

Reