

BRIEF

The Youth Opportunity Guarantee

A Framework for Success

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

The *Youth Opportunity Guarantee* (“the guarantee”) is a bold vision that ensures *all* young people have the opportunity for long-term career success. This framework aims to guarantee to every young person ages 16 to 24 in the United States:

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

Throughout our history, the United States has taken steps toward ensuring a fair chance for every child, regardless of their background. But today, too many youth 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 launching a career trajectory. In our educational and employment systems, various groups face additional barriers—including low-income youth, youth of color, girls and young women, LGBTQ youth, and immigrant and undocumented youth.

This hurts employers, who struggle to hire and retain needed workers, and damages our national economy. The status quo isn’t working.

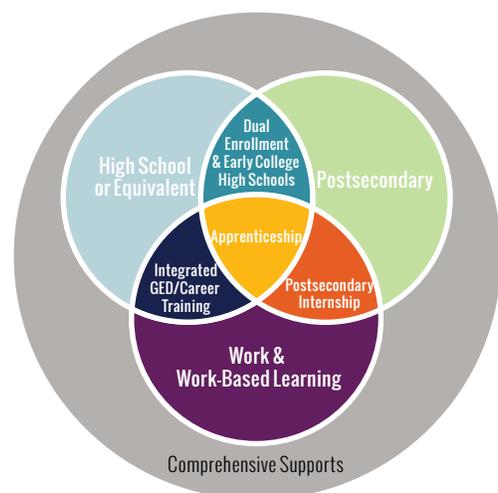
After years of extensive research and collaboration, Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality has envisioned a new framework, the Youth Opportunity Guarantee, that integrates secondary, postsecondary, and employment systems to make long-term career success a reality for *all* youth in the United States. This framework builds on the United States’ existing commitment to

ensure access to primary and secondary education for all youth.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE GUARANTEE

- **Systems Integration:** Increased connection and integration across secondary, postsecondary, and employment systems make it more likely that youth will continue advancing toward career success. The guarantee integrates and overlaps these components (see Figure 1).
- **Equity:** Interlocking systems of oppression disrupt educational and career trajectories. The guarantee includes strategies to ensure all young people receive resources and support in proportion to the barriers they face.
- **Youth-Adult Partnership:** The framework emphasizes youth-adult partnership at the interpersonal, community, and national levels.

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



- Example: Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program in Nebraska.
- Example: YouthBuild programs in states nationwide.
- Example: Apprenticeship 2000 Program in Charlotte, North Carolina.
- Example: Career Ready Internship Programs in Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

HIGH SCHOOL OR EQUIVALENT

The guarantee would offer high school or equivalent that seamlessly leads to a variety of postsecondary options and includes:

- **Career & technical education** blending academic and technical education with college-prep coursework to prepare students for college and high demand careers in a variety of sectors.
- **Work-based learning programs**, ranging from job shadowing to paid internships to apprenticeships.
- **Secondary education aligned and connected with postsecondary learning**, such as dual enrollment or early college high school programs.
- A variety of **re-engagement opportunities** for youth who have left high school.

A RANGE OF POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS

The guarantee would offer a **range of postsecondary options** that are affordable, designed for completion, and lead into a good job.

- The **majority of good-paying jobs** require at least an associate's degree or certificate.
- Students can study at a variety of institutions, including community colleges, in programs designed to help them enter in-demand, good-paying jobs—with a **clear path to a four-year degree**.
- **Postsecondary options designed to maximize students' chances of completion** take steps such as improving developmental education, establishing guided pathways, and ensuring comprehensive supports.

CAREER TRAINING, NATIONAL SERVICE, OR EMPLOYMENT

The guarantee promises a good-quality offer of career training, national service, or employment within six months of finishing school or registering as unemployed.

- Career training options would range from **sectoral training** that focuses on technical and professional skills training to **apprenticeships** that combine on-the-job learning with classroom learning.

- **Service programs** meet national and community needs while providing a pathway for youth and young adults to gain experience and skills; they can include education components during or afterward.
- The guarantee proposes cross-sector partnerships that encourage **youth entrepreneurship** through programs that could include trainings, exposure to local entrepreneurs, and micro-financing—as well as private and public employment.

CASE STUDIES

- In California, the Long Beach College Promise brings together K-12, postsecondary, city government, and employer partners guaranteeing Long Beach Unified graduates tuition-free semesters at Long Beach Community College and admission to Long Beach State University (if eligibility requirements are met), with initiatives to increase work opportunities and boost completion rates.
- In Tennessee, the Mechatronics pathway offers high school students the opportunity to gain college credit, certifications, and work experience, with a range of postsecondary options. They can earn an associate's and bachelor's degree and transition into high-demand jobs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPERATIONALIZING THE GUARANTEE

- **Cross-Sector Community Commitment:** Local collaboration between systems is required to develop pathways for youth to complete high school and postsecondary education and transition into a good job, with opportunities to reconnect as needed.
- **Significant Federal and State Support:** Operationalizing the guarantee will demand increased support to scale up existing programs, establish new programs, and permit flexibility—with accountability—in pooling and leveraging resources.
- **Well-Designed Accountability Systems:** Limited accountability often leads to limited results. Successful implementation of the guarantee requires accountability to ensure both access and quality of opportunities to youth.



This document is a summary adaptation of “The Youth Opportunity Guarantee: A Framework for Success” by Laura Tatum, Indivar Dutta-Gupta, Cosette Hampton, Huixian (Anita) Li, and Peter Edelman. Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, March 2019.