

**WASHINGTON STATE  
WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD  
MEETING NO. 131  
NOVEMBER 20, 2008**

**RECONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS  
A REPORT TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE**

The Washington State Legislature passed Senate Bill 6261 in 2008. SB 6261 called for the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to examine programs to help young people between 18 and 24 years of age be more successful in the workforce and make recommendations to improve policies and programs in Washington. Section 28 states:

Conduct research into workforce development programs designed to reduce the high unemployment rate among young people between approximately eighteen and twenty-four years of age. In consultation with the operating agencies, the board shall advise the governor and legislature on policies and programs to alleviate the high unemployment rate among young people. The research shall include disaggregated demographic information and, to the extent possible, income data for adult youth. The research shall also include a comparison of the effectiveness of programs examined as part of the research conducted in this subsection in relation to the public investment made in these programs in reducing unemployment of young adults. The board shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by November 15, 2008, and every two years thereafter. Where possible, the data reported to the legislature should be reported in numbers and in percentages.

A draft research report entitled *Reconnecting Young Adults 18-24: A Report To The Washington State Legislature* is included under this tab.

**Board Action Requested:** Adoption of the Recommended Motion.

## RECOMMENDED MOTION

**WHEREAS,** The Washington State Legislature finds that there is a persistent and unacceptable high rate of unemployment among young people in Washington; and

**WHEREAS,** The Legislature, through Senate Bill 6261, directed the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to provide demographic information about young adults and to conduct research into workforce development programs designed to reduce such high unemployment rates among young adults and report the findings and recommendations; and

**WHEREAS,** The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board developed *Reconnecting Young Adults 18-24: A Report To The Legislature* in collaboration with operating agencies;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,** That the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board adopts the recommendations contained in *Reconnecting Young Adults 18-24: A Report To The Legislature*, November 2008.

*“The number, size, and intractability of many of our nation’s problems have obscured our view of an entire generation of youth that stands in silent danger of being lost to the country and to themselves – their talent and energy wasted, their hopes muted, and their promise unrealized because they live in a generation that has not found its time or place in this one.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **RECONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS 18-24 A REPORT TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE**

This report examines the economic and educational situation of Washingtonians who are in their late teenage years and early 20s. The report presents selected best practices in comprehensive work and learning programs serving disconnected youth among this age group. The report features postsecondary pathways initiatives and concludes with recommendations for policymakers. The term “young adults” in this report is defined as individuals 18 to 24 years of age. The term “disconnected youth” in this report is defined as individuals 18 to 24 who are neither employed or in school.

The age span from 18 to 24 is a critical one for educational and labor market development. This time span is developmentally important, as young people prepare to take on adult responsibilities. This is the time to lay the foundation through work and learning for successful labor market participation and civic responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

### **One in three unemployed in Washington are young adults**

In 2006, Washington’s unemployment rate stood at 5 percent, or roughly 168,000 people.<sup>3</sup> Of the unemployed, 64,000, or one in three were young adults. This figure is troubling on many levels, especially when considering that young adults account for just 16 percent of the overall working population but a third of the unemployed.<sup>4</sup>

We can expect the high unemployment rate for youth to worsen as Washington, and the nation, experience a recession. General economic conditions have a profound impact on the 18-24 age group. Young adults tend to experience above average rates of job loss and reduced access to high-skilled positions when the economy enters a recession or endures a jobless recovery. During 2001-2002, for example, employment opportunities for the nation’s out-of-school young adults declined at a rate approximately three times as fast as that of older adults.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sum et al., A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth, Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Campaign For Youth: Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future, A National Investment Strategy for Reconnecting America’s Youth, a 12 member national steering committee, 2008

<sup>3</sup> This represents the state’s civilian, non-institutional population, which excludes such groups as military personnel and those housed in institutional settings, including prisons and jails.

<sup>4</sup> This figure represents youth aged 16-24. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics measures the young adult population using these ages, rather than 18-24.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew M. Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Nathan Pond, and Mykhaylo Trub’skyy, Left Behind in the Labor Market: Labor Market Problems of the Nation’s Out-of-School, Young Adult Population, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northwestern University, Chicago 2003.

The cumulative amount of education, work experience, and training that young adults receive directly influences their long-term labor market success, and in recent decades this has become increasingly the case.

The median earnings of most young men (ages 16-24) today, adjusted for inflation, are substantially lower than those enjoyed by their counterparts three decades ago. These young men without at least some postsecondary education suffered the greatest losses, a reflection of the increasingly prominent role of education in determining an individual's workforce success. Key Finding: Young men who failed to obtain a high school diploma or GED and those who graduated from high school, but did not complete any years of post-secondary education, saw their real earnings decline by one-fourth between 1973 and 2000.<sup>6</sup>

In 2006, young adults comprised 16 percent (551,126) of Washington's working age population<sup>7</sup>. Thirty-nine percent (213,899) of young adults were attending school—with about half that group holding a job at the same time. Another 38 percent were working. But 13 percent, or more than one out of 10 Washington young people, *were not working or going to school*.

By far, these “disconnected” young adults who are out of school and out of work are in the greatest distress. Experts agree that this combination of unemployment and lack of education can lead to crime and other troubles, increasing the likelihood that a young person will end up permanently disenfranchised, poor and dependent on social service subsidies. The link between low education levels, low wages and high unemployment is clear.

Of the 21 percent (112,355) of Washington young adults with less than a high school diploma, three out of four were working in 2006, the latest date that figures are available<sup>8</sup>. But, their median hourly wage sat at \$9.05, only slightly higher than minimum wage, which reached \$7.63 an hour in 2006. And their unemployment rate, 24 percent, was five times the rate of the general working age population.

Some 38 percent (206,854) of Washington's young adults have only a high school diploma and yet they represent almost 60 percent of the young adults who are unemployed. Of those high school graduates who did hold jobs, their median hourly wage was \$11.

