecondary education and transition into a good job via cohesive education-career pathways, and to reconnect Opportunity Youth to education and career. Our goal should be a cross-system

public and private engagement that includes K-12 education, postsecondary, employers and the workforce system, government, unions, foundations, community-based organizations, youth and young leaders and other civic leaders.

While youth are forced to navigate too many uncoordinated systems, they face too few realistic options to advance academically and professionally. Often, high school youth are not presented with meaningful post-graduation options other than a four-year college degree. This situation

does not reflect the realities of labor market demand. Various other options including an Associate's degree or a certificate could help youth secure a good job.

<sup>116</sup> Recognizing that many but not all young people will go from high school to four-year-college to career, the career pathways approach described below emphasizes college-and-career pathways—with a variety of postsecondary options—recognizing numerous trajectories on the way to a good job.

Our current systems supporting youth are insufficiently funded and designed to adequately meet the demand, much less provide necessary additional help to youth who start or fall behind. Career pathways programs are still the exception

rather than the norm in American high schools; our country spends relatively little on youth career-focused training, particularly compared to European countries.<sup>117</sup> We have 4.6 million Opportunity Youth in the U.S., but youth employment and training programs to help reconnect youth are not funded to serve anywhere near that number of people, as discussed further in this report.

We envision a community-driven approach in which leaders of many systems come together to develop a variety of pathways, integrating education and work, into the local labor market's high-demand, good-paying jobs. We draw on the efforts of organizations across the country working to achieve this vision, and we explore ways to scale up to ensure that our nation's system for youth employment and career pathways truly maximizes all young people's chances of long-term labor market success.

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young person would be guaranteed high school—or equivalent, for students who do not finish high school—that prepares them for college and career by:

1. integrating high-quality career and technical education and work-based learning with college-prep coursework;
2. connecting secondary and postsecondary learning; and
3. leading into a variety of postsecondary options.

We now examine each of these components in turn.

## HIGH-QUALITY CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young person is guaranteed high school—or equivalent, for students who leave high school—that prepares them for college and career by integrating high-quality career and technical education and work-based learning with college-prep curriculum.

While youth are forced to navigate **TOO MANY UNCOORDINATED SYSTEMS**, they face too few realistic options to advance academically and professionally.

## The transformation from vocational education to CTE is reflected in federal legislation

High-quality career and technical education (CTE) teaches high school students skills to meet the needs of the labor market and therefore is essential to both young adults and to employers. In recent decades, it has seen a surge of enthusiasm and a transformation in the United States. Policymakers and educators are recreating “vocational education” as CTE, which prepares students for a range of careers in growing industries and provide them with the skills and training needed for long-term success.<sup>118</sup> CTE courses are designed to mesh with classes in academic subjects so that high school graduates are prepared for both work and a range of postsecondary options including a certificate program, associate’s, bachelor’s, and advanced degree.<sup>119</sup>

The transition from 20th century vocational education to 21st century CTE has made great strides but is still ongoing. In the old system, “voc ed” courses of questionable quality were the presumptive high school placement for students who were considered poorly-suited for college and were expected to enter directly into full-time, usually low-wage work. Conversely, academic courses were designed for students seen as college-bound. Black and brown students and low-income students were disproportionately tracked into vocational education.<sup>120</sup>

The Perkins Act reauthorization in 2006 reflected a turning point in moving from 20th century vocational education into 21st century CTE. Until then, the act defined vocational education as preparation for careers “other than careers requiring a baccalaureate, master’s, or doctoral degree.”<sup>121</sup> The 2006 reauthorization replaced the term “vocational” with “career and technical” and made it possible to use these funds to prepare students for careers requiring a bachelor’s or advanced degree.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, the reauthorization introduced “programs of study” (POS), requiring each local subgrantee to offer at least one POS—a progression of courses aligning secondary and postsecondary education and leading to an industry-recognized credential or certificate at the postsecondary level or an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.<sup>123</sup> The act also included accountability provisions to better hold state agencies and local subgrantees responsible for their performance.<sup>124</sup>

The newest Perkins reauthorization in 2018 continues these improvements, particularly with respect to accountability requirements around quality and equity. According to analysis by Kisha Bird at the Center for Law and Social Policy, the law improves data transparency, requiring outcome data disaggregation by racial, ethnic, gender and other groups.<sup>125</sup> It also requires states to dedicate funding to recruit “special populations” to enroll in CTE programs; these populations include low-income youth and adults, English language learners, youth with disabilities; and youth in foster care.<sup>126</sup> Further, states are required to support improvement in CTE for people who are incarcerated, including youth in juvenile justice facilities.<sup>127</sup>

ESSA, introduced above, improved alignment with the Perkins Act and WIOA, and provided states with greater ability to ensure college and career readiness through their accountability systems.<sup>128</sup> For example, the law requires that state ESSA plans are developed in coordination with state Perkins Act plans.<sup>129</sup> Performance metrics are better aligned across Perkins, ESSA, and WIOA.<sup>130</sup> States are indeed taking steps to further incorporate college and career readiness in their accountability systems. In their ESSA plans submitted in 2017, 35 states included a career-focused measure in their high school rating systems, such as industry-recognized credential attainment, dual credit, and/or work-based learning.<sup>131, 132</sup>

## CTE delivery & participation

Career and technical education is delivered in a variety of types of schools including career academies, which offer a high school experience blending technical and academic courses and work-based learning focused on a particular career theme such as health or business.

The California Linked Learning District Initiative, launched with significant support from the James Irvine Foundation, provides a strong example of CTE with career pathways available to all high school students in nine school districts across the state.<sup>133</sup> More than three-quarters of the high school students in each district were students of color, and over half were socioeconomically disadvantaged.<sup>134</sup> The Linked Learning approach explicitly rejects “the outmoded and usually inequitable separation of students into vocational and academic tracks” and centers four core components: rigorous college-preparatory academics; CTE courses in sequence emphasizing real-world applications of academic learning; work-based learning that provides exposure to real-world workplaces and teaches the professional skills needed to thrive in a career; and comprehensive support services to address the individual needs of all students.<sup>135</sup> A recent multi-method evaluation found that compared to traditional high school students, California Linked Learning District Initiative students had lower high school dropout rates, higher high school graduation rates, had completed slightly more of the college preparatory courses required to be eligible for a California public four-year institution, and were equally likely to enroll in college.<sup>136</sup>

United States high school student participation in CTE is comparatively low. The vast majority (88 percent) of public high school graduates earn at least one CTE credit but only about a quarter of U.S. high school students today earn three or more CTE credits.<sup>137, 138</sup> According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards, only 6 percent of U.S. secondary students enroll in concentrated vocational education, as compared to roughly 50 percent or more in many European countries.<sup>139</sup>

### Studies of CTE

Although causal literature on CTE is limited, rigorous studies have shown positive effects of CTE on educational attainment, employment, and earnings.<sup>140</sup> In a landmark randomized controlled trial study of career academies, MDRC found sustained earnings gains for academy participants throughout the eight-year follow-up period; these impacts were concentrated among the young men in the study sample.<sup>141</sup> A quasi-experimental study by the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education examined the impact of CTE Programs of Study on high school academic and technical achievement outcomes and found that completing a POS may boost GPA and increase the probability of graduation.<sup>142</sup>

Benefits to CTE are found in a recent study by Shaun Dougherty using administrative data from Massachusetts. Participation at a regional vocational and technical high school (RVTS), where all students engage in CTE, increased probabilities of remaining enrolled in high school, graduating on time, and earning professional certifications. Effects were larger for low-income students.<sup>143</sup>

The Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy reviewed these and other studies and concluded that CTE programs should contain four anchors: student cohorts in career-themed course sequences; rigorous, college-preparatory academics; opportunities to earn college credits and industry-recognized credentials or certificates; and work-based learning opportunities.<sup>144, 145</sup>

## WORK-BASED LEARNING, INCLUDING APPRENTICESHIP

Work-based learning would also be an essential part of high school under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, benefiting students and employers by helping to prepare students for work—and requiring a partnership between schools and employers.

### A continuum of learning that exposes students to work

Work-based learning (WBL) exposes students to the world of work. The 2018 Perkins Act defines it as “sustained interactions with industry or community professionals in real workplace settings, to the extent practicable, or simulated environments at an educational institution that foster in-depth, firsthand engagement with the tasks required of a given career field, that are aligned to curriculum and instruction.”<sup>146</sup> However, there is no universal definition of WBL; some definitions limit it to learning that occurs *at* a workplace, but it always involves student interaction with an employer or professional.

Work-based learning offers a range of benefits to students and employers. It can provide young people with a variety of opportunities to develop and practice technical skills and soft skills; apply academic and technical knowledge in real-world settings and see the relevance

of their education; gain work experience and professional connections with employers; develop positive relationships with adults; establish a foothold in a particular career field; and earn income. Work-based learning can help level the playing field for teenagers from lower-income families who are less likely to work and who may not be exposed to an array of well-paying professions, in contrast to youth from higher-income families.<sup>147</sup>

Work-based learning is commonly understood as a continuum with four key stages, as explained by the College and Career Academy Support Network: (1) career awareness, (2) career exploration, (3) career preparation, and (4) career training.<sup>148</sup> *Career-awareness* WBL builds awareness of the variety of careers available and the role of postsecondary education; examples include workplace tours and guest speakers. *Career-exploration* WBL allows a student to take an active role in exploring career options related to their own emerging interests; examples include job shadowing and informational interviews. In *career-preparation* WBL,

students apply their learning through practical experiences such as service learning or a compensated internship connected to classroom curriculum. In *career-training* WBL, students train for employment and/or postsecondary education in a specific range of occupations, developing mastery of occupation-specific skills; examples include apprenticeships and clinical experiences.

### Increasing support for work-based learning in the U.S.

Federal, state, local, and nongovernmental initiatives in recent decades have sought to increase work-based learning in the U.S. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of the 1990s sought to extend work-based learning opportunities to a significant fraction of high school

#### BOX 5.

#### ROBERT HALPERN, ERIKSON INSTITUTE IN CHICAGO:

“Decontextualized [school] learning is not effective for the majority of high school students or consistent with findings from cognitive and learning sciences that learning is most effective when it takes place in a context that allows immediate application, where young people feel some connection to real-world endeavor.”

Source: Halpern, Robert. “Supporting Vocationally Oriented Learning in the High School Years: Rationale, Tasks, Challenges,” *New Direction for Youth Development* 134 (2012).

students, but fell short, partly due to modest funding and a temporary time horizon.<sup>149</sup> A study by the National Skills Coalition (NSC) found that thirty-five states have enacted at least one state policy supporting work-based learning, sometimes drawing from Perkins or WIOA funding.<sup>150</sup> Such policies include: resources for state staff or intermediaries such as workforce development boards to help create work-based learning opportunities; employer subsidies for WBL in the form of grants or tax credits; funds for paid student internships, sometimes focused on industry sectors in need of skilled workers; and policies facilitating youth apprenticeship.

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Youth CareerConnect (YCC) grant program has supported the development of cross-sector career pathways systems including work-based learning. DOL established the program in 2014 and awarded \$107 million to 24 applicants in many states.<sup>151</sup> Community partners including local education agencies, postsecondary institutions, employers, the workforce system, and community organizations used the funds to advance career pathways in high-growth industries. Activities included integrated academic and career curricula, employer partnerships, and work-based learning.<sup>152</sup> YCC funds were important in the creation of various career pathways systems including Pathways to Prosperity in various states.<sup>153</sup>

## BOX 6.

### LAZAR TRESCHAN, COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY OF NEW YORK:

“It’s time to radically transform the way we think about and structure summer youth employment programs. Rather than being seen as a way to keep inner city youth occupied and safely off the streets during the dog days of July and August; we should turn summer jobs into an integral part of the high school academic year that affords all students an opportunity to gain a foothold in the labor force.”

Source: Treschan, Lazar. “The Case for a National University Summer Internship Program.” The Community Service Society of New York, July 2016. Available at <http://ghhttp.58547.nexcesscdn.net/803F44A/images/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/National%20Summe%20Jobs%20-%20Final%201%20-%20updated.pdf>.

### Paid internships integrated into high school

Paid internships are increasingly seen as a valuable work-based learning opportunity that should be more widely available to high school students. Interns gain work experience, technical skills and soft skills, professional relationships, and income. An internship may spark or deepen a student’s career interest as well as motivation for relevant postsecondary education—or may help them realize a career is not for them, and they would like to try something different.

The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) has proposed a national universal summer internship program, integrated into the high school structure, making a paid internship available to every student who chooses to participate. Currently, most summer jobs programs are separate from schools and classroom learning. In contrast, CSS suggests this universal program be administered by community-based organizations (CBOs) contracted to offer internships to all youth at a particular school, with one or more school-based coordinators.<sup>154</sup> This structure, similar to that used by the Boston Private Industry Council career specialists to connect students with summer jobs, would enable the coordinators to develop relationships with students and match them to internships

aligned with their interests and abilities.<sup>155</sup> Universally available paid internships would ensure access for low-income youth, who are less likely to work in the summer; teens whose families make under \$20,000 per year are less than half as likely to work during the summer as those whose families earn at least \$100,000.<sup>156</sup>

Paid internships integrated into the high school experience are more resource-intensive than other work-based learning opportunities, but they are being implemented around the country. The Pathways to Prosperity network integrates internships into many career pathways

programs.<sup>157</sup> In Connecticut, Hartford Public Schools leadership intends to offer a paid internship to all eligible and interested 11th grade students by 2020—estimated to be 60 percent of the cohort.<sup>158</sup> The initiative, which facilitates both school-year and summer internships, includes the mayor, business groups, and the region’s workforce board.