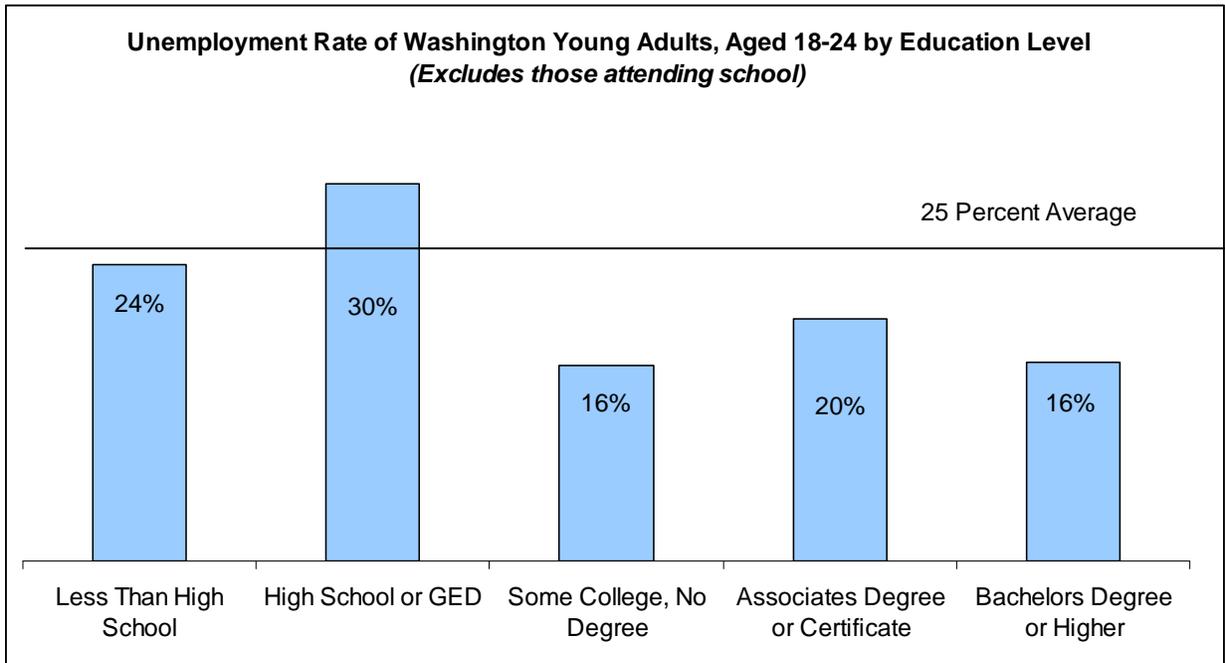
Three out of four of Washington's unemployed young adults, (52,203), did not go beyond high school or obtain a GED.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew M. Sum, [Leaving Young Workers Behind](#), Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northwestern University, Chicago, 2003

<sup>7</sup> The working age population is generally defined as those aged 18 to 64.

<sup>8</sup> Office of Financial Management 2006 State Population Survey.



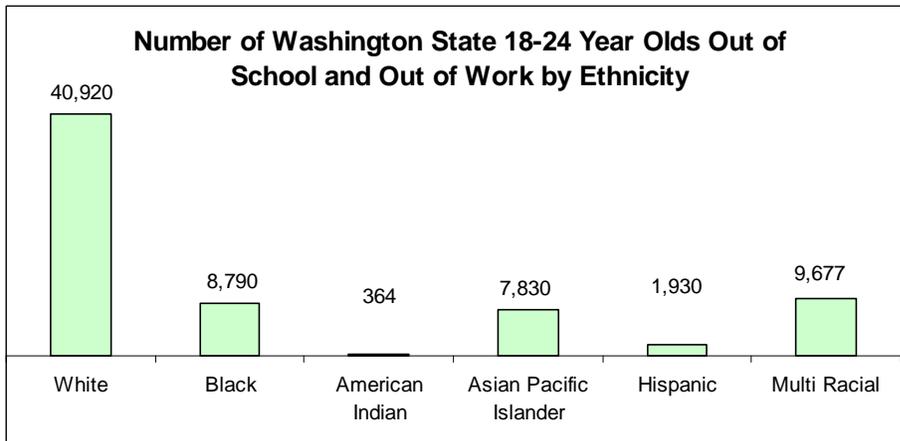
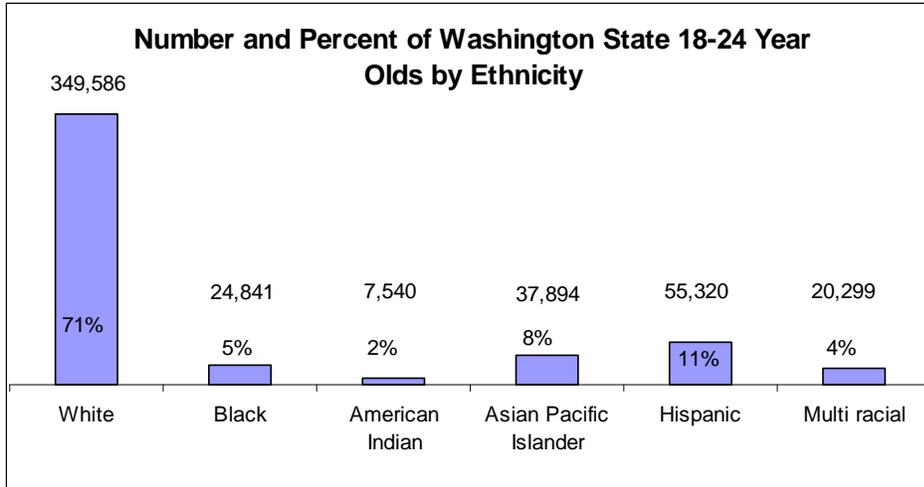
Source: Office of Financial Management 2006 Population Survey.

Who are these disconnected (unemployed and not in school) young adults in Washington?

- 62 percent are male, 38 percent female
- 87 percent were born a U.S. citizen, 13 percent foreign born
- 68 percent are urban, 32 percent rural
- 35 percent are 18-19 years old, 65 percent are 20-24

It's worth noting that some of Washington's youth demographics depart from national statistics. For example, while nearly 70 percent of our unemployed young adults come from urban areas, just 50 percent of the nation's unemployed young adults are city dwellers.

Also, some of our minority populations have a greater share of unemployed young people than their percentage of the population. African Americans, for example, have twice as many unemployed young people than their share of the population. And those who describe themselves as multiracial have more than three times as many unemployed young people as their population share (see chart below).



## Some history on federal youth employment and training programs

In 1982, Congress directed federal funds to provide employment and training services to economically disadvantaged youth under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). A 1994 long-term study of JTPA by Abt Associates, a social policy research organization, found discouraging results. There were no statistically significant positive effects for out-of-school youth (either male or female) from classroom training, on-the-job training, job search or other services.<sup>9</sup> Some researchers and JTPA practitioners questioned the random sampling and comparison group techniques used in the study. The evaluation did not assess the design of the programs nor the quality of services. The evaluation results, nevertheless, led many national policymakers to think that “nothing works for these kids.” Responding to the Abt study, and a 1995 U.S. Department of Labor report that stated JTPA youth programs were unsuccessful in raising long-term employment or earnings for youth, Congress significantly cut appropriations for the JTPA Out-of-School Youth Programs.<sup>10</sup> Congress eliminated the Summer Youth Employment Program in 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Bloom, et al., The National JTPA Study: Overview of Impacts, Benefits, and Costs of Title II-A, Abt Associates, 1994

<sup>10</sup> Alan Zuckerman, The More Things Change The More They Stay The Same: The Evolution and Devolution of Youth Employment Programs, National Youth Employment Coalition, undated

In the second half of the 1990s, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers began to point out that the employment and training components in the key federal programs had been maladapted to the needs of disconnected youth.

In 1997, the Levitan Youth Policy Network (Network) began to advocate for an integrated and comprehensive service delivery system among community partners to make a difference in disconnected lives. Leaders in the Network realized that this stage of development is critical and that young people must be engaged in preparing for their future with the support of caring competent adults. The Network recommended seven “principles” in youth programs:<sup>11</sup>

1. Each young person needs to feel that at least one adult has a strong stake and interest in his or her labor market success.
2. Each young person must sense three things: that the activity or program has strong and effective connections to employers; that placing the young person into a paid position with one of those employers as soon as possible is of the highest priority; and that the initial job placement is one step in a continuing and long-term relationship with the program or initiative to advance the young person’s employment and income potential.
3. Each person must feel at each step of the way the need and opportunity to improve his or her educational skills and certification.
4. Each person must feel that the program or initiative will provide support and assistance over a period of time--perhaps up to several years—that may include several jobs and several attempts at further education (brief, time-limited programs for youth that pointed only toward a job placement achieved little success).
5. Effective connections are needed between the program and external providers of basic supports such as housing, counseling, medical assistance, food, and clothing.
6. The program requires an “atmosphere” buttressed by specific activities that emphasize civic involvement and service—in short, an extension of practical caring beyond self, family, and friends.
7. Motivational techniques are needed, such as financial and other incentives for good performance, peer group activities, and leadership opportunities.

These seven principles were considered as Congress worked to design JTPA’s successor, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. WIA aimed to move JTPA’s patchwork system toward a more comprehensive approach for serving disadvantaged youth. WIA consolidated JTPA’s year-round and summer youth programs into a single program that supports services for low-income youth who are between the ages of 14 and 21 and who face barriers to employment. In addition, WIA encouraged communities to develop a clearer picture of the diverse array of agencies and organizations, public and private that are critical to youth development.

The purpose of the WIA youth program is to provide effective and comprehensive activities to in-school and out-of-school youth seeking assistance in achieving academic and employment success. The Act described a new service strategy: 1) preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities, in appropriate cases; 2) strong linkages between academic and occupational learning; 3) preparation for unsubsidized employment, in appropriate cases; and 4) effective connections to intermediaries with strong links to the job market and local and regional employers.

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<sup>11</sup> Gary Walker, Out of School and Unemployed: Principles for More Effective Policy and Programs, Chapter Four of “A Generation of Challenge: Pathways to Success for Urban Youth,” Levitan Youth Policy Network, 1997

WIA requires 10 program elements, including youth development activities, be made available to eligible youth:

- 1) Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction, leading to completion of high school, including dropout prevention strategies.
- 2) Alternative school services.
- 3) Summer employment opportunities that are directly linked to academic and occupational learning.
- 4) Paid and unpaid work experiences, including internships and job shadowing.
- 5) Occupational skill training.
- 6) Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive behaviors during non-school hours.
- 7) Support services.
- 8) Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, lasting at least a year long.
- 9) Follow up services for at least a year after completion.
- 10) Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral.

## **WIA Youth Program results in Washington**

In Program Year<sup>12</sup> (PY) 2007, the WIA Youth Program served 3,110 Washington youth aged 14 through 21. Many of the youth were older, with one in four 19-21 (794). That year, Washington's 12 Workforce Development Councils met an average of 102.6 percent of the U.S. Department of Labor's performance targets for WIA youth.<sup>13</sup> The PY 2007 WIA program results for older youth were:

- Entered employment rate (within three months of exiting program): 73.5 percent.
- Employment retention rate (of those working in the first quarter after exit, the percent working in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter): 87.6 percent.
- Six months earnings increase (the change in earnings from a six month pre-program period to a six month post-program period): \$4,900.
- Credential rate (percent of those earning an education credential during the program): 49.5 percent

The WIA Adult Program serves individuals 18 years of age and older, including a significant segment of young adults. In Program Year 2007, the WIA Adult Program served 831 Washington youth aged 18-24, or 21 percent of program participants. The PY 2007 program results for youth aged 18 to 24 were:

- Entered employment rate: 80 percent
- Employment retention rate: 88.3 percent
- Six months earnings increase: \$4,479
- Credential rate: 47 percent

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<sup>12</sup> Program Year 2007 runs from July 2007-June 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Number is greater than 100 percent because Workforce Development Councils exceeded targets in some cases.