NAF aims to bring paid summer internships to scale. The 617 NAF academies with over 110,000 students across 35 states are small, career-focused learning communities within high schools.<sup>159</sup> NAF places a high priority on high school internships; the organization achieved a 29 percent internship rate in 2018 and seeks to ensure a high-quality paid internship for every student.<sup>160</sup> NAF internships are 120 hours, and require direct supervision, a written individualized learning

plan linked to WBL outcomes, and the work produced must be of value to the employer.<sup>161</sup> In addition to completing projects to meet employer needs, internships benefit employers by increasing the number of potential job applicants with relevant skills and work experience and potentially recruiting and training future hires.

## BOX 7.

### JD HOYE, NATIONAL ACADEMY FOUNDATION:

“We are seeing businesses engaging more—not only as a corporate social responsibility strategy, but because it’s a business imperative. They need talent.”

Source: Hoyer, JD. 14 April 2017.

### Research shows importance of work-based learning

The importance of work-based learning is affirmed in a range of studies, including recent research by the Brookings Institute and Child Trends that identified factors shaping job quality among 29-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>162</sup> The report explains that participation during high school in a work-based learning program incorporating positive relationships with adults—specifically cooperative education, internship, apprenticeship, or mentorship—is related to higher job quality

at age 29, an effect persisting even ten years after high school.<sup>163</sup> These programs involve a relationship with a workplace supervisor or mentor who helps them develop skills that employers value.<sup>164</sup> Importantly, these relationships expand students’ networks beyond their parents, parents’ colleagues, and neighbors—who significantly influence a child’s choice of career.<sup>165</sup>

### Apprenticeship

A prime example of work-based learning is apprenticeship, which combines paid on-the-job learning with related classroom learning. Apprenticeship has long existed in the United States, as the national Registered Apprenticeship system dates back to 1937, but on a relatively small scale.<sup>166</sup> In countries that have invested significantly in apprenticeships, like Germany and Switzerland, over half of high school students transition from school to work with the benefit of apprenticeships in a wide variety of occupations.<sup>167</sup> In these countries, youth unemployment rates are significantly lower than in the U.S.<sup>168</sup>

In the United States, there are currently less than 500,000 apprentices.<sup>169</sup> Apprenticeship programs are generally concentrated in construction and manufacturing occupations and primarily recruit workers in their mid-20s, with little linkage to either the secondary school system or community college system.<sup>170</sup> Research has found that apprenticeship benefits workers through increased earnings and benefits employers by meeting the demand for skilled workers and raising productivity, among other advantages. This evidence base focuses primarily on adult Registered Apprenticeship programs.<sup>171, 172</sup>

African Americans were long **EXCLUDED FROM VARIOUS TRADES' APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS** and continue to be underrepresented among Registered Apprentices.

The population of apprentices in the U.S. is far from representative of the overall population. The vast majority (93 percent) of people completing Registered Apprenticeships are men; just seven percent are women.<sup>173</sup> African Americans were long excluded from various trades' apprenticeship programs and continue to be underrepresented among Registered Apprentices.<sup>174</sup> Discrimination against African Americans in apprenticeship training has been documented repeatedly including in a seminal 1967 book by Marshall and Briggs<sup>175</sup>, and remains a concern. In 2017, only 10.7 percent of individuals who completed Registered Apprenticeship programs were African American, according to an analysis by the Center for American Progress.<sup>176</sup> Efforts are underway to increase apprenticeship participation among a variety of underrepresented groups including Opportunity Youth, youth and adults with justice system involvement, and women and people of color.<sup>177, 178, 179, 180</sup>

### Increasing support for apprenticeship in the U.S.

In recent decades, there have been several surges of enthusiasm to expand apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship, with support from various Republican and Democratic leaders. In the early- to mid-1990s, interest in expanding youth apprenticeship gained traction during the George H.W. Bush administration, and President Clinton subsequently signed the STWOA in 1994. That legislation ultimately supported a broad array of activities rather than focusing on youth apprenticeship, although some states used School-to-Work grant funds for such efforts.<sup>181</sup> In the late 1990s, European companies expanding operations in various parts of the U.S., such as North Carolina, developed youth apprenticeship programs to hire and train the skilled workers they needed.<sup>182</sup> In the past decade, both the Obama Administration and Trump Administration have sought to expand apprenticeship.<sup>183</sup>

Well-designed youth apprenticeship programs integrate classroom and work-based learning, bridging secondary and postsecondary education. This requires a collaboration between employers, high schools, and postsecondary institutions, with an intermediary organization generally supporting this partnership. Various models take different approaches to connecting secondary CTE students to apprenticeship programs, particularly by aligning instructional content and smoothing the transition from CTE into apprenticeship.<sup>184</sup>

In some models, high school students are simultaneously enrolled as apprentices or pre-apprentices. For example, youth may be hired as apprentices while in their junior or senior year of high school; they spend a few days per week (or a few hours per day) at work, and the rest of their time in class at either high school or community college. After graduating high school, the apprentice continues working for an additional one to three years, usually while also taking community college courses. The apprentice completes the program having gained work experience, college credit (sometimes an associate's degree), a portable industry credential, and often a full-time job at the same company.<sup>185</sup> One notable program using this model is Apprenticeship 2000, a four-year apprenticeship program in Charlotte, North Carolina. Formed in 1995, the program closely partners with local companies to offer eligible high school students paid, onsite training as the apprentices earn an associate's degree in manufacturing and graduate with a guaranteed job.<sup>186</sup>

### State efforts to expand youth apprenticeship

States are leading efforts to expand youth apprenticeship through a variety of approaches. In Wisconsin, with one of the oldest youth apprenticeship programs dating back to the early 1990s, the state funds regional consortia that work with employers and school districts to develop and

manage youth apprenticeship programs.<sup>187</sup> In North Carolina, employers have taken the lead in expanding youth apprenticeship by creating independently-financed regional consortia; program quality is governed by the state's Registered Apprenticeship system.<sup>188</sup> In Colorado, CareerWise Colorado launched in 2016 as a philanthropic and state-funded nonprofit intermediary to help local employers and schools develop apprenticeship programs statewide, with a goal of 20,000 youth apprentices by 2027, which would represent about 10 percent of the state's students in their last two years of high school.<sup>189</sup> Beyond states, various cities also have launched apprenticeship initiatives, such as Apprenticeship 2020 created by business, philanthropic, and city leaders in Chicago.<sup>190</sup>

State policy changes to systemically expand youth apprenticeship, include a clear framework to guide program design and quality, industry-wide approaches to program development, sustainable financing for postsecondary instruction, and sustainable financing for intermediaries.<sup>191</sup> A policy framework should clarify youth apprenticeship program requirements, including the responsibilities of industry and education, avoiding the inefficient process of each program determining these roles. Industry-wide approaches working with industry associations, chambers of commerce, or regional sector partnerships bring employers together to define shared skill needs, reduce program start-up time for individual employers, and ensure that apprentices learn skills that are portable from one employer to another. Sustainable financing for postsecondary instruction is important to support the cost of related postsecondary instruction for youth apprentices by subsidizing either the student's cost of tuition and fees or the institutions that provide instruction.<sup>192</sup> Sustainable financing for intermediaries supports third parties that play a critical role in helping new employers and schools start up and manage youth apprenticeship programs.

Additionally, some states have enacted employer-focused policies to incentivize apprenticeship and work-based learning such as subsidies, tax credits, and grants for program startup.<sup>193</sup> South Carolina, for example, offers a tax credit of \$1,000 per apprentice per year to employers sponsoring adult or youth apprenticeships.<sup>194</sup> Robert Lerman, a professor of economics at American University, has proposed a similar subsidy at the federal level.<sup>195</sup>

## ALIGNED & CONNECTED HIGH SCHOOL & POSTSECONDARY LEARNING

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young person would be guaranteed high school that prepares them for college and career by aligning and connecting secondary and postsecondary learning. Dual enrollment programs and Early College High Schools are proven ways to align and connect high school and postsecondary learning; they are both discussed below.

ESSA, the 2015 reauthorization of the primary federal law governing elementary and secondary education, advances the framework for dual or concurrent enrollment programs and early college high schools. For the first time, it offers a formal definition for these programs, and it permits local education agencies (LEAs) to support them with Title I funds.<sup>196</sup> It also requires local applications for Title I funding to include language discussing how an Local Educational Agency will support "effective student transitions" between high school and postsecondary education, including coordination with higher education institutions and employers.<sup>197</sup> More broadly, ESSA advances the framework for accountability, including providing states with greater ability to ensure college and career readiness through states' accountability systems.<sup>198</sup>

## Dual enrollment programs

Dual enrollment programs, which provide high school students the opportunity to enroll in college courses and earn college credit, were first designed in the 1980s to help high-achieving students get ahead, but are now seen more widely as an important means to increase opportunity for a broad array of students.<sup>199</sup> Dual enrollment allows high school students to enroll in college courses which are offered in a variety of settings including high school or college classrooms or online.<sup>200</sup>

Dual enrollment opportunities for students are growing but far from universally accessible.<sup>201</sup> Eighty-two percent of U.S. public high schools offer dual enrollment opportunities.<sup>202</sup> During the 2015-2016 school year, eight percent of high school students participated in dual enrollment.<sup>203</sup> However, students' access to dual enrollment programs varies substantially by state, income, race, and other factors.<sup>204</sup>

States are increasingly taking action to broaden access to dual enrollment and address a range of issues from credit transfer to quality standards. In Ohio, for example, the College Credit Plus program, operational as of the 2015-2016 school year, requires each high school to offer two model pathways with a partnering college at no cost to low-income students.<sup>205</sup> In Nebraska, the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship program provides qualified, low-income high school students with the funds needed to pay tuition and the mandatory fees for enrolling in college courses.<sup>206</sup> ESSA also increases access to federal funding for dual enrollment programs.<sup>207</sup> However, ongoing funding challenges must be addressed in order for programs to reach scale and to ensure equitable access.<sup>208</sup> Lower-income students face barriers to participating in dual enrollment as students (and parents) pay out of pocket for tuition in 45 percent of programs.<sup>209</sup>

Research suggests that dual enrollment programs benefit students in a variety of ways. In addition to saving students time and often money, dually-enrolled students are more likely to meet college-readiness benchmarks, more likely to enter college, less likely to be placed into remedial English or math, and have higher four- and six-year college completion rates.<sup>210</sup> Dual enrollment can disproportionately benefit traditionally underrepresented students. For example, one study found a greater increase in college enrollment after high school graduation for lower-income dually-enrolled students than for higher-income dually-enrolled students.<sup>211</sup>

## Early college high schools

Early College High Schools (ECHS) partner with colleges and universities to provide all students an opportunity to earn an associate's degree or up to two years of college credits during high school at no or low cost. Early College High Schools have generally focused on students who are underrepresented in higher education including low-income students, students of color, and English language learners. Early College High Schools in the U.S. grew in part due to significant support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation which launched the ECHS Initiative in 2002 "with the primary goal of increasing the opportunity for underserved students to earn a postsecondary credential."<sup>212</sup> Early College High Schools are generally small and provide students with significant guidance and support. They may be small standalone schools or located at a high school campus (as a school-within-a-school) or college campus.<sup>213</sup>

The concept of ECHS is the fundamental idea behind the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) in Brooklyn, New York City, which has received widespread recognition. P-TECH was created in Brooklyn in 2011 through a partnership among IBM, the

City University of New York, and the City's Department of Education.<sup>214</sup> It provides a six-year college-and-career education with work-based learning experiences including mentorship and paid internships, along with an associate's degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) pathways. Graduates are first in line for entry-level jobs with their industry partner.<sup>215</sup> Since its inception, the P-TECH model has spread not only across the state but also nationally and internationally. As of December 2018, 110 P-TECH schools are underway on the P-TECH model across eight U.S. states and four countries, with more than 600 business partners participating.<sup>216</sup>

Research has shown significant positive impacts for ECHS. For example, The American Institutes of Research took advantage of Early College lotteries at 10 schools to conduct a randomized experiment and found that Early College attendance had a positive impact on both college enrollment and college degree attainment.<sup>217</sup> Eighty-one percent of Early College students enrolled in college as compared to 72 percent of comparison students; this gap in enrollment rates between the groups decreased but did not disappear over time.<sup>218</sup> As for degree attainment, 25 percent of Early College students earned a college degree (typically an associate's degree) during the study period, compared to only 5 percent of comparison students. Furthermore, Early College reduced educational attainment gaps since the positive impact on college degree attainment was stronger for students of color than white students, and for lower-income than higher-income students.<sup>219</sup>

### A range of postsecondary options

A central part of the Youth Opportunity Guarantee is that well-designed career pathway programs provide students with a range of postsecondary options, including but not limited to a four-year degree. Career pathways leading into associate's degrees and middle-skill jobs provide young people with an opportunity to gain a postsecondary degree and some measure of economic security; they must explicitly include the option for further educational attainment. A

A program that pushes low-income students and students of color toward **TWO-YEAR RATHER THAN FOUR-YEAR** degrees **PERPETUATES INEQUITY.**

program that pushes low-income students and students of color toward two-year rather than four-year degrees perpetuates inequity. Any career pathway should be appealing to students regardless of what level of postsecondary education they aspire to. The Mechatronics programs of study in Tennessee exemplifies such a pathway and is described in the Tennessee case study.

A career pathway that terminates in an associate's degree and middle-skill job, without the option for further educational attainment, risks marginalizing its students as well as the pathway itself. As explained by David Stern of the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley,

*"Pathways that would prepare high school students to enter postsecondary training as computer numerically controlled (CNC) operators or radiology technicians can obviously benefit those students and the economy. But if those pathways do not also provide a future option for students to move from CNC machining into mechatronic engineering, for example, or from radiology tech to radiologist, or into other fields entirely, the pathways run the risk of being marginalized within the high school, as vocational education became marginalized in the past."*<sup>220</sup>

### REENGAGEMENT FOR YOUTH WHO HAVE LEFT HIGH SCHOOL

The Youth Opportunity Guarantee guarantees high school or equivalent to all students, including young people who have left traditional high school. There are a many kinds of programs

reengaging youth who have left high school. Under the guarantee, communities should have a centralized reentry point such as the community reengagement centers described below. Youth should have a variety of high school or GED completion opportunities designed as a pathway to college and/or careers, as exemplified below by Gateway to College, GED Bridge to Health and Business, YouthBuild, National Guard Youth Challenge, Job Corps, and Community Restitution Apprenticeship-Focused Training (CRAFT).