Every four years, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board conducts net impact and cost-benefit analysis of workforce development programs. The most recent net impact study was conducted in 2006. To estimate short-term and long-term impacts, those who participated in the WIA Youth Program were compared to individuals who had similar characteristics, but who did not participate in any of the programs included in the study. The study revealed:

The WIA Youth program in Washington state has positive long-term net impacts on employment, hourly wages, hours worked, and earnings. Participation increases lifetime earnings.<sup>14</sup>

The cost-benefit analysis estimates the value of the net impact on earnings employee benefits (estimated at 20 percent of earnings), social welfare benefits, UI benefits, and certain taxes. For each WIA Youth, the public (taxpayer) program cost is about \$6,300 over the length of enrollment. During the first two-and-a-half years after leaving the program, participation increases the average youth participant's earnings by \$1,719. During the course of a working life to age 65, the average youth participant will gain about \$27,780 in net earnings (earnings minus forgone earnings) and about \$5,560 in employee benefits. These are net gains compared to the earnings of similar individuals who did not participate in the program.

Projected participant benefits to age 65 outweigh public costs for the WIA Youth program by a ratio of 5.3 to 1, or \$33,336 to \$6,314. From the time of leaving the program to age 65, the public is expected to gain about \$4,800 per youth participant in additional Social Security, Medicare, and federal income and state sales taxes, and to save about \$2,800 per youth participant in total social welfare costs, and UI benefits—greater than the direct cost of the program.<sup>15 16</sup>

Despite this success, the federal WIA youth program is underfunded with falling annual budgets. The size of Washington's WIA Youth Grant has dropped from \$30 million in PY 2002 to \$20 million in PY 2008. Washington's WIA youth programs served just 1,625 youth aged 19-24 in PY 2007 compared to the 56,308 disconnected youth (19-24 out-of-school and out of work) who live in the state—only a 3 percent penetration level.

Congress is expected to either reauthorize WIA in 2009 or replace it with new legislation.

## **Model programs serving disconnected young adults**

A patchwork of second chance programs have succeeded against the odds in transforming the future for youth they touch. Here are some examples:

### **JOBSTART at the San Jose Center for Employment and Training (CET) site**

Between 1985 and 1988, 13 service providers across the county chose to participate in JOBSTART, a federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) demonstration project. JOBSTART was a program of basic education, occupational skills training, support services, and job placement assistance for young, economically disadvantaged dropouts who read below the eighth

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<sup>14</sup> 2006 Workforce Training Results, Net Impact analysis, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research for the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The U.S. Department of Labor has not conducted a net impact evaluation of the WIA of 1998.

grade level. The program served predominately black or Hispanic high school dropouts. The JOBSTART demonstration project tested various approaches to provide short-term, moderately expensive training for youth. In formal evaluations, there was a statistically significant difference between JOBSTART and control group youth on the likelihood of receiving a high school diploma or GED certificate. But when it came to long-term earnings impact, only the San Jose Center for Employment Training (CET) fared better than the control group. CET had very impressive long-term earnings impacts.<sup>17</sup> Annual earnings for participants improved by over \$3,000 (in 1993 dollars). Here is what made CET stand out from the other 12 JOBSTART sites.

1. Compared to the other JOBSTART sites, San Jose CET was more of a full-immersion program with a more intensive experience for the youth. Youth were enrolled for an average of 4.1 months and spent 355 hours in training. Over 80 hours per month were spent in training
2. CET was effective in involving employers in developing the program's occupational emphasis and curriculum. Training areas were chosen carefully, based on analysis of local labor market needs. San Jose CET was also unusual in the extent to which educational services were shaped by occupational training needs and provided in an integrated way. The program had a strong labor market orientation and its experienced staff used their many employer connections to help place their participants after training was complete.
3. San Jose CET offered integrated basic education that was tightly connected to skills training. In this individualized open-entry, open-exit program, trainees immediately began vocational training designed to simulate a real job situation. If a trainee had difficulty with basic reading or math during this training, he or she was given individual assistance on the spot by basic skills tutors present during the training. Instead of being taught academic skills through classroom instruction, students learned them in the context of job training.
4. Finally, the San Jose CET excelled because it employed and retained highly experienced staff with extensive local knowledge. The cumulative experience of staff allowed the program to develop many contacts in the business community and earn an excellent reputation among employers. The program forged very close connections to the labor market.<sup>18</sup>

### **YouthBuild**

YouthBuild offers young people training and practical experience for construction industry careers. The national, alternative education program draws young adults, ages 17-24, for hands-on construction trades training. Youth acquire construction skills as they build or rehabilitate low-income housing in their communities. The program aims to empower young adults to rebuild their communities and their own lives with a commitment to work, education, responsibility, safety, and family. It is a "tools for life" program. Participants spend 50 percent of their time alternating between the job site and school. YouthBuild participants receive leadership training while they earn high school diplomas or GEDs through the program.

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<sup>17</sup> George Cave, et al., JOBSTART: Final Report on a Program for School Dropouts, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1993

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, What's Working (and What's Not): A Summary of Research Impacts and Employment and Training Programs, 1995

YouthBuild provides personal counseling and training in life skills and financial management. The students are part of a mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other's success and to improving the conditions in their neighborhoods. Participants include young people who have been in the juvenile justice system, are aging out of foster care, are high school dropouts, or are otherwise at-risk of failing to reach key educational milestones and opportunities that lead to fulfilling careers.

Phoenix has had a YouthBuild program since 1996 and is proud of its results. YouthBuild Phoenix, retained 72 percent of its students until they completed their training and achieved a cumulative attendance average of 91 percent. Over 73 percent of the graduates attained either their GED or a high school diploma. Of those completing the program, 96 percent were initially placed in jobs or postsecondary education, and 73 percent are still engaged in work or school.<sup>19</sup>

According to Professor Andrew Hahn, Brandeis University, YouthBuild graduates responding to a survey nearly universally agree that YouthBuild helped them to turn their lives around, and that success would have been out of reach without it. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents said they were in postsecondary education or earning at least \$10/hour (2004 dollars). In addition, 76 percent are not dependent on federal programs such as food stamps, unemployment insurance, welfare; 85 percent are positively involved in their communities; 70 percent are registered to vote, and almost 50 percent voted. Respondents did say they would like access to post-program follow-up services and assistance, particularly to help them further develop their work skills.<sup>20</sup>

The YouthBuild Offender Program<sup>21</sup> and the YouthBuild Welfare-to-Work Program<sup>22</sup> have also brought about impressive results. There are three YouthBuild programs in Washington: YouthBuilders Renton, Nooksack Indian Tribe in Deming, and Tacoma Goodwill YouthBuild.