### Community reengagement centers provide a reentry point

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, communities would have a one-stop reengagement center to provide a reentry point for youth who are out of school or off-track for a high school credential. A growing number of cities have established such centers in recent years to conduct outreach to encourage out-of-school youth to return to school and help them resume their education. They vary based on local assets and needs but central functions are: active outreach, individual assessment of each young person, referral to best-fit local education and training options, and supporting the young person's transition back into the system.<sup>221</sup> A sustained relationship with a caring adult staff member is critical to this success. Centers sometimes create programming focused specifically on populations who are more likely to leave high school such as LGBTQ youth or youth experiencing homelessness.

Reengagement centers aim to successfully reconnect youth to the system by offering a variety of options for next steps, and therefore they require partnerships. They exemplify system integration as “a community of partners who take collective responsibility for disengaged youth, and coordinated action to provide them with a pathway to high school graduation and adult success.”<sup>222</sup> Reengagement centers are often sponsored or co-sponsored by school districts; regardless, schools are crucial partners. Centers partner with community colleges and universities to connect students with college credits and career training; opportunities to simultaneously earn college credit while working toward a high school diploma or GED can be particularly beneficial for older students who are far from graduation or wanting a faster track to college.<sup>223</sup> Additionally, centers commonly have partnerships with: local government to provide visibility and resources; workforce development organizations to provide career training opportunities; community organizations to help provide wraparound supports; foundations to provide funding; and sometimes juvenile justice departments to help reconnect youth who have had experience with the justice system.

An example of a community reengagement center is discussed as part of the Boston case study.

### Gateway to college

The Gateway to College program serves as one model of reconnection for youth who have left high school to earn their diploma and transition into postsecondary. The program began in 2000 at Portland Community College (Oregon), providing students who have left high school or are not on track to graduate an opportunity to complete their high school diploma while simultaneously earning college credit. Gateway to College (GtC) has since grown into a national network of 36 programs and affiliates in 22 states partnering with more than 125 public school districts.<sup>224</sup> From 2004 to 2018, more than 7,000 students graduated high school while earning an average of 20 college credits through the GtC program.<sup>225</sup> The program positions students to continue in postsecondary after finishing high school.

The Gateway to College model is based on a partnership between a school district and community college. The program is funded by school districts, which pay a per pupil fee for each

student who enrolls. GtC programs are located on community college campuses, which make them more accessible to students who previously struggled at a traditional high school and may not want to return there, and programs often receive in-kind support from the college. Many, and in some cases, all courses are dual-credit college classes.

Personalized support is a central component of the Gateway to College program, which ensures that each student has a relationship with a counselor/mentor and receives wraparound support. As Nick Mathern from Gateway to College National Network notes, “We really prioritize student support. What keeps students in the program is a Success Coach who creates a personalized/caring relationship with the students. Many of our students have dealt with challenges ranging from bullying to homelessness to addiction, which makes this support even more important.”<sup>226</sup>

Mathern also emphasizes the importance of a variety of options for students to reengage because, “There’s no single solution that works for everyone. No one solution can pick up all of these students with one scoop. Our program works for some. But for example, many of our programs require an 8th grade reading level, and not everyone has that.”<sup>227</sup>

### GED bridge to health & business

In New York City, LaGuardia Community College’s GED Bridge to Health and Business (Bridge) program provides a model of a GED program designed explicitly as a pathway to college and careers. The key innovation is a career-focused curriculum that helps students prepare academically for the GED while studying content in health or business. This career-oriented approach provides students with more information to help them consider a career in the field and seems to increase student engagement. Additionally, Bridge students benefit from in-class and individualized transition counseling, helping them explore postsecondary and career options, assess their interests and skills, and create a plan for their next steps. An MDRC random assignment study found that, compared to traditional GED prep students, Bridge students were more likely to: complete the course, pass the GED exam, enroll in college, and persist in college.<sup>228</sup>

### YouthBuild

YouthBuild provides construction-related or other vocational training and educational services to low-income young people from ages 16 to 24 who did not finish high school. The program, which is federally and privately funded and modeled after the first YouthBuild program established in 1978 in East Harlem, serves over 10,000 young adults annually at over 250 organizations across the country.<sup>229</sup> Participants generally earn a GED while training in construction and renovating or constructing housing for low-income people; some YouthBuild programs offer training for other in-demand occupations.<sup>230</sup> YouthBuild centers leadership development and a strength-based approach, with counseling, supportive services and transition services. Impact findings from an MDRC YouthBuild evaluation found that the program led to a sizable increase in high school equivalency credential receipt and an increase in college enrollment. The evaluation found an increase in survey-reported employment and earnings, but no significant effects on work as reported to the unemployment insurance system.<sup>231</sup> YouthBuild funding streams have experienced cuts, and the demand for YouthBuild from both interested young people and nonprofits wanting to host programs vastly exceeds existing opportunities to participate.<sup>232, 233</sup>

## National Guard Youth Challenge

National Guard Youth Challenge is an intensive residential alternative education program to help young people ages 16 to 18 who have left high school without a degree attain a secondary credential. The first Challenge sites began in the mid-1990s; there are now 40 Challenge sites in 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.<sup>234</sup> The program lasts 17 months and includes three phases: Pre-Challenge, a brief orientation and assessment period; a 20-week Residential Phase in which participants or “cadets” attend classes during much of the day focusing on completion of a GED or High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) credential; and a one-year Post-residential Phase built around mentoring, with a placement in employment, education, and military service.<sup>235</sup> During the first two phases, participants live at the program site, often a military base. The program takes place in a “quasi-military” environment, but there are no requirements for military service during or after the program.<sup>236</sup> Eighty percent of participants are male.<sup>237</sup> A random assignment evaluation found that Challenge participants were much more likely to have obtained a GED or a high school diploma and to have earned college credits.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, participants were more likely to be employed at the time of the three-year follow-up survey, and they earned about 20 percent more than their control group counterparts in the year before the survey.<sup>239</sup>

## Job Corps

Job Corps is a residential program offering education and career training for low-income young people ages 16 to 24. Most participants do not have a high school diploma or GED certificate upon entry. Established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Job Corps serves approximately 60,000 young people per year at 131 Job Corps centers located throughout the country.<sup>240</sup> Participants can earn a high school diploma or equivalency credential and receive training in various fields such as business, health, construction, or culinary arts. Most instruction is individualized and self-paced, and the average participant is enrolled for eight months.<sup>241</sup> Some students take college-level classes through community college partnerships. Comprehensive services and supports include health care, a living stipend, career counseling, and transitional support for a year following graduation.

A four-year study found that Job Corps increased GED certificate attainment and vocational certificates attainment. Survey data showed initially negative earnings impact estimates when many participants were enrolled in Job Corps, but the estimated impacts became positive in year three and by year four, Job Corps participants experienced a 12 percent earnings gain.<sup>242</sup> An evaluation is being conducted currently to assess the Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy pilot in Washington State. Its career pathways in information technology and health care include high school and college academic services, career and technical training, work-based learning, and life skills training.<sup>243</sup>

## Community Restitution Apprenticeship-Focused Training (CRAFT)

CRAFT is a six-month pre-apprenticeship construction training and job placement program for youth with justice system involvement, who concurrently attend high school or GED preparatory courses. The program was developed in 1994 by the Home Builders Institute, the educational arm of the National Association of Home Builders, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.<sup>244</sup> It includes hands-on training, academic and job skill development, and a variety of supports. A randomized control study of a CRAFT program in Connecticut, directed toward youth age 15 to 18 with justice system involvement and a history of substance abuse, found that CRAFT increased youth employment and GED attendance.<sup>245</sup> Over the 30-month follow-up

period, youth in CRAFT were significantly more likely to have been employed (76 percent versus 50 percent) and employed in construction (46 percent versus 19 percent), although participation did not affect average hourly wage.<sup>246</sup> Youth in CRAFT were also significantly more likely to have attended a GED program (50 percent versus 26 percent).<sup>247</sup>



## Guarantee of a Range of Postsecondary Options Designed to Lead to a Good Job

Our current system of postsecondary education is not working for many of our young adults. An increasing share of high school graduates has *enrolled* in college over the past three decades but postsecondary *attainment* remains a major challenge.<sup>248</sup> Rates of postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment vary widely by race, socioeconomic status, and other groups.

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young adult would be ensured a range of postsecondary options, including certificate programs and community college programs, geared toward local labor market demand, to help students enter good jobs. The range of postsecondary options emphasizes affordability and completion and leaves open a path to continue to a four-year degree. This section examines each of these three key components: (1) a range of postsecondary options as part of a career pathway that are (2) affordable and (3) designed for completion.

### A RANGE OF POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS AS PART OF CAREER PATHWAY

Our goal is for all young adults to attain good jobs with the potential to eventually earn a family-supporting salary, most of which require at minimum an associate's degree or certificate. In today's U.S. economy, a postsecondary credential is nearly essential for a good-paying job. Due to automation, globalization, and other changes in the U.S. economy, 65 percent of jobs are estimated to require postsecondary education and training by 2020, compared to 28 percent

in 1973, according to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce.<sup>249</sup>

Eighteen of the 30 fastest-growing occupations typically require some level of postsecondary education to enter.<sup>250</sup> Returns to postsecondary education vary by race and other demographic factors, as discussed in the next section.

**A range of postsecondary degrees help workers secure good jobs, but return varies**

People with postsecondary degrees generally fare better in the labor market. According to an analysis of 2009-2016 data by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, bachelor's degree holders have median earnings of \$62,000, which are nearly double the median earnings of \$36,000 for workers with a high school diploma. Associate's degree holders have median earnings of \$47,000 per year.<sup>251</sup> The real wage premium for college degrees over high school degrees has nearly doubled from 1979 to 2017.<sup>252</sup> Unemployment rates are consistently lower for workers with postsecondary degrees than workers with a high school education.<sup>253</sup> Returns to postsecondary education vary by race and other demographic factors, as discussed in the next section.

Research by the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) has emphasized that there are and will continue to be good-paying jobs that do not require a bachelor's degree. Although 35 percent of job openings by 2020 will require at least a bachelor's degree,

Our goal is for all young adults to attain **GOOD JOBS** with the potential to eventually earn a **FAMILY-SUPPORTING SALARY**.

30 percent of job openings will be “middle-skill jobs” requiring some college or an associate degree but not a bachelor’s.<sup>254</sup> Importantly, many of these jobs are “good jobs,” defined by Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce as paying at least \$35,000 for workers 25 to 44 and at least \$45,000 for workers 45 to 64, with median earnings of \$56,000 for workers with less than a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and \$65,000 when including workers with a BA or higher.<sup>255</sup> In 2016, there were 15.7 million middle-skill good jobs.

### **Return to postsecondary education varies by degree, field, type of institution, & demographic factors**

More education generally benefits workers’ earnings, but field of study can matter even more than the level of educational attainment. As explained by the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, “Some certificates pay more than some associate’s degrees, some associate’s degrees pay higher than some bachelor’s degrees, and some bachelor’s degrees result in higher earnings than some graduate degrees.”<sup>256</sup> For example, a bachelor’s degree holder in Psychology and Social Work earns less (\$47,000 median annual earnings) than an associate’s degree holder in STEM (\$60,000).<sup>257</sup> The variation in earnings by postsecondary field of study, from lowest to highest, has quadrupled since 1983.<sup>258</sup>

Recent research found substantial heterogeneity in labor market returns to various CTE certificates and degrees offered at California community colleges, the nation’s largest public community college system.<sup>259</sup> The study used longitudinal administrative data to estimate earnings returns, finding average returns of 14 percent for shorter-term certificates and 45 percent for associate degrees.<sup>260</sup> Earnings effects varied greatly by program. For example, returns for a 30–59 unit certificate ranged from approximately 11.5 percent in business to 17 percent in public and protective services to nearly 49 percent in health.<sup>261</sup> Earnings gains were particularly large—up to 99 percent—in health-related programs.<sup>262</sup>

Certificate programs can provide a leg up in the labor market, but their impact on labor market outcomes varies greatly. While there are many high-return certificate programs, not all generate high returns, especially those that are short-term in duration. According to a 2018 study, students in for-profit certificate programs generally do not gain enough in earnings to offset the debt they incur.<sup>263</sup> Some certificates are noncredit programs, while some are for credit. While noncredit certificate programs are harder to “stack,” they are more appealing to many employers as they can be quickly set up and very responsive to industry demand. Currently, Pell funds cannot be utilized for short-term or noncredit programs. Changing this would make it easier for low-income students to pursue workforce preparation in high-demand fields, but would require safeguards considering the drawbacks of these types of certificate programs.<sup>264</sup>

The earnings premium for higher education varies by race, ethnicity, gender, and other demographics. For example, analysis published by the CollegeBoard showed that between 2013 and 2015, the earnings premium for a bachelor’s degree relative to a high school diploma was over 100 percent for Asian men and women age 25 to 34.<sup>265</sup> The earnings premium for other groups varied as follows: 74 percent for black men, 62 percent for black women, 62 percent for Hispanic men, 70 percent for Hispanic women, 54 percent for white men, and 68 percent for white women.<sup>266</sup>

As labor market success generally requires postsecondary education but not necessarily four-year-college, young adults should have a range of postsecondary options designed to lead into a good job. Young adults’ postsecondary options should include programs of study at community

colleges that are geared toward local in-demand good-paying jobs, integrate work experience, and help students enter good jobs upon completion—with the viable option of continuing to a four-year degree. Again, this requires a career pathways approach engaging employers.

### **Postsecondary institutions may face challenges in implementing career pathways**

Many postsecondary institutions have improved their career or CTE pathways to better prepare students for the workforce<sup>267</sup>, but they often face challenges in doing so. In many ways, postsecondary institutions currently face too few incentives—and even some disincentives—to utilize a career pathways approach responding to local labor market needs.

Although college instructional costs per student vary by field of study, state postsecondary funding is traditionally based on enrollment. Colleges generally receive a fixed dollar amount per student, regardless of field of study or student completion of a credential.<sup>268</sup> Instructional costs tend to be greater in fields where graduates earn more.<sup>269</sup> Institutions face a disincentive to offer higher-cost programs such as technical programs that involve higher equipment and instruction costs. As a result, programs in fields with high labor market returns sometimes limit enrollment and utilize selective admissions and/or waiting lists.<sup>270</sup> This situation can limit student access to programs with greater labor market value, sending some students to second-choice fields of study and contributing to a shortage of workers trained in nursing and other high-demand fields.<sup>271</sup>

Economist Harry Holzer’s proposal for a Race to the Top for community colleges would help address this problem, among others, by creating the opportunity for states to gain substantial federal resources in return for imposing stronger accountability on community colleges based on their low-income students’ academic and employment outcomes.<sup>272</sup> This would incentivize growing programs that respond to local labor market needs.

### **Postsecondary partnerships with industry or employers**

A variety of community college partnerships with industry or employers are seeking to ensure that students have access to a postsecondary certificate or degree that helps them secure a well-paying job in the local labor market. Employers also benefit from these partnerships, which can provide the opportunity to find qualified workers, help minimize their training costs, and fill training needs that they do not have the capacity to offer directly such as English language or basic skills training.<sup>273</sup> Industry and employer engagement can take many forms: program oversight such as through advisory boards; program design to ensure the broad area of focus and specific technical skills are aligned with current local labor market needs; program delivery including mentoring, teaching a component of a course, and work experience opportunities; recruitment and hiring of program participants; and financial or in-kind resources.<sup>274</sup>

LaGuardia Community College leaders see the institution as a gateway into the middle class and prioritize working with industry to ensure their training helps students secure a well-paying job in the local labor market.<sup>275</sup> They use labor market statistics and employer-identified hiring needs to assess local labor demand to guide decisions about creating or phasing out programs. They engage employers in the program design phase to help develop programs to fit their needs, informing the curriculum through input on skills and competencies, aiming to create an employment pipeline into the company. They engage employers in mock interviewing students and workshopping student resumes, and then work with employers to facilitate hiring. Furthermore, they offer an array of programs and degrees of different duration to suit the needs

and schedules of a variety of students, and boost access to the large local immigrant community by providing a strong program for English language learners.

In a similar effort to connect students to work-based learning opportunities, the Career Ready Internship Program offers college juniors and seniors semester-long internship opportunities that are connected with the students' career interests. The internship programs are paid and specifically targeted to students with financial needs.<sup>276</sup> Initially, the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation only provided funds to selected four-year colleges in Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin to develop the paid internship programs, but the reach of the program has since been expanded to two-year colleges as well.<sup>277</sup>

## Sector partnerships

Sector partnerships are a promising strategy to boost students' postsecondary completion and labor market success while helping employers find skilled workers and fill jobs. In a sector partnership, a community college or other entity provides students with industry-specific postsecondary education and training designed to meet workforce needs defined by various local employers, or an industry association. Intermediaries such as community-based organizations and local workforce development boards often play key roles in these partnerships as well. Sector or industry partnerships, which must involve higher education institutions or other training providers, are a required state and local activity under WIOA.<sup>278</sup>

Rigorous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of sector partnerships involving a postsecondary credential, but this research tends to focus on programs mainly serving students older than ages 18 to 24. For example, a recent Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) study evaluated early impacts of Washington State's I-BEST Program. I-BEST programs, offered at community or technical colleges, are designed to help students in basic skills programs (such as Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language) enroll in and complete college-level occupational training in various in-demand occupational areas such as automotive, electrical, nursing, precision machining, and welding.<sup>279</sup> The programs involve team teaching by a basic skills instructor and an occupational instructor, and for the purposes of this study, students received financial support for tuition and materials as well as supplementary academic and career advising services.<sup>280</sup> The random assignment evaluation found that I-BEST boosted participation in college-level courses, credits earned, and credential attainment.<sup>281</sup> Subsequent reports will discuss the effect of I-BEST on employment and earnings. However, only 37 percent of study participants were age 24 or younger, and it is unknown whether or not the findings differed by age group as sample sizes did not permit reliable subgroup analyses.

## Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College & Career Training (TAACCCT) program

The Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) federal grant program provided almost \$2 billion from 2011 through 2014 to help build and strengthen postsecondary-employer partnerships helping workers gain skills needed for in-demand jobs. The program serves unemployed, underemployed, and low-income adults, including Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)-eligible individuals who lost their jobs due to international trade.<sup>282</sup> TAACCCT programs tend to serve adults with an average age of 31,<sup>283</sup> slightly older than our young adult focus population, but provide a variety of useful examples of systems integration.

TAACCCT grants have enabled advances in career pathways and postsecondary-employer partnerships in various states. In Wisconsin, career pathways coordinators at every technical

college now develop, implement, and monitor local career pathways programs, coordinating across college departments, with workforce and business partners, and with other colleges<sup>284</sup>, including increasing stackable credentials.<sup>285</sup> In Wichita, TAACCCT allowed colleges to work with the workforce board to develop modular, accelerated training that benefits employers and jobseekers by providing training that begins immediately rather than at the start of the next academic cycle.<sup>286</sup> In Missouri, the TAACCCT partnership helped to facilitate a statewide memorandum of understanding allowing for integrated data system with information on student postsecondary enrollment, credential attainment, and employment. These data help students and college and workforce leaders assess programs and continue to improve systems alignment.<sup>287</sup>

Although the program was geared towards adults, some TAACCCT grants have benefited youth. For example, Delaware Technical Community College (Del Tech) launched a manufacturing technician program for adult learners in 2011 with TAACCCT funding.<sup>288</sup> The program's curriculum, equipment, and lab then became the foundation for a high school Advanced Manufacturing Pathways Program, including dual enrollment with Del Tech.

### Stackable credentials

To promote further educational and career advancement, credentials must be stackable, meaning that they build toward higher-level certificates, degrees, or other credentials. If a credential is not stackable, young adults who have earned certificates might return to a community college for their associate's degree and find themselves back at square one. Stackable credentials often require the vocational and academic sides of a community college to work together to ensure that a student can move from the former to the latter, with the academic program accepting vocational credits.<sup>289</sup> Many states are adopting policies that require postsecondary institutions to offer stackable credentials and/or offer funding to establish them.<sup>290</sup> Beyond stackability, credentials must also be portable to ensure that they are recognized outside of local labor markets.

## POSTSECONDARY AFFORDABILITY & ACCESS

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young adult would be guaranteed a range of affordable postsecondary options.

### The college affordability crisis

Rising college costs, combined with inadequate public support for higher education, have resulted in a college affordability crisis. As state spending per student at public institutions has declined in recent decades,<sup>291</sup> the federal government's role in financing higher education has become even more important. But the Pell Grant—our nation's primary investment in helping low- to moderate-income students pay for higher education—is at its lowest relative purchasing power in 40 years.<sup>292</sup> It now covers less than a third of an in-state public four-year education.<sup>293</sup> Students' net burden for tuition and other expenses, after grant aid, has increased by 18 percent at public two-year colleges and 87 percent at public four-year colleges since 1990.<sup>294</sup> More and more students are relying on loans to finance their education, and every year, one million borrowers default on nearly \$20 billion in federal student loans.<sup>295</sup>

Much federal support to help individuals and families offset the cost of postsecondary education benefits students from middle-class and wealthy families more than students from low-income families. A variety of tax breaks related to postsecondary education benefit families with a range of income levels; in 2014, these federal higher education tax provisions amounted to

\$34.5 billion, 14 percent more than the need-based Pell Grant program.<sup>296</sup> The largest is the American Opportunity Tax Credit which benefits families with incomes of up to \$90,000 (or \$180,000 for joint filers).<sup>297</sup> In contrast, most Pell funding goes to dependent students whose parents have incomes of less than \$60,000 or to nondependent students with incomes under \$30,000.<sup>298</sup> The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program was intended to assist students from low-income families but an outdated funding formula disproportionately directs its dollars to expensive, elite institutions, although financial need is more concentrated in community colleges.<sup>299</sup> A student at a private four-year institution from the top quartile of the income distribution is more likely to receive FWS than a bottom-income-quartile student at a public four-year institution, and far more likely to receive FWS than a bottom-quartile student at a community college.<sup>300</sup>

### **Additional barriers to affordability for marginalized groups**

A disproportionate share of people of color, women, and low-income students borrow money for college and struggle to repay it. Almost 80 percent of African American students borrow money for college, as compared to 60 percent of students overall.<sup>301</sup> Women are more likely than men to borrow money for college, take on more debt than men, and repay their loans more slowly than do men, in part because of the gender pay gap.<sup>302</sup>

Student loan default rates vary widely by race and class. Even with a college degree, 12 years after entering school, the typical African American borrower still owed 114 percent of what they originally borrowed, comparing to 79 percent for Latinx students and 47 percent for white students. Consequently, African American borrowers are much more likely to default on their loans than their white and Latinx counterparts.<sup>303</sup> Twelve years after starting college, 1 in 5 African American bachelor's degree graduates default on their loans, as compared to 6 percent of white bachelor's degree graduates.<sup>304</sup> This discrepancy is caused by a variety of factors including racial disparities in familial wealth, employment opportunities and pay, and college completion rates<sup>305</sup>—as borrowers who do not earn a degree are much more likely to default on loans.<sup>306</sup>

Young adults who are undocumented, LGBTQ, and/or have had involvement with the justice system often face additional barriers to being able to afford postsecondary education. For example, undocumented immigrants can access in-state tuition in only 20 states and state financial assistance in only five states; a few states explicitly prohibit undocumented immigrants from enrolling in public higher education.<sup>307</sup> LGBTQ students may struggle to complete a financial aid application if their parents are unaccepting and refuse to provide financial information or a signature, or they may lose parental support when they come out during college yet their financial aid package may not reflect this change.<sup>308</sup> Young adults who have had justice system involvement face barriers to receiving financial aid, and young adults in prison face limited access to postsecondary education due in large part to the ban on Pell Grants for students in prison.<sup>309</sup>

Accumulated debts harm young people's economic security and overall wellbeing. For example, some might have to forgo their entrepreneurial aspirations as they have less financial capital to start a business, or compromise their career choices since they are less likely to be able to afford to work in low-paying public-interest occupations.<sup>310, 311</sup> Others might delay purchasing a house and forming families.<sup>312, 313</sup>

## College Promise programs

In recent years, many states and localities have sought to address concern about college costs and student debt by enacting “free college” policies, or College Promise programs. Sixteen states now have at least one statewide Promise program—of these states, ten have enacted and funded a Promise program since 2014.<sup>314</sup> As Jen Mishory at The Century Foundation explains, “Promise programs are distinct from existing state financial aid in that they provide at least free or debt-free tuition to a significant subset of students who are not chosen based *primarily* on merit considerations.”<sup>315</sup>

Promise programs in Tennessee and in Long Beach, California are described in the case studies. Promise programs have the potential to enjoy significant public support as they are easy to explain and are seen to be universal.

State policymakers deserve significant credit for these ambitious initiatives to expand college access and affordability. However, free college programs do not fully solve the problem of college affordability, as living expenses are often a greater barrier than tuition to low-income students.<sup>316</sup> The average community college student receives enough aid in grants and education tax benefits to cover tuition, but many students must still earn or borrow money to pay for living expenses.<sup>317</sup>

Free college programs must be designed carefully for equity. If not, they can actually worsen inequity, as explained by Tiffany Jones and Katie Berger of The Education Trust in “A Promise Fulfilled: A Framework for Equitable Free College Programs.”<sup>318</sup> The authors created an equity framework to evaluate what costs the program covers, who is eligible, and whether or not recipients must pay back any of the grant aid. They analyzed 15 existing and 16 proposed statewide free college policies and found that no programs met all eight criteria of their equity rubric. For example, Promise programs that cover only two years of tuition are inequitable in that they risk tracking low-income students into programs with lower graduation rates and smaller economic payoffs. Promise programs centered on “last dollar” aid (in which award levels are reduced by the receipt of other grant aid) are inequitable in that they may provide no benefit to low-income students enrolling at low-cost institutions.

## POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young adult is guaranteed a range of affordable postsecondary options designed to maximize their chance of completion. This requires improving developmental education, establishing guided pathways, and ensuring comprehensive supports.