### **Washington Service Corps (WSC)/AmeriCorps**

The Washington Service Corps (WSC) was founded in 1983 to involve young adults in their communities while gaining employment experience and skills. In 1994, WSC became part of the nationwide AmeriCorps program. WSC/AmeriCorps places citizens in full-time community service projects and supports them with a monthly minimal living allowance of \$950.

WSC engages people across the state in full-time service projects benefitting their local communities. There is individual participation and team participation. The individual placement program is for youth, including unemployed and out-of school youth that must be between the ages of 18 and 25. There is no upper age limit for those participants enrolled in the team-based program. All participants must either be a citizen or permanent resident alien. Each year, 500 of the WSC participants serving in September 2007 through August 2008 were between the ages of 17 and 25.

In partnership with local sponsors, such as school districts, local governments, non-profit agencies and chambers of commerce, WSC promotes work ethic and the satisfaction and skills

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<sup>19</sup> Youthbuild Phoenix, 2008

<sup>20</sup> "Why Do Some Programs for Out-of-School Youth Succeed" In cooperation with the National Youth Employment Coalition and YouthBuild USA, A Forum, 2004

<sup>21</sup> Mark Cohen, Vanderbilt University and Alex Piquero, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and City University of New York Graduate Center, Costs and Benefits of a Targeted Intervention Program for Youthful Offenders: the YouthBuild USA Offender Project, 2008

<sup>22</sup> Anne Wright, The YouthBuild Welfare-to-Work Program: Its Outcomes and Policy Implications, 2001

learned by “getting things done.” WSC/AmeriCorps members offer literacy instruction, they tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, help communities respond to disasters, and help build the capacity of nonprofit groups to become self-sustaining. Members who complete their term of service (normally 10 1/2 months) are eligible to receive a federally-funded education award of \$4,725. The award is held in trust and paid to educational institutions or to sponsors of federally-guaranteed student loans. In both the individual and team programs, members must have completed high school or received a GED before using their educational awards.

Over 300 Washington WSC/AmeriCorps participants in the 2006-2007 service year responded to a VeraWorks qualitative survey. Survey respondents described AmeriCorps as an intense experience boasting enriching relationships, compelling and intensely rewarding service work, and novel and challenging experiences. WSC/AmeriCorps volunteers did report that the program had its downsides. Chief among these were the financial hardship of living within the program’s stipend, paperwork and an exhausting schedule. For over 97 percent of respondents, however, the pleasures and challenges of the WDC/AmeriCorps experience came together as a positive and transformative experience. Participants reported that the program experience gave them more skills and made them more confident, directed and service oriented. Over three quarters of respondents reported higher levels of workplace skills (leadership, management, teamwork and communication as well as technical skills) due to the program<sup>23</sup>

Nationally, AmeriCorps engages more that 75,000 individuals in intensive, results-driven service each year. A 2008 national AmeriCorps survey reports similar positive longitudinal results:<sup>24</sup>

1. AmeriCorps members gained a sense of civic empowerment and they continued their participation in community service long after they completed the program.
2. AmeriCorps is a pipeline to public service oriented careers. Forty-four percent of members of racial and ethnic minority groups and 46 percent of those from low-income backgrounds are employed in public service careers as compared to 26 percent in their comparison groups.
3. AmeriCorps alumni are more satisfied with their lives eight years later than others who did not serve in the program.

A multisite control group evaluation by Abt Associates and Brandeis University entitled *Promising Strategies for Young People and Their Communities* reported significant employment and earnings gains by AmeriCorps alumni compared to the control group.

### **YouthSource Renton**

YouthSource in Renton is a multi-agency education, employment and development center for at-risk youth ages 14-21.

The key innovations of YouthSource include:

- Co-location of a range of youth-serving agencies in one site, sharing staff and blending resources.

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<sup>23</sup> VeraWorks, Waynesboro, PA, [AmeriCorps Service As A Personal and Professional Boost: Results From A Reflective Survey](#), for the Washington Commission for National and Community Service

<sup>24</sup> [Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni](#), co-authored by the corporation for National and Community services and Abt Associates Inc.

- Co-location with King County’s flagship one-stop site (WorkSource Renton).
- Integration of basic skills education with occupational skills training in innovative skills programs for construction, information technology and manufacturing careers.
- Integration of a public school alternative education program.
- On-site counseling for mental health and substance abuse issues, with referrals for more assistance.
- Direct liaison and partnership with the juvenile court system for cross-referral (a project now expanding with the partnership’s new youth offender grant from DOL).
- Integration of a post-secondary institution (technical college) to provide both on-site services and a connection to the college’s campus.

In July 2008, YouthSource Renton received the U.S. Department of Labor’s Recognition of Excellence Award in the “connecting America’s youth to the workforce” category at the national 2008 Workforce Innovations Conference in New Orleans. YouthSource is a model of collaboration across partners and systems, blending the resources and services of more than a dozen government and non-profit agencies in a one-stop center for at-risk youth that meets their unique needs for education, employment and leadership.

By coordinating multiple partners funded by multiple federal, state and local funding streams with differing outcomes and requirements, YouthSource maximizes resources in a seamless way. Youth can find not only a broad range of services for employment and education, but a depth of services that can address underlying issues and barriers, including mental health and substance abuse. YouthSource administrators have great success in identifying mutual benefit for partners and fostering a spirit of collaboration in which partners help each other meet their program goals while serving the needs of youth. Program partners include YouthBuild, Job Corps, Digital Bridge Technology Academy, and Opportunity SkyWay.

YouthSource serves several hundred youth each year in its wide range of programs. In WIA out-of-school youth services which cross most of the YouthSource programs, 276 youth were served in 2006 and 183 were served in 2007 (decrease due to funding cuts). All participants have significant barriers to success in school and work. Most (97 percent) are school dropouts and 99 percent are educationally at risk. 87 percent are unemployed, 66 percent are involved in the justice system, 31 percent have a disability, and 44 percent have problems with drugs or alcohol. About 10 percent are homeless. About two-thirds are young men and 68 percent are youth of color. The average age is 17; about 30 percent are 16 or under and 17 percent are aged 19-24.