### Completion rates & challenges vary by type of postsecondary institution & by student group

Postsecondary completion rates differ greatly along various lines, particularly with respect to type of institution and students’ race and income. Completion rates are much lower at public two-year and for-profit institutions than public four-year colleges and universities.<sup>319</sup> Community colleges serve about 40 percent of all U.S. undergraduates,<sup>320</sup> but they were designed for access more than completion, less than 40 percent of community college students earn a certificate or degree within six years of enrollment.<sup>321</sup> Low-income students and Black and Latino students are overrepresented at institutions with lower completion rates, where the cost of attendance is generally less.<sup>322, 323</sup> Disadvantaged students need more resources in order to succeed—but they are overrepresented at postsecondary institutions with fewer resources.<sup>324</sup>

Young adults who are undocumented, LGBTQ, and/or have had involvement with the justice system often face a range of additional barriers—beyond ongoing financial challenges—to completing postsecondary education. For example, undocumented students may struggle to: commute to campus without access to a driver's license,<sup>325</sup> access institutional support,<sup>326</sup> and navigate the ongoing fear of immigration raids affecting themselves or their families.<sup>327</sup> LGBTQ students face harassment based on sexual identity or gender identity or expression, sometimes fearing for their safety on campus.<sup>328</sup> Students with justice system involvement are sometimes barred from on-campus employment, despite research showing no significant differences in crime rates before and after mandatory background checks were implemented.<sup>329</sup>

## Developmental education

The unevenness of high school education today means that maximizing postsecondary completion rates requires improving developmental or remedial education—a major barrier for many students. Over half of entering community college students are required to take at least one developmental course, usually based on their scores on placement exams.<sup>330</sup> Many students at public four-year institutions are also required to take developmental courses. Such courses cost time and money but do not count towards a degree. Latino, African American, and low-income students are disproportionately placed in developmental education and at lower levels than other groups of students.<sup>331</sup>

Developmental education must be improved in line with a variety of proven innovations including minimizing the need for developmental education, accelerating students' progress through developmental courses, and contextualized instruction. The need for developmental education can be minimized by improving the system for assessment and placement (such as by considering high school grades or coursework in addition to placement tests) and determining the need for developmental courses in the context of what a student plans to study.<sup>332</sup> Innovations to speed students' progress through developmental education include “fast-track” courses compressing the developmental education curriculum into several weeks or a half semester, offering self-paced instruction through modularized courses, and mainstreaming students directly into college-level courses with additional supports.<sup>333</sup> Contextualized instruction incorporates developmental learning into particular academic or vocational disciplines. For example, in Washington State's I-BEST program, developmental education is incorporated into students' workforce training classes; with two teachers per class, one provides remediation as needed.<sup>334</sup>

## Guided pathways

Research suggests that more structured pathways within community colleges—with guided pathways rather than the “cafeteria model”—would also boost completion rates. Currently, students at many community colleges struggle to chart their course from enrollment to earning a credential or two-year degree or transferring to a four-year college.<sup>335</sup> Thomas R. Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins explain that in a cafeteria-style college, “Students are left to navigate often complex and ill-defined pathways mostly on their own.”<sup>336</sup> Academic advisers at community colleges can provide only limited assistance as they are often responsible for hundreds of students at a time.<sup>337</sup> With many choices to make about classes and programs but minimal guidance to help, students may make uninformed selections that cost them time and money and can eventually lead to leaving before completion.

Instead of the cafeteria model, guided pathways at community colleges help students efficiently complete their programs. In the guided pathways model, a “program map” defines a default

sequence of courses in a program of study, leading toward (1) credential completion; and (2) options for further education (by transferring) and/or career advancement.<sup>338</sup> Students who have chosen a major have a program map; students who have not yet selected a major pick a broader “meta-major” which has its own program map and guides them toward selecting their major with more information over time. The program map provides a default but is not mandated; students can customize their courses if they choose. Rigorous evaluations of guided pathways are not yet available, but case studies of various community colleges and four-year colleges implementing these reforms show improved retention and completion.<sup>339</sup>

## Student supports

Maximizing postsecondary completion rates requires improving a range of student supports from academic and career advising to basic needs assistance. Integrated career and academic advising is particularly valuable in ensuring that students’ career goals drive academic planning.<sup>340</sup> Studies suggest that advising or coaching is most effective when an adviser proactively and frequently makes contact with students and works consistently with the same group.<sup>341</sup> Additionally, some colleges and programs seek to help students cover food, housing, child care, and other costs which can interfere with their ability to stay in school. A Wisconsin HOPE Lab study found that 36 percent of university students and 42 percent of community college students experienced food insecurity, while 36 percent of university students and 46 percent of community college students experienced housing insecurity.<sup>342</sup>

## Proven examples of raising completion rates

The City University of New York’s (CUNY’s) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) addresses several of these barriers to student success and has dramatically improved completion rates. ASAP provides intensive student services including enhanced advising and tutoring, as well as increased financial support. ASAP requires students to attend college full-time and urges them to take developmental courses early and to graduate within three years.<sup>343</sup> A random assignment evaluation by MDRC found that ASAP nearly doubled graduation rates for low-income students referred to developmental education.<sup>344</sup> Subsequently, three community colleges in Ohio implemented programs based on the CUNY ASAP model; a random assignment evaluation found similar effects.<sup>345</sup>

The City University of New York’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs addresses several of these barriers to student success and has **DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED COMPLETION RATES.**

The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) has also demonstrated the effectiveness of additional supports to increase graduation rates and earnings. CPI is an innovative investment of TANF funds intended to increase low-income parents’ enrollment in and attainment of college-level certificate and associate degree programs, as well as job attainment and job retention in high-demand good jobs in the local labor market.<sup>346</sup> The program provides advising and career planning assistance, employment support services, and financial support for costs ranging from child care to transportation to textbooks.<sup>347</sup> A quasi-experimental evaluation found that low-income parents participating in CPI graduated with a degree or certificate at more than twice the rates of their non-participant peers; African-American and Hispanic CPI participants’ graduation rates were more than three times the rate of their non-participating ethnic/racial group peers. After graduation, CPI participants earned \$3,100 more in their first year than their TANF counterparts from the same region and field, despite similar incomes before entering the program.<sup>348</sup> Furthermore, every dollar invested in CPI resulted in an estimated return of \$1.79 over five years.<sup>349</sup>



## Guarantee of Quality Career Training, National Service, or Employment

Under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, every young adult ages 16 to 24 would be guaranteed—within six months of leaving school or registering as unemployed—a good-quality offer of career training, national service, or employment. These offers are designed to help young adults move toward good jobs in the local labor market and completion of postsecondary education. The offers, discussed below, include: career training, national service, youth entrepreneurship, and private and public employment. Additional programs that include GED completion, such as Job Corps, were included in the previous section focused on high school. The programs listed below provide a few examples, not a comprehensive list. A variety of options is needed to ensure accessibility and success for all youth.

A guarantee of career training, national service, or employment for all young adults ages 16 to 24 cannot be achieved by any one entity alone. It requires a cross-sector community effort with federal and state investment to offer these opportunities in a connected system and provide necessary comprehensive supports ranging from transportation to child care.

### A RANGE OF CAREER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Career training options under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee would range from sectoral training such as Year Up or JVS-Boston to apprenticeship.

#### Year Up

Year Up is a particularly successful sectoral training program for young adults, serving 18- to 24-year-olds with a high school diploma or equivalent in urban areas. Operated by a national nonprofit started in Boston in 2000, Year Up provides intensive workforce training to over 4,000 young people per year. The full-time program includes six months of technical and professional skills training in the financial service and IT sectors, followed by six-month paid internships at major companies. Partnerships with local colleges allow young adults to earn college credits for their Year Up participation. The program provides weekly stipends and extensive supports including advising, mentoring, and social workers offering services and referrals as needed. Year Up is funded primarily by employer payments for interns as well as contributions from foundations and other private-sector donors; public agencies cover just two percent of operating funds.<sup>350</sup>

A recent Abt Associates evaluation determined that Year Up yielded significant results, including earnings impacts that were “the largest reported to date for workforce programs tested using a random assignment design.”<sup>351</sup> Year Up boosted average quarterly earnings by \$1,895 (53 percent) in the sixth and seventh quarters after random assignment, and large positive effects continued through the third year.<sup>352</sup> This earnings impact was due to an increase in average hourly wages—by nearly \$4 per hour—as well as hours worked per week.<sup>353</sup> The program increased earnings for every subgroup of participants but to a varying extent; for example, earnings gains were smaller for African Americans.<sup>354</sup> As for education, Year Up boosted receipt of industry certifications; Year Up participation resulted in more college credits earned but did not increase college credential attainment during the study period.<sup>355</sup> Lastly, employer experiences with Year Up interns were quite positive and had caused several employers to create new lower-level career entry points.<sup>356</sup>

## Jewish Vocational Service-Boston (JVS-Boston)

Jewish Vocational Service-Boston (JVS-Boston) also exemplifies a sectoral employment program proven to be successful for young adults, although the program is not limited to young people. JVS-Boston, a community-based nonprofit founded in 1938, was originally focused on helping Jewish immigrants launch careers but now provides workforce development services more broadly. A randomized control study found significant benefits to its five-and-a-half-month intensive training program, with substantial support, in medical billing and accounting.<sup>357</sup> Participants experienced earnings gains over the two year period, primarily because they were more able to find work. Young adult program participants were particularly successful, earning nearly 50 percent more than the younger control group participants.

## Apprenticeship

The Youth Opportunity Guarantee would also build on recent efforts to expand access to apprenticeship, including for Opportunity Youth. Pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities should be available to youth in high school, as described previously—but not limited to youth in high school. For example, District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund, a health care labor-management partnership, recently created a pre-apprenticeship-to-apprenticeship program in Philadelphia designed to bring opportunity youth into Direct Support Professional jobs in behavioral health services. A survey of employers revealed that they see opportunity youth as uniquely qualified for these jobs as they are more likely to have lived experience related to their clients' needs.<sup>358</sup> These positions pay \$10 to \$15 per hour, a significant improvement over Pennsylvania's minimum wage of \$7.25. During the apprenticeship year, participants earn 24 college credits toward an associate's degree in health and human services; they can continue on a career pathway at Philadelphia University for an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree in behavioral health, and a master's degree in trauma counseling.<sup>359</sup> To ensure apprentices' success, the program provides a range of support services including help with child care, transportation, tutoring, and assistance obtaining drivers' licenses, which are required by most employers in the field.<sup>360</sup>

## ACCESS TO NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

Options under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee would include national service programs, which meet community needs while providing a critical pathway to young adults' education and employment success. They can help youth and young adults secure a good job by gaining experience and skills. Service programs often include educational components during the program and/or immediately afterwards through funding provided at the end of service. They also provide young people the opportunity to contribute to their community in meaningful ways and can inspire youth to continue on to a career in nonprofit or public service.

## Community & national service opportunities in the U.S.

A variety of programs provide community and national service opportunities to young adults in the United States. AmeriCorps is a national service network with three main programs and a total of roughly 75,000 members per year; 70 percent of AmeriCorps members are 24 years old or younger.<sup>361</sup> These three primary programs are: AmeriCorps State and National, in which members serve with national and local nonprofit and community groups; AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), AmeriCorps' poverty-fighting program; and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps, a residential program inspired by the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s engaging young adults ages 18 to 24 who work in teams to complete projects addressing community needs. Additionally, The Service and Conservation Corps provide over

25,000 young people (generally ages 16 to 25) and recent veterans service opportunities across the country through projects addressing conservation, recreation, disaster response, and community needs.

Individuals' and organizations' demand for national service programs vastly exceeds the available supply. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, passed in 2009, authorized expansion of the number of AmeriCorps slots from 75,000 to 250,000 by 2017. However, AmeriCorps funding allowed for only 59,700 AmeriCorps service members in 2017.<sup>362</sup> In 2011 AmeriCorps received over 582,000 applications for 82,500 positions; they had to turn away 86 percent of applicants, or nearly 500,000 people. Organizations apply for AmeriCorps funding to increase their capacity, and in 2011, organizations applied for more than twice as much AmeriCorps funding as was available; merely one in five applications received funding.<sup>363</sup>

### **Employment-related & education-related benefits of service programs**

Service programs provide a range of employment-related benefits. In a service program, a participant gains work experience, develops skills including soft skills, and expands their professional network. Some programs offer résumé workshops, mock interviews, and other assistance to help youth transition into employment after service. In the 2016 AmeriCorps Alumni Outcomes Survey, over half of alumni reported that serving in AmeriCorps opened up a career path that they might not have otherwise considered, and more than two-fifths of alumni who were employed within six months after their AmeriCorps service said their employment resulted from a connection made during their service.<sup>364</sup>

Service programs also provide a range of education-related benefits. Educational opportunities during a service program range from GED-prep classes to courses resulting in nationally recognized certifications in various industries.<sup>365</sup> Some service programs involve postsecondary partnerships such as agreements in which participants receive college credit for service programs completion.<sup>366</sup> AmeriCorps members earn an education award upon completion of service to pay for postsecondary education or repay student loans.

The Conservation Corps of Long Beach (CCLB) is a local Conservation Corps program combining service, work, and education, primarily serving 18- to 25-year-olds who do not have a high school diploma. Participants attend the associated charter high school while working about 28 hours per week, earning California minimum wage of \$10.00 per hour.<sup>367</sup> Projects include drought abatement, recycling and litter abatement, park and trail restoration, invasive species removal, and cleanup and conservation.<sup>368</sup> Work on City of Long Beach contracts provides training for city conservation jobs. Participants receive quarterly feedback from teachers and worksite supervisors as well as referrals to affordable housing, child care, and transportation support.<sup>369</sup> CCLB assists participants and graduates in applying for college, jobs, and AmeriCorps programs, and provides almost half of graduates with scholarships covering a significant portion if not all of local community college costs.<sup>370</sup>

### **Making national service available & accessible to all young people**

National service should be an option for all young people. A report by the Center for American Progress<sup>371</sup> recommends increasing Opportunity Youth's access to national service, including by ensuring opportunities to simultaneously pursue education and national service, expanding supportive services, updating criminal record check processes to avoid excluding candidates who are a good fit, and increasing funding such that there are sufficient "slots" for everyone who wants to take part. Furthermore, national service stipends must be increased so that low-income youth and young adults can afford to participate.

## EXPANDED YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The guarantee should also advance opportunities for youth entrepreneurship so that young people with viable business or nonprofit ideas have the opportunity to create their own employment opportunities and employ their peers. Young adults face a variety of barriers to starting businesses; for example, they generally have smaller professional networks, making it harder to access capital.<sup>372</sup> Young people are less likely to have financial resources accumulated over time, including savings and established credit.<sup>373</sup> Furthermore, business development programs designed to help start or grow a business predominantly serve adults ages 35 and over.<sup>374</sup> The guarantee would help address these barriers, building on recent efforts to increase youth entrepreneurship education and support.