In Program Year 2006, YouthSource achieved a 71 percent positive exit rate. That is, participants entered unsubsidized employment or postsecondary advanced training. The team attained 169 percent of its goal for credentials, with 54 achieved. Youth exiting into full-time unsubsidized employment are working at an average wage of \$9.38 per hour. Due to its connections with the construction and information technology sectors and occupational skills training specific to these sectors, many youth are entering jobs or further training in these high-demand careers.

Some 70 percent of youth who had a positive exit were retained in school or employment in the third quarter of follow-up. In addition, for youth 19-21, YouthSource achieved a 78 percent entered employment rate with 77 percent job retention in the third quarter of follow-up. YouthSource has achieved a 62 percent GED/diploma rate.

YouthSource has proved highly effective with court-involved youth thanks to its partnership with King County Superior Court. Out of 190 court referrals, YouthSource achieved an 82 percent non-recidivism rate. Through YouthSource's employment programs in PY04-05, youth involved in the juvenile justice system paid back \$7,539 in victim's restitution/court obligations so they could move forward with their lives. Ten youth paid their restitution in full.

### **Youth Opportunity (YO) Grants**

In May 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded sizable Youth Opportunity (YO) Grants to 36 high poverty urban, rural, and Native American communities. According to the American Youth Policy Forum, the Youth Opportunity Grant program "represents the most promising federal effort to date for mobilizing the human and financial resources of troubled, generally low-income communities."<sup>25</sup>

The Youth Opportunity delivery systems in each of the 36 communities were uniquely tailored to build on the strength of the delivery capacity of local providers, employers, education entities, and the youth-serving systems. YO grants in Baltimore, Portland, Seattle and other sites enabled young people to know that caring adults were committed to their success, whether in traditional systems or by developing innovative alternative pathways to the mainstream. YO is based on a youth development framework that emphasizes a comprehensive approach to meeting a young person's needs. Under the YO model, trained youth workers were expected to provide follow-up to participants for at least two years after they completed participation in program activities. This is in keeping with the effective practice of providing youth access to a caring, trusted adult for an extended period of time. Additionally, experts have suggested that youth benefit from continuing a relationship with a program for as long as they need.<sup>26</sup>

The U.S. Department of Labor contracted Decision Information Resources, Inc. to conduct a comprehensive YO evaluation. This impact analysis report was completed but DOL has not released the findings despite a request from the GAO. The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) released a study in 2006 that praised the Youth Opportunity Grants for dramatically increasing youth participation in education reengagement activities and in internship opportunities. YO established formal connections with community colleges to provide special programming on campus for YO's high-risk youth. CLASP also found that YO contributed to an increased professionalism of the youth delivery systems in the 36 sites including a youth practitioners' apprenticeship program.<sup>27</sup>

When the federal YO grants ended in 2006, the City of Baltimore voted to provide funding to sustain Youth Opportunity (YO!) Baltimore. The two YO! Baltimore Centers provide education and career skills training to out-of-school youth 16-22 years of age. Services include:

- GED and pre-GED classes on-site at each center.
- Classes and online courses for high school completion.
- Career training in high growth industries.
- Life skills, social event clubs, and computer labs.

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy Martin and Samuel Halperin, Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth, American Youth Policy, 2006

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, Youth Opportunity Grants, GAO-06-53, 2005

<sup>27</sup> Linda Harris, Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), 2006

- Leadership development through community service projects.
- Job readiness classes and job placement services.

The City of Baltimore reports that YO! Baltimore has improved employment and earning among participants, increased educational achievement, lowered teen pregnancy rates and reduced crime. YO! members earn 35 percent more and are employed at a 42 percent higher rate than non-participants. A recent study showed that YO! Baltimore members earned an average of \$5,000 more than their peers, and were more “attached” to the workforce than were their peers. YO! members are one-third less likely to be arrested and convicted than non-participants and the out-of-school YO! members earned GEDs at twice the rate of non-participants.

### **Summer Youth Employment: Initiatives in Baltimore and Los Angeles**

In 2008, the Center for Labor Market Studies testified before the U.S. Congress that the summer job market for teens would be extremely weak and forecasted a seasonally adjusted teen summer employment rate of only 34 percent, which would have marked a 60-year historical low teen employment rate.<sup>28</sup> The 2008 summer employment rate for teens was 4.3 percentage points below its value in 2004 and 12.3 percentage points or nearly 30 percent below its value in the summer of 2000.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1990s, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provided federal funds for summer youth employment programs. This summer program offered low-income youth age 14-21 with paid work experience in the public and private nonprofit sectors and education remediation classes. Prompted by indications that federal funds would not be available for the 1996 summer youth program, the State of Washington appropriated \$5.4 million to ensure that the state’s at-risk youth would still have the benefits that a summer youth program offers. Some 4,301 youth were enrolled in the summer of 1996. Washington State University’s Social and Economic Sciences Research Center conducted an evaluation of this 1996 summer youth program. Findings from the evaluation indicate that the summer youth program played a key role in participants’ decisions to return to school. Around 63 percent reported that it was “very important” in making the decision to return, and about 59 percent reported that it was very helpful in making them ready to return to school. The effect was particularly strong for non-white participants. As a result of their summer experience, about 94 percent felt more prepared to get another job, 90 percent felt more prepared to finish school, and 96 percent felt more prepared to learn new things.

Congress eliminated the federal Summer Youth Employment Program in 1998.

In early 2008, Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon announced that summer jobs would be a priority for her administration and asked leaders from across Baltimore to join her 2008 YouthWorks Leadership Team. She asked them to commit to the Baltimore YouthWorks theme: *Summer Jobs are Everyone’s Business*, by placing 6,500 teens in summer jobs. Working in partnership with the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development and the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board’s Youth Council, the Mayor worked to recruit employers and solicit donations from businesses, philanthropic organizations, faith-based institutions, government agencies, and

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<sup>28</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [The Employment Situation: August 2008](#), Washington, D.C. September 5, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, and Joseph McLaughlin, [The Historically Low Summer and Year Round 2008 Teen Employment Rate: The Case for An Immediate National Policy Response to Create Jobs for the Nation’s Youth](#), Center for Labor Market Studies, Northwestern University, Boston, September 2008

community leaders. These efforts resulted in raising sufficient funds and job commitments for more than 6,500 summer jobs.