Staff at the E3 Power Centers in Philadelphia noticed a very different dynamic among students in the entrepreneurship class—they heard them **TALKING ABOUT THE CLASS OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM.**

Various longstanding and new initiatives are developing youth entrepreneurship opportunities and related research. Such efforts include the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund (YEF) launched in 2017 by The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The YEF takes a collaborative approach to designing and implementing local entrepreneurship pathways offering a range of services and supports.<sup>375</sup>

In Philadelphia, YEF supports a cross-sector partnership led by Project U-Turn and the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN). Neighborhood-based E3 Power Centers (Education, Employment, and Empowerment) providing services to opportunity youth are implementing an entrepreneurship pathway pilot, with youth input integrated into program design and evaluation. The pathway includes entrepreneurship training, hands-on learning including internships, exposure to local entrepreneurs, and micro-financing for some entrepreneurship projects.<sup>376</sup> Staff at the E3 Power Centers in Philadelphia noticed a very different dynamic among students in the entrepreneurship class—they heard them talking about the class outside of the classroom (unlike with traditional academic classes such as math and English).

Entrepreneurship is a particularly important opportunity for undocumented youth, who face distinct barriers to employment. All immigrants regardless of legal status can start a business using a Social Security Number or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), a tax processing number issued regardless of immigration status.<sup>377</sup> Undocumented youth entrepreneurship is supported by Immigrants Rising's Entrepreneurship Fund which provides grants to undocumented entrepreneurs, including but not limited to DACA recipients, who are working to create positive social change.<sup>378</sup>

## PRIVATE & PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

The guarantee would also include further opportunities for private and public employment, which should include opportunities for education and advancement. All employers have a role to play in helping to create employment pathways for youth, and doing so helps them hire and retain skilled workers.

A primary recent example of increased employer engagement in advancing youth employment is the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ (“100K”). A group of companies led by Starbucks with the Schultz Family Foundation founded 100K in 2015 with foundation support and The Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions acting as an intermediary.<sup>379</sup> The coalition's 55 companies committed to “reinventing our hiring, retention, and advancement practices to hire and train opportunity youth” and have surpassed double their initial goal of hiring 100,000 youth.<sup>380</sup> Their main strategies have included working with community-based “backbone”

organizations in seven demonstration cities and supporting city-specific events like hiring fairs bringing together youth, employers, and community leaders.

100K companies have found success in partnering with community-based organizations at the community level to engage and support youth. Chipotle, for example, established ongoing local relationships with Job Corps, YouthBuild, Leaders Up, and other organizations. Once a youth began work there, the partner organization would keep in contact with the young person and Chipotle and would provide feedback and support.<sup>381</sup>



## Case Studies

**M**any communities and states across the country have taken bold steps to increase educational and employment opportunity for young people. In this section, we discuss three of them: Long Beach, California; Tennessee; and Boston, Massachusetts. Each of the following case studies provides merely an introduction to the story of advancing opportunity for youth in these places. They also exemplify many of the recommendations for operationalizing the guarantee, which are laid out in the following section.

### Long Beach, California

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The Long Beach College Promise officially launched in 2008 with an agreement to offer all Long Beach Unified School District students the opportunity to earn a college degree.<sup>382</sup> The Promise began with three partners—Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College (LBCC), and Long Beach State University (LBSU)—seeking to work as one system. This K-16 partnership has expanded over time to include additional partners, including the City of Long Beach and Mayor’s Office in 2014, and to better pave the way for student success. An early example of a college promise program, it has helped inspire other local, state, and federal initiatives.

#### ORIGINS

Long Beach College Promise grew out of a community partnership started by Mayor Ernie Kell in 1992 that focused on economic development.<sup>383</sup> After significant local job loss<sup>384</sup>, he initiated a community effort to boost economic development, education, and public safety.<sup>385</sup> Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College (LBCC), and Long Beach State University (LBSU) came together in a partnership which aimed to develop “a world-class seamless education system” and became known in 1994 as the Seamless Education Partnership.<sup>386</sup> The education initiative was seen as a “pre-requisite to economic growth.”<sup>387</sup> Four local business provided startup capital.<sup>388</sup>

In 2008, the three partners formalized the Long Beach College Promise to guarantee access to higher education for all students. They signed a memorandum of understanding laying out their vision and goals. It was the Great Recession and, once again, economics were an impetus.<sup>389</sup> The Promise initially offered all Long Beach Unified graduates (1) a tuition-free semester at LBCC (if enrolled as full-time students for the fall semester following graduation); and (2) guaranteed admission to Long Beach State University (if minimum CSU eligibility requirements are met). The guarantee of admission is significant as LBSU is selective, with an admission rate of 32 percent in 2018.<sup>390</sup> The partners have expanded the Promise over time, adding external resources to the internal resources with which they began the partnership. As of spring 2019, LBUSD graduates are eligible for two years tuition-free at LBCC.<sup>391</sup>

## BOX 8.

### ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT ON ESTABLISHING THE LONG BEACH PROMISE:

“[I]t changed a little bit, from “it’s nice that we’re collaborating” to “we’ve made a promise here.” It was much more of a moral imperative than the Seamless Partnership was... because we have a promise about where we’re going to send our students. If we don’t send them prepared, it’s a hollow promise... [and] preparing our students for a place that’s not there for them is just as hollow.”

Source: Asera, Rose, Robert Gabriner, and David Hemphill. “What Makes a Partnership Work?” College Futures Foundation, March 2017. Available at: <https://collegefutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/What-Makes-A-Partnership-Work-2017.pdf>.

The process of partnership was not always easy. There were structural challenges as each of the three institutions had their own data management system, policy context, and accountability system.<sup>392</sup> There were also cultural challenges—for example, college faculty are often accustomed to autonomy rather than collaborating regarding curriculum or pedagogy.<sup>393</sup> Strong executive leadership and developing relationships across the institutions were key to navigating these early obstacles.<sup>394</sup>

### HIGH SCHOOL THAT PREPARES STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

LBUSD high schools are designed to prepare students for college and career. The school district is the third-largest in California; its student population reflects the city’s diversity and is about 56 percent Hispanic/Latino, 14 percent African American, 13 percent white, 7 percent Asian, 3 percent Filipino, fewer than 2 percent Pacific Islander, fewer than 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native, and about 4 percent

other, and approximately 20 percent of all students are English language learners.<sup>395</sup> Starting in 2009, LBUSD implemented Linked Learning pathways, making career pathways available to all high school students in the district and transforming the district’s high schools into smaller, industry-themed learning communities.<sup>396</sup> LBUSD was one of nine districts across the state piloting Linked Learning with funding from the James Irvine Foundation.<sup>397</sup> As described earlier in this report, the Linked Learning model centers four components: rigorous academics, career and technical education, work-based learning, and comprehensive support services.

In 2015, Long Beach College Promise began to develop K-16 pathways in various disciplines and career areas across LBUSD schools, LBCC, and LBSU. Receiving the Governor’s Award for Innovation in Higher Education in 2015 provided the necessary funding.<sup>398</sup> Each pathway defines the course sequence and requirements—from high school through postsecondary—leading to a particular degree or career.<sup>399</sup> The pathways include health, engineering, business administration, liberal arts, and life and physical sciences.<sup>400</sup> Each one is run by a team of nine, including a faculty member, administrator, and counselor or advisor from each of the three institutions.<sup>401</sup>

Work-based learning for middle school through college students is facilitated by Long Beach Career Linked Learning (LBCaLL) and the Mayor’s Internship Challenge. LBCaLL is a nonprofit organization that works with employers, teachers, and administrators to ensure WBL opportunities for Long Beach students to complement their classroom learning. The Internship Challenge was created by Mayor Robert Garcia in 2015, as part of the College Promise, to double the number of internships in the city and improve students’ access to work experience in their field of interest.

In fact, college and career preparation begins long before high school for LBUSD students. For example, in elementary school, all fourth grade students visit Long Beach City College, and all fifth grade students visit Long Beach State University. In middle school, all students and their parents are encouraged to make the College Promise Middle School Pledge, a commitment to preparation for college and career.<sup>402</sup>

## BOX 9.

### LBUSD EDUCATOR:

“Our goals are secondary completion, postsecondary completion, [and] having a good job when you graduate. Those are the common goals.”

Source: Asera, Rose, Robert Gabriner, and David Hemphill. “What Makes a Partnership Work?” College Futures Foundation, March 2017. Available at: <https://collegefutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/What-Makes-A-Partnership-Work-2017.pdf>.

## A RANGE OF POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS DESIGNED FOR SUCCESS

Beyond the tuition assistance at LBCC and guaranteed admission to LBSU, Long Beach College Promise has implemented a variety of initiatives to maximize college completion. In 2012, LBCC launched Promise Pathways which updated the assessment process to ensure appropriate placement of new students who should be in college-level courses, rather than developmental courses. Students are evaluated based on high school achievement using factors like GPA, not standardized tests.<sup>403</sup> The program has boosted the percentage of students—across all ethnic groups—who have completed the necessary courses to transfer to a four-year degree program.<sup>404</sup> Cross-institutional data sharing enables the evaluation of program success, for example by comparing Promise Pathways students with non-Promise Pathways students.<sup>405</sup>

## PATHWAYS INTO EMPLOYMENT

Long Beach College Promise continues to strengthen its pathways into employment. The Promise partners created a pipeline that yields 70 percent of new LBUSD teachers.<sup>406</sup> The Port of Long Beach, a major employer, joined The Promise in 2018 as its first official industry partner. The Port is advising on curriculum as well as connecting students with internships and jobs.<sup>407</sup> LBCC and LBSU program heads consult regularly with industry contacts to ensure that students are prepared for jobs in growing fields, and more Promise industry partners are said to be coming soon.<sup>408</sup>

## Tennessee

### THE DRIVE TO 55 & TENNESSEE PROMISE

Statewide tuition-free community college in the U.S. began with Tennessee’s Republican Governor Bill Haslam and his vision for economic development. Companies considering locating in the state were less interested in financial incentives than skilled workers, but only 32 percent of the state’s residents had a college degree or certificate—significantly below the national average.<sup>409</sup> So in 2014 Governor Haslam announced the Drive to 55, setting the goal that 55

percent of Tennessee residents would have a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2025. His primary motivating factor was to bring jobs to the state.<sup>410</sup>

Haslam soon announced several initiatives to boost postsecondary access and completion to advance the Drive to 55; at the center was the Tennessee Promise. The Promise, implemented in 2015, made Tennessee the first state to cover technical and community college tuition costs for recent high school graduates. The program also includes mentoring for each student participant as they navigate the college admission process, engaging volunteer mentors at the local level. Tennessee Promise gained bipartisan support because it was (1) introduced as an economic development initiative to bring jobs to the state; (2) open to everyone (not restricted by income); and (3) funded by the lottery reserve fund.<sup>411</sup> In addition to the Promise program for recent high school graduates, Tennessee Reconnect was established to help adults access postsecondary education.

These postsecondary initiatives followed the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 (CCTA), which set goals for improved college completion and shifted state higher education funding to an outcome-based model. CCTA allocates funding based on outcomes such as degrees earned and student progression in reaching credit hour benchmarks, with a 40 percent premium for degrees earned by adults and low-income students. Research on CCTA's effects is mixed, but some credit the act with incenting Tennessee's 13 community colleges to implement reforms to boost student persistence and success, including guided pathways practices described earlier in this report.<sup>412, 413, 414</sup>

## TENNESSEE PATHWAYS & PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

Tennessee Pathways—Tennessee's K-12 initiative under the umbrella of the Drive to 55 goal—actually began earlier, in 2012. At that time it was called Pathways Tennessee. It aims to improve collaboration across K-12, higher education, and the workforce. Tennessee Pathways is centered on three key elements to increase postsecondary enrollment and success: (1) college and career advisement throughout K-12; (2) early postsecondary and WBL opportunities in high school; and (3) alignment between K-12, postsecondary programs, and career opportunities resulting from partnerships among school districts, higher education institutions, employers, and community organizations.<sup>415</sup>

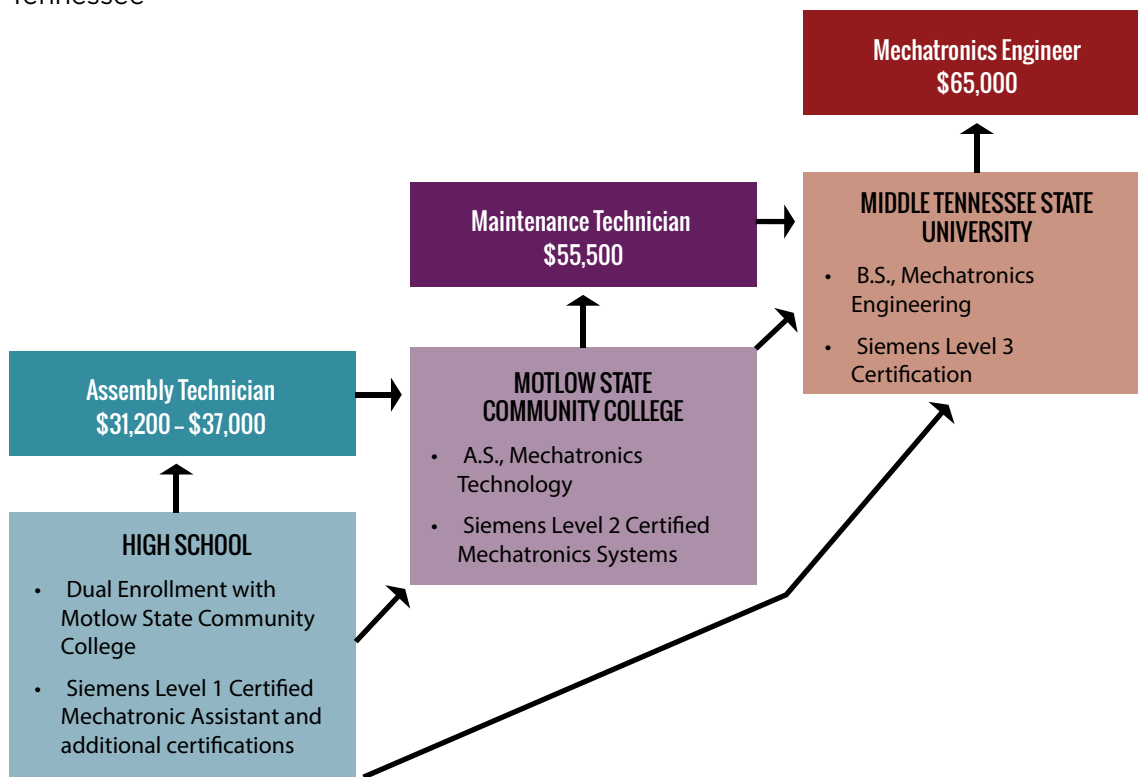
The work of Tennessee Pathways stems from the aforementioned Pathways to Prosperity report, published in 2011, and the Pathways to Prosperity Network. Tennessee was one of the first states to join the Pathways to Prosperity Network which, together with the nonprofit Jobs for the Future, provides states and regions with professional development, guidance, and active partnership in developing career pathways systems. Pathways Tennessee began with asset mapping, identification of intermediaries, and mobilization of employers in each of the state's nine economic regions. Pathways Tennessee has developed a range of pathways across the state, emphasizing work-based learning and dual enrollment, with various postsecondary options leading into a well-paying job.<sup>416</sup>

The state's active cross-agency leadership team focused on career preparation lays the groundwork, but the Tennessee Pathways regions drive the initiative.<sup>417</sup> In each region, employers and their representatives are involved from the beginning because their needs drive the pathways. Chambers of Commerce lead the partnerships in several regions. Regional Coordinators foster relationships and facilitate collaboration between school districts, postsecondary institutions, employers, and community leaders.<sup>418</sup> The coordinators also support

districts and schools in applying for Certified Tennessee Pathways recognition which requires four key characteristics: a progression of coursework informed by local workforce needs, Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs) and work-based learning, cross-sector partnerships, and a culminating credential.<sup>419</sup>

**FIGURE 13. A range of postsecondary options leading into good jobs**

Mechatronics Pathway Beginning in High School in Rutherford & Warren Counties, Tennessee



Note: The given dollar amounts are approximate annual starting salaries for the corresponding occupation.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019. Authors' correspondence with Duffield, Beth at Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, March 2019. Diagram adapted from "Mechatronics: Advanced Manufacturing." Tennessee Department of Education. Available at <https://www.tn.gov/education/career-and-technical-education/career-clusters/cte-cluster-advanced-manufacturing.html>

The Mechatronics pathway in Rutherford and Warren Counties, part of the state's Mechatronics program of study, offers one story of cross-sector partnership.<sup>420</sup> The pathway began when Todd Herzog and other local manufacturing business owners approached Mary Lou Apple, president of Motlow State Community College (MSCC), in need of more workers technically skilled in mechatronics.<sup>421</sup> Mechatronics is a form of engineering blending various technologies to form a complex system. MSCC's program opened in 2010 with a basic 16-hour Level 1 certification and soon expanded to offer a second level, partnering with Siemens, an industry leader.<sup>422</sup> In 2014, MSCC reached an articulation agreement with Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) enabling students to transfer and graduate from MTSU with a bachelor's in engineering, as well as a Level 3 certification in mechatronics.<sup>423</sup>

Local business owners saw the success of the postsecondary pathway and suggested developing it backwards into high school. The school district partnered with MSCC and industry leaders to develop a rigorous program at Oakland High School using the Siemens training

model as a foundation.<sup>424</sup> High school students who choose the pathway earn college credit in Engineering and Mechatronics and a Siemens Level 1 certification, and may participate in an internship.<sup>425</sup> After graduating high school, they can earn their associate degree from MSCC and bachelor's in engineering from MTSU and transition into high-demand jobs.

## RESULTS TO DATE

Tennessee's array of education and workforce initiatives, particularly Drive to 55 and Tennessee Promise, has clearly achieved significant progress in many ways. Since the Promise began, Tennessee has consistently ranked first in the nation for the proportion of high school students filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).<sup>426</sup> In the Promise's first year, the statewide college-going rate jumped from 58.4 percent to 64.3 percent.<sup>427</sup> The inaugural class of Tennessee (TN) Promise students (2015 high school graduates) had a 21.5 percent community college graduation

rate after five semesters, as compared to 13.8 percent of 2014 high school graduates after the same period of time.<sup>428</sup> Governor Haslam said in 2018, "If we sustain our current momentum, we are on pace to meet the Drive to 55 goal two years early."<sup>429</sup>

Various leaders in Tennessee are taking steps to move the Promise towards equity, but more action is needed. Since it covers any tuition and fees not already covered by other grant aid, low-income students receiving Pell Grants receive less Promise funding (if any) compared to middle-income or higher-income students without Pell grants.<sup>430</sup> So far, the Promise has left various inequities unchanged—for example, African American retention, graduation, and employment rates remain substantially lower than other student groups.<sup>431</sup> But recent steps are increasing lower-income students' access to a wider range of postsecondary opportunities. The University of Tennessee system will soon implement a new initiative, modeled after the state's Promise program, covering tuition and fees for students with a household income of less than \$50,000 a year. Additionally, Nashville Mayor David Briley has announced a new program covering non-tuition college costs including textbooks, transportation, tools and supplies.<sup>432</sup>

## BOX 10.

### TODD HERZOG, MCMINVILLE-WARREN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE:

"The chief issue was the inability to hire qualified entry-level labor, and to retain qualified entry-level labor as well... The education systems that were providing entry-level labor—be it high school, tech school, college, etc.—just simply weren't meeting our standards, weren't getting the job done. One of our top priorities was that we needed a more effective workplace development strategy."

Source: "Motlow's Mechatronics prepares skilled workers." Upper Cumberland Business Journal. March 2010. Available at <http://depreciated.ucbjournal.com/news.php?id=17>.

## Boston, Massachusetts

Boston is a nationally-recognized model in school-to-career initiatives, youth leadership, and collective impact strategies to address challenges faced by young people. This case study describes the city's longstanding school-to-career initiatives and three recent waves of collective impact focused on: (1) reconnecting students to high school, (2) boosting postsecondary completion, and (3) reengaging Opportunity Youth who have a high school credential.

## CONNECTING SCHOOL TO CAREER

The Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), the city's workforce development board, has also led school-to-career initiatives in Boston Public Schools (BPS) since its creation in 1979. A federal judge's desegregation orders had laid out a comprehensive plan for BPS which required "school/community partnerships" with business and college engagement.<sup>433</sup> This nascent collaboration was formalized in The Boston Compact, a historic agreement between BPS, PIC, employers, and local colleges signed in 1982.<sup>434</sup> Employers eagerly agreed they would hire high school graduates in exchange for BPS improving academic performance.<sup>435</sup> In implementing the compact, the PIC hired career specialists in Boston's high schools to match students with jobs. Career specialists in nearly every Boston public high school continue to form the backbone of the PIC's School-

to-Career initiative.<sup>436</sup> They connect students with summer jobs and school-year jobs and internships, as well as organizing a range of career readiness activities.<sup>437</sup>

### BOX 11.

#### EMMANUEL ALLEN, RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER:

"Where students went to re-enroll, it was kind of like a DMV. If you don't have all your paperwork together and you get up to that window, it's over. 'Come back later' or something like that. And that's what our students were going through. They were young, they weren't equipped for that. So that's what the reengagement center set out to do."

Source: Allen, Emmanuel. "The Boston Story: Multiple Waves of Collective Impact." Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Convening. 23 May 2017. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQQVevImNGw>.

## RECONNECTING STUDENTS TO HIGH SCHOOL

In 2004, Mayor Thomas Menino's leadership helped create the Youth Transitions Task Force (YTTF) to address Boston's high school dropout crisis. The PIC convened YTTF as a cross-sector coalition bringing together a range of stakeholders—including the Boston Public Schools, community organizations, city and state agencies, and philanthropy. With a grant from the Youth Transitions Funders Group, the coalition set out to raise public awareness and soon published a groundbreaking report, explaining that only two out of three BPS

students who started in the ninth grade graduated in four years.<sup>438</sup> The group piloted a variety of strategies including canvassing neighborhoods to reach out to students who had dropped out and learn whether they would return to school when given the option, and how the district and its partners could better support both prevention and re-engagement.<sup>439,440</sup> Hundreds of youth went back to school, and these successful efforts grew into one of the nation's first reengagement centers.<sup>441</sup>

With strong support from the mayor, Boston Public Schools and the PIC launched the Re-Engagement Center (REC) in 2009.<sup>442</sup> The center reengages students who have left school as well as those who are still enrolled but no longer attending school regularly. The REC's proactive outreach strategies include mail, phone, social media, networking, and door-knocking.<sup>443</sup> Once at the center, a young person has the opportunity to share their story and to hear the story of a staff member who went through similar struggles.<sup>444</sup> They discuss several options for educational reengagement, help students re-enroll, and continue to follow up with students after placement.

The partnership's strategic use of data has boosted its effectiveness and demonstrated its results. Data sharing between BPS and the PIC, including the names of disengaged students, facilitates prompt outreach.<sup>445</sup> The REC reengaged 3,092 students between 2006 and 2018, and

the dropout rate fell from 9.4 percent in 2005-06 to 3.6 percent in 2016-17.<sup>446</sup> With these results, the REC has continued through district leadership changes and budget shortages.<sup>447</sup>

## BOOSTING POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

In 2008 a new cross-sector collaboration, Success Boston, was launched with a goal of doubling the college completion rate of BPS graduates. The initiative focuses on low-income, first-generation students of color. A startling report catalyzed this effort by revealing that only about a third of BPS graduates who enrolled in college attained a degree.<sup>448</sup> Inspired by Mayor Thomas Menino and funded by the Boston Foundation, the collaboration brought together the City of Boston, Boston Public Schools (BPS), nonprofit organizations, and 37 local higher education institutions.

Youth leaders' surveys of youth and young adults revealed the need for a **ONE-STOP DROP-IN RESOURCE CENTER**.

Success Boston devised a four-part strategy to support youth through the challenges of higher education and career entry: Getting Ready, Getting In, Getting Through, and Getting Connected.<sup>449</sup> The initiative's cornerstone is one-on-one postsecondary coaching for students, beginning in high school, provided by staff of the PIC and other youth-serving nonprofits. The coaches help students: apply to and transition into college, receive the supports needed to earn a degree, and connect with jobs through internships and a variety of other opportunities.<sup>450</sup> The coaches also ensure students take advantage of new support programs such as the Tuition Free Community College scholarship program announced by Mayor Martin Walsh in 2016.<sup>451</sup> College completion rates have increased significantly, and 52 percent of BPS Class of 2011 graduates who enrolled in college within the first year after high school had completed a degree in six years.<sup>452</sup>

## REENGAGING DISCONNECTED YOUTH WITH A HIGH SCHOOL CREDENTIAL

In 2013 the PIC and Boston Opportunity Agenda (BOA) co-convened a new citywide collective impact network, the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC), with funding from the Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund. The cross-sector group of over 80 partners included the Boston Public Schools, local community-based organizations, philanthropy, city and state agencies, and postsecondary institutions. Youth leadership distinguished the collaborative from the beginning. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative developed a team of youth leaders that would become the Youth Voice Project (YVP), an integral component of the collaborative.

Research identified the need to focus on disconnected 20- to 24-year-olds with a high school credential—who were the largest segment of the Opportunity Youth population in Boston at the time, but an underserved group.<sup>453</sup> Youth leaders' surveys of youth and young adults revealed the need for a one-stop drop-in resource center where Opportunity Youth could learn about and connect to education, training, and employment services.<sup>454</sup> This led to the creation of the pilot Connection Center in 2015.

The Connection Center, supported by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) with local match funding, was the first in the nation designed for Opportunity Youth with a high school credential.<sup>455</sup> Coaches, mostly former Opportunity Youth themselves, provided guidance, placement, and follow-up services. They supported youth in applying for jobs as well as referring youth to next steps including: college bridging programs, colleges and universities, and occupational skills training programs such as Year Up or YouthBuild. In accordance with Jobs for the Future's Back-on-Track model, they prioritized programs providing pre-college bridging and college retention support.<sup>456</sup> The center engaged over 500 young adults in three years but, despite active

outreach, did not reach the same scale as the REC. The collaborative decided not to continue the stand-alone center when the grants ended, but OYC members continue its activities within other projects.<sup>457</sup>



# Recommendations for Operationalizing the Guarantee

**W**e previously described three key principles of the guarantee: systems integration, equity, and youth-adult partnership. Building on these principles, as well as the case studies, this section lays out three broad recommendations specifically for operationalizing the guarantee:

1. Cross-Sector Community Commitment
2. Significant Federal and State Support
3. Well-Designed Accountability Systems

## Cross-Sector Community Commitment

Successful implementation of the guarantee will require a community commitment and collective impact approach. Local collaboration between systems is required to help youth complete high school and postsecondary education and transition into a good job, and to reconnect Opportunity Youth to education and career. These systems should operate primarily at the local or regional level because education systems and labor markets are organized locally and regionally and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. In any given region, the degree and certificate programs available must align with the demands of the regional economy.

Below we outline the partners, collective impact approach, and steps suggested for local implementation of the guarantee—with state and federal support.

### **INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP WITH EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

The guarantee will require leadership from the mayor, or county executive or tribal leadership as applicable. The public-private community partnership implementing the guarantee should

include K-12 education, postsecondary institutions, employers and the workforce system, local government, unions, foundations, nonprofits, young leaders, and other civic leaders. A wide variety of organizations could contribute to the effort; for example, libraries have helped to advance many community initiatives and should be considered. The guarantee should provide opportunities for community residents to participate, like the volunteer mentors in Tennessee Promise. Engaging local residents would boost capacity as well as community awareness of and support for the initiative.