In 2008, 100,000 youth in Los Angeles were reported to be out-of-school and out-of-work. The City of Los Angeles responded by allocating \$4 million a year for 5,000 summer jobs, targeted to youth who were dropouts and “Non-Passers.” The LA. Workforce Investment Board and the LA. Unified School District partnered to offer another 3,000 jobs on school campuses, paid by the district’s Community Development Block Grant. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa required every city department to hire a targeted number of young people for entry-level positions, adding another 1,000 summer jobs. Then the City of Los Angeles turned to the private sector. The Chamber of Commerce encouraged local employers to sponsor “Hire L.A.’s 18-24” at benefactor (\$25,000), sustaining (\$10,000) and supporting (\$5,000) contribution levels. In the end, Mayor Villaraigosa reached his goal to hire 10,000 youth in the summer of 2008 and for next summer, the mayor has kicked the goal up to 15,000 summer youth jobs.

## **Creating postsecondary pathways for young adults**

Jobs for the Future (JFF) analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, which tracked the educational progress of 25,000 eighth graders over the period from 1988 to 2000. The study found while 20 percent of students drop out, most dropouts are remarkably persistent in their drive to complete secondary education. Close to 60 percent of dropouts eventually do earn a high school credential—in most cases a GED certificate. Almost half of the dropouts who attain a secondary credential—44 percent—later enroll in two- or four-year colleges. Yet for all their effort, less than 10 percent earn a postsecondary degree.<sup>30</sup> “The JFF study provides compelling evidence of the willingness and desire on the part of these youth to improve their labor market and educational status. It also provides evidence that with access to alternative options for high school credentialing, a substantial proportion of these youth can achieve the academic skill level to pass the GED and reach the doorstep of postsecondary institutions.”<sup>31</sup>

Some call it a “10-year drift.” That’s the time when many young adults enter the labor force and wander through a series of low-paying jobs and bouts of unemployment, without building toward a future career. Years are lost before many of these individuals enter postsecondary education. A Washington State Board for Community and Technical College (SBCTC) research report entitled “The Socioeconomic Well-being of Washington State: Who Attends Community and Technical College” found that lower socioeconomic levels are linked to lower attendance levels. People in the lowest socioeconomic quintile delay college attendance. When they finally do arrive at college, they tend to be older adults with low skills. This means they are less likely to be prepared for college and are more likely to have additional priorities to deal with while in college, including families and jobs.

An important first step in increasing transitions to postsecondary education for dropouts is to make college matriculation a central goal of youth employment, alternative education, and adult education. Each program’s mission involves

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<sup>30</sup> Cheryl Almuida, Cassius Johnson, Adria Steinberg, Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts, Jobs For the Future, April 2006

<sup>31</sup> Linda Harris and Evelyn Ganzglass, Creating Postsecondary Pathways To Good Jobs for Young High School Dropouts: the Possibilities and the Challenges, Center for American Progress, October 2008

outreach to high-risk youth and putting them back on a positive track.<sup>32</sup> [emphasis added]

In 2003, the Ford Foundation established the five-year *Bridges to Opportunity* Initiative to promote state policies that strengthen the capacity of community colleges to work with other partners to improve educational and economic opportunities for low-income adults. This national initiative targets increased college access and success for low-income students who are trying to drive from Point A: low-income jobs, to Point B: higher income careers.

Washington's community and technical colleges, though SBCTC, is participating in the *Bridges to Opportunity* Initiative along with Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico and Ohio. An example of a Bridges to Opportunity program is the Community College of Denver's *College Connection* model that "provides an intensive eight-week summer remediation for GED graduates (aged 18-24) who are planning to enroll in fall college classes and who test into developmental math, reading, or English. Keys to the success of this course are that the career exploration component links college work to a specific career goal; the course is taught by college developmental education faculty who understand what knowledge and competencies students must master and how they will be measured; the instructors are sensitive to the instructional and social characteristics of the student; and benefits are immediate to students such as exempting them for classes that they 'hated' in high school and GET preparation."<sup>33</sup>

In Washington, the Ford Foundation's *Bridges to Opportunities* Initiative was a springboard to expand upon Washington's community and technical colleges' I-BEST demonstration. Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) pairs English as a second language (ESL)/adult basic education (ABE) instructors and professional-technical instructors in the classroom to concurrently provide students with literacy education and workforce skills. This makes it possible to tailor remediation in credit-bearing occupational classes. Studies indicate that adult learners acquire basic education skills most effectively when they are learning them in a practical context, rather than trying to acquire vocabulary or math skills in isolation.

I-BEST projects are showing success. Not only did they expand access to college vocational training for ESL students, participants were many times more likely to complete workforce training and earn college credits than were traditional ESL students studying the same amount of time. Based on these results, all of the state's 34 community and technical colleges have established I-BEST programs (now totaling 117 programs).

According to a SBCTC study ("Increasing Student Achievement for Basic Skills Students") in 2006-07, Adult Basic Education student participation in college-level programs has jumped 33 percent system-wide. A portion of I-BEST program credits must be college-level and count toward the next level certificate or degree in the academic pathway. To ensure that the students can achieve these ambitious objectives, the program also provides support services, which include a contact person for every student. This individual follows up regularly and helps with the navigation necessary to obtain external resources that may be needed to stabilize the student's environment.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Linda Harris and Evelyn Ganzglass, [Creating Postsecondary Pathways To Good Jobs for Young High School Dropouts: the Possibilities and the Challenges](#), Center for American Progress, October 2008

<sup>34</sup> SBCTC Literacy Assistance Center, [Literacy Update: Education + Work Skills = Jobs](#), October 2008, Vol. 18

Governor’s WIA Statewide Activities Grants were awarded in 2008, to Workforce Development Council/college partnerships in the Benton-Franklin, Seattle-King County, and Olympic workforce development areas to advance I-BEST learner supports for 16 to 24 year old out-of-school youth. These career pathways demonstrations will study the impact on student success when I-BEST is complemented with case management, financial aid advising, wrap-around support services, job placement, and post-instruction follow-up services.

## **Seattle Vocational Institute’s Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Trades**

Pre-apprenticeship programs provide a bridge to registered apprenticeships for those who are not otherwise prepared to meet entry requirements. Guided by its industry-based advisory board, Seattle Vocational Institute’s Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Trades (SVI-PACT) is a model that ensures the appropriateness of training and the readiness of graduates to succeed as apprentices. Program recruitment focuses on low-income minorities and women. The vast majority of the students are high school dropouts, many of whom have criminal histories, some with gang involvement. Yet, SVI-PACT is ushering these students away from their pasts and into well-paying construction jobs. SVI-PACT is a six-month commitment in construction and life skills. SVI-PACT strives for an environment of trust and respect combined with high standards that mirror the construction industry. Key to its success is the relationship built between the training staff and the student. Trades math is emphasized. Students are helped to overcome barriers such as the lack of a driver’s license or a high school diploma or GED. There are two sessions a year with an annual capacity of 30 to 45 students. Here are the current enrollment demographics:

Young Adults age 18-24	43 percent
Gender:	Male – 86 percent; Female – 14 percent
Race:	85 percent minority: African American – 59%; Hispanic – 9%; Asian/Pacific Islander – 14%; Caucasian – 15%; Other – 1%
Immigrant	36 percent
Past Incarceration	29 percent

Since 2003, SVI-PACT has had a 90 percent graduation rate, with more than 85 percent of graduates entered into apprenticeships. The retention rate of students who become apprentices is 60 percent compared to the national aggregated average of 50 percent. A number of the trades have mentors, including former SVI graduates, who are helping the newest apprentices to stay the course.

The SVI-PACT program was featured in the July 27, 2008 Seattle-Post Intelligencer. The following is a quote from this newspaper article about program participant John Collins:

At 19, he had spent almost as much time incarcerated for drug, weapons, and robbery offenses as he had in school. With virtually no prospects and little inclination to change, he ambled into the brightly lit building on Jackson Street on the suggestions of a friend. “I pretty much had noting to lose,” said Collins, now

23. “It was off to SVI and try to get a career , or go back to the streets.” Now 23, and a laborer with the commercial construction firm Lease Crutcher Lewis, he is on track to buy and home – or build one himself.

## **Success elements among model programs that help young adults succeed**

The following list are success elements found in common among the Center for Employment and Training (CET in San Jose), YouthBuild, Washington Service Corps/Americorps, YouthSource Renton, Youth Opportunity Grants, and the WIA Title I-B Youth Programs:

- Youth service providers hire highly experienced staff with an extensive knowledge and connection to the local business community. They establish an excellent reputation among employers. They work carefully with partner agencies to foster collaboration so that packaged services are comprehensive.
- Effective programs connect with external providers of basic supports such as housing, and counseling for mental health, youth offender, and substance abuse issues.
- Incentives such as paid work experience and computer literacy classes help youth stay engaged in skill building activities and avoid risk-taking behavior.
- Basic remedial education instruction is offered in a practical context by integrating ABE/ESL with occupational skills training. Innovative solutions are found for the youth so that they can enroll in effective alternative education programs (online, on-site, or through a strong community partner) with pathways to postsecondary education and employment always in mind.
- Young adults have at least one caring adult who is committed to their long-term labor market success. They feel safe in coming to a trusted environment that builds social networks and acts as a mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other’s success toward career progression.
- Young adults receive ample opportunities for leadership development through community service projects that encourage responsibility, positive behaviors, teamwork, management, communication, and civic empowerment.
- Program supports continue after young adults leave a program. Several of the model programs featured in this paper offer post-program follow-up services and career mobility assistance to help youth to continue to develop as they change jobs and make several attempts at further education.

## **Recommendations**

*High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington’s Strategic Plan for Workforce Development* was adopted by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board on September 25, 2008. To meet our state’s workforce development goals for youth, adults, and industry, this strategic plan provides a series of “Steps to Get Us There.” As workforce development partners in Washington implement the following *High Skills, High Wages* actions steps, we will be aiding the progress of disconnected young adults who are 18 to 24 years old:

- Provide opportunities for all youth to connect to the workplace, including mentorships, job shadows, and internships.
- Create summer youth employment programs.

- Connect disadvantaged youth to AmeriCorps and Washington Service Corps opportunities.
- Develop a system to provide post-employment services to adults to improve work retention and career advancement.
- Develop I-BEST opportunities specifically for older youth. Expand the number of Adult Basic Education programs that integrate occupational skills training through the I-BEST model.
- Develop better links between Adult Basic Education, English-as-a-Second Language, job preparation and college-level courses.
- Expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities for youth.
- Enhance professional development and provide credentials for career coaching, mentoring, and instruction of life skills and employability skills for WorkSource staff, training institutions, community-based organizations, employers and others.
- Enhance employment and training options for targeted populations (people of color, people with disabilities, and women), ex-offenders, and veterans.
- Provide more financial aid and support services to enable students to enroll in and complete at least one year of postsecondary training and receive a credential, including: 1) expanding the Opportunity Grant program and include support services; and 2) provide the first five credits of postsecondary training free for workforce students who earn less than the median family income.
- Create easy to navigate postsecondary education and training and career websites, including information on financial aid and support services.
- Ensure the Building Bridges Grant programs includes a strong component for reengaging youth 21 years of age and under to reconnect with education to obtain a high school diploma.\*
- Identify and make recommendation to reduce the fiscal, legal and regulatory barriers that prevent coordination of program resources across agencies and community-based organizations to support the development of sustainable dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval partnerships.

\*OSPI implemented the Building Bridges Dropout Prevention and Retrieval Program supported by a \$5 million Legislative appropriation in 2007

### **Additional Recommendation**

- The state should create a supplemental program for disconnected youth given that Washington's WIA Youth Program has a positive return on investment yet reaches only 3 percent of disconnected youth in Washington. The supplemental program should be based on youth developmental principles (Levitan Youth Policy Network Principles). If state leaders consider additional investments during these hard economic times or in the future, a state disconnected youth program would be worthy of their consideration.