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH

A collective impact approach is best suited to implement the guarantee; no one entity could achieve it alone. Collective impact, a concept developed by social impact consultants FSG, is defined as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.”<sup>458</sup> Such initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure and dedicated staff. Their process involves a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.<sup>459</sup>

## “BACKBONE” INTERMEDIARY

Implementing the guarantee will require a “backbone” intermediary to organize the partnership to transform the system, working closely with local government. Backbone organizations generally pursue six activities to facilitate collective impact: guide vision and strategy, support aligned activities, establish shared measurement practices, build public will, advance policy, and mobilize funding.<sup>460</sup>

The appropriate intermediary would vary by community, and could be a new or an existing organization. It might be a community-based organization, workforce development board, chamber of commerce, or community college—such organizations already play intermediary roles in career pathways efforts across the country.

Additional intermediaries may be needed to manage particular parts of the guarantee. In the Pathways to Prosperity network, for example, intermediaries carry out (1) a convening function guiding the work across entities in a region and (2) the function of engaging employers and developing work-based learning opportunities for youth. In some cases, one intermediary fulfills both functions. In other cases, these roles are spread across multiple organizations.<sup>461</sup>

## IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The steps involved in implementing the guarantee will vary somewhat by community. Based on the preceding case studies, the steps will include but not be limited to the following:

1. Come together across sectors with the common purpose of implementing the Youth Opportunity Guarantee.
2. Conduct community assessment to identify job opportunities, community strengths and needs, and available resources. This should include analyzing high school graduation rates, college enrollment and completion rates, youth disconnection rates, characteristics of local Opportunity Youth (such as educational attainment)—overall and broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, etc.
3. Collaboratively develop—and then implement—a strategy to achieve the guarantee. Include shared goals with coordinated actions to meet them, specific outcomes, deadlines, and

shared measurement systems with public reporting. The creation of subgroups will likely be necessary to achieve the goals.

4. Collect and analyze evaluation data on an institutional and partnership level. Assess progress and modify plans as needed.
5. Adjust strategies and expand partnership. Continue to grow the partnership and its work with new members and funding. Adapt to policy changes. Develop new solutions as new challenges arise.

## Significant Federal & State Support

Successful implementation of the guarantee will require significant federal and state support to scale up existing proven programs, establish new programs and initiatives, and permit flexibility in pooling and leveraging resources. We have discussed existing proven programs and initiatives throughout this report. Below, we briefly provide examples of the need for new programs and for additional flexibility in leveraging resources.

### CURRENT SUPPORT IS INADEQUATE

Our current educational and workforce systems supporting youth and young adults are insufficiently funded to adequately meet the demand, much less provide necessary additional help to youth who start or fall behind. Career pathways combining high-quality education and training aligned with labor market needs are still the exception, rather than the norm, in American high schools. We have 4.6 million Opportunity Youth in the U.S., but federally-funded programs serve only an estimated 339,719 Opportunity Youth annually.<sup>462</sup> Demand for programs from AmeriCorps to YouthBuild vastly exceeds the available supply, primarily because of inadequate public funding.

We have **4.6 MILLION OPPORTUNITY YOUTH** in the U.S., but federally-funded programs serve only an estimated 339,719 Opportunity Youth annually.

### FEDERAL AND STATE SUPPORT ARE ESSENTIAL

The guarantee should fund the creation of new programs including a federally-funded Jobseeker's Allowance, or JSA, to provide short-term income support and employment services to unemployed or underemployed adults, including young adults, who are seeking work and ineligible for Unemployment Insurance (UI). The JSA would help close a gap in the economic security system for young adults who may be ineligible for UI for a variety of reasons—for example, because they lack recent work history or they are transitioning from full-time caregiving for a child or other family member.<sup>463</sup> Similar to UI, the JSA would offer eligible jobseekers a weekly allowance to help meet basic needs and job-search-related costs such as transportation.<sup>464</sup> Navigators administering the JSA program would also help connect participants with a range of services from child care to mental health services.<sup>465</sup>

As part of the guarantee, federal action is also needed to facilitate flexibility in pooling and leveraging resources, with strong accountability as discussed in the next section. Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (often called P3) provides an example. P3 was authorized in 2014 to allow states, localities, and tribes additional flexibility to pilot innovative ways to better serve disconnected youth. Selected pilot sites could blend discretionary funds from various federal agencies into one “pot” with new, single sets of reporting and other requirements, in exchange for committing to improvements in outcomes.<sup>466</sup> To ensure that funds remain accountable to program goals and to youth, new requirements created for pooled resources should include strong oversight and specific eligibility requirements to ensure access.

In Los Angeles, the P3 partnership brought together public and private agencies to advance a “system response” for serving Opportunity Youth.<sup>467</sup> Partners braided funding and utilized waivers to improve service delivery, such as by expanding eligibility for services at the city’s fourteen YouthSource Centers (YSCs) to reach additional disconnected youth.<sup>468</sup>

## BOX 14.

### ROBERT SAINZ, ASSISTANT GENERAL MANGER, ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, LOS ANGELES:

“P3 allows us to integrate funding, which allows us to integrate services. That helps us better serve youth. For example, we can offer various educational, workforce, health, and housing assessments and services all at one YouthSource center, under one roof.”

Source: Sainz, Robert. 6 March 2019.

State support in various ways, including resources and alignment, are essential for the guarantee’s success. Throughout this report we have discussed state initiatives committing resources to better support youth, from apprenticeship to postsecondary access. State leadership is also necessary to advance alignment across systems such as secondary and postsecondary education.

## FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PARTNER

Federal-state partnerships will be an important tool for implementation of the guarantee. Such partnerships have many advantages. Federal-state partnerships can provide a high federal match rate to encourage state participation, but the state match

urges them to contain costs. A “counter-cyclical” matching formula, in which the federal portion automatically expands during recessions, ensures a quick response to economic downturns.<sup>469</sup> Like Medicaid, the match ratio should take into account a state’s per capita wealth to help compensate for inequities between states. The partnership’s design should include quality and equity-focused standards in exchange for federal funds.<sup>470</sup> The federal government could also manage a competitive grant program, in part by prioritizing localities and CBOs, in states that have not yet joined the federal-state partnership.

Implementation of the guarantee could build on several existing relevant proposals for new federal-state partnerships, including a postsecondary education partnership to ensure access for all. For example, “Beyond Tuition” by the Center for American Progress proposes debt-free postsecondary education made possible by significant new federal investment matched by state and institutional funding. The lowest-income students would not have to pay for college, and middle-income students would be able to afford college with a reasonable family contribution. The proposal includes mechanisms focused on ensuring equity and accountability. Beyond Tuition is projected to cost the federal government approximately \$60 billion annually.<sup>471</sup>

## COSTS ARE SIGNIFICANT BUT JUSTIFIED

Operationalizing the Youth Opportunity Guarantee will require considerable federal and state resources. We believe this investment is necessary, and the benefits are likely to far surpass the cost. An estimate of fiscal impact is beyond the scope of this framework report, but existing cost estimates for other initiatives provide benchmarks. For example, Bridge to Reconnection proposes reconnecting an additional 660,000 Opportunity Youth each year—in order to reengage a total of one million youth annually—for an additional four billion per year in federal spending.<sup>472</sup> Beyond Tuition, described above, is projected to cost \$60 billion annually.

While the guarantee would increase costs in the short term, it would also increase government revenues and reduce social costs in a variety of ways over time. For instance, Measure of

America estimates a \$55 billion boost in federal revenue each year if all youth remained connected.<sup>473</sup> Improved opportunities available under the guarantee would also lead to reduced spending in many areas ranging from juvenile and criminal justice to treatment of poor health.

Beyond the major federal commitment noted above, we suggest several strategies to cover the cost of the guarantee. States' support of the guarantee would build on their investments in career pathways initiatives, among many others. Support from private stakeholders including employers and foundations would be critical, as it has been in local and state efforts around the country. Additional flexibilities—with appropriate accountability—would be offered to help communities better leverage federal resources.

## Well-Designed Accountability Systems

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Successful implementation of the guarantee would require well-designed accountability systems to ensure both *access* to opportunities and the *quality* of opportunities for each of the three components of the guarantee. Limited accountability often leads to limited results, but poorly-designed accountability systems can lead to exclusion of youth facing greater barriers. Accountability measures must be designed to increase—rather than decrease—engagement of marginalized youth.

Efforts to ensure accountability can draw from the lessons learned in states' experimentation with outcomes-based funding (OBF) in higher education. OBF is intended to improve colleges' performance. However, as states increase the percentage of funding tied to outcomes, institutions may respond by increasing selectivity to help them achieve outcomes. This would make it more difficult for underprepared students to access higher education; due to historic and systemic reasons, these students are more likely to be low-income and/or students of color. Therefore, Anna Cielinski and Duy Pham at CLASP have proposed “equity measures” as performance measures serving two related purposes: to counteract OBF's incentives for postsecondary institutions to increase selectivity, and to help ensure sufficient resources for institutions serving students most in need.<sup>474</sup> The number of degree completions by low-income students exemplifies such an equity measure.

An important means to increase transparency would be a student-level federal postsecondary data system to provide information about what programs are helping students to earn credentials and attain good jobs. These data would allow students to compare return on investment for different programs, as it varies widely. The bipartisan College Transparency Act outlines a new system that would publicize aggregate information including students' enrollment, completion rates, debt repayment, and employment outcomes for postsecondary programs.<sup>475, 476</sup> This privacy-protected system would build on the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and College Scorecard which have advanced transparency but do not offer a complete picture.<sup>477</sup> Data would be disaggregated along lines including race/ethnicity, income, and gender.

In addition to these postsecondary statistics, other statistics to evaluate youth opportunity by state and community include: the high school completion rate, youth disconnection rate, youth unemployment rate, and duration of young adults' periods of unemployment. These rates must be evaluated in the aggregate and broken down by income, race, and gender. Transparency is also needed with respect to the use of public funds under the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, and federally-funded evaluations would be utilized to assess impact.



## Conclusion

All youth and young adults—regardless of their background—should be given a fair chance to achieve their educational and career dreams. But today, too many youth in the United States struggle to achieve their educational goals and secure a good job. Nearly five million youth and young adults are disconnected from school and work.

Youth are forced to navigate underfunded and unconnected secondary, postsecondary, and workforce systems with too few realistic options to advance academically and professionally.

The status quo is not working. It falls short for employers, who struggle to hire and retain the workers they need. It damages our economy, which will have to rely increasingly on today's younger workers to support an aging population. Most of all, it hurts millions of young people, especially low-income youth, youth of color, girls and young women, LGBTQ youth, and immigrant and undocumented youth, among others.

Any serious national economic agenda, and any agenda to advance racial equity, must address this challenge in an ambitious way.

In cities and states across the country, from Long Beach to Tennessee to Boston, serious solutions are being designed and implemented to solve youth education and employment challenges. They show us what's possible. But we fall far short of ensuring meaningful opportunity for all youth in every community. This report outlines a vision and offers a path forward that is as ambitious as it is necessary.

We need to take bold steps to build on our progress. We need cohesive, integrated systems of education and employment. We need to reconnect youth who are out of school and out of work. We need to ensure youth receive resources and support in proportion to the barriers they face.

We need to truly set up all youth for success.

We need a Youth Opportunity Guarantee.

# Appendix

**TABLE 1. Youth to Adult Unemployment Ratio by state**

Ratio of unemployment rate of ages 16-24 to that of ages 25-54 by state, 2018

STATE	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE		RATIO
	AGES 16-24	AGES 25-54	
Alabama	8.2%	3.6%	2.3
Alaska	14.1%	6.0%	2.4
Arizona	10.4%	3.3%	3.2
Arkansas	8.2%	3.1%	2.6
California	9.3%	3.6%	2.6
Colorado	7.0%	2.6%	2.7
Connecticut	12.4%	3.5%	3.5
Delaware	9.6%	2.9%	3.3
District of Columbia	12.4%	4.7%	2.6
Florida	8.4%	3.0%	2.8
Georgia	9.5%	3.1%	3.1
Hawaii	5.7%	2.5%	2.3
Idaho	6.1%	2.5%	2.4
Illinois	10.0%	3.4%	2.9
Indiana	8.4%	2.8%	3.0
Iowa	5.4%	2.0%	2.7
Kansas	6.4%	3.0%	2.1
Kentucky	10.6%	3.4%	3.1
Louisiana	12.1%	4.0%	3.0
Maine	11.4%	2.3%	5.0
Maryland	10.1%	3.4%	3.0
Massachusetts	5.9%	2.9%	2.0
Michigan	9.1%	3.3%	2.8
Minnesota	5.0%	2.6%	1.9
Mississippi	14.6%	3.5%	4.2
Missouri	7.1%	2.9%	2.4
Montana	6.7%	3.5%	1.9
Nebraska	6.0%	2.4%	2.5
Nevada	8.6%	4.0%	2.2
New Hampshire	6.5%	2.20%	3.0
New Jersey	7.0%	3.5%	2.1
New Mexico	10.6%	3.9%	2.7
New York	8.4%	3.8%	2.2
North Carolina	8.5%	3.4%	2.5
North Dakota	4.5%	2.7%	1.7
Ohio	9.9%	3.8%	2.6
Oklahoma	7.5%	3.0%	2.5
Oregon	8.1%	3.8%	2.1
Pennsylvania	8.5%	3.7%	2.3
Rhode Island	10.1%	3.2%	3.2
South Carolina	8.8%	3.2%	2.8
South Dakota	7.2%	2.6%	2.8
Tennessee	8.7%	2.7%	3.2
Texas	8.3%	3.2%	2.6
Utah	6.7%	2.4%	2.8
Vermont	5.5%	2.4%	2.3
Virginia	7.2%	2.4%	3.0
Washington	11.2%	3.5%	3.2
West Virginia	11.9%	5.0%	2.4
Wisconsin	6.2%	2.3%	2.7
Wyoming	8.2%	3.7%	2.2

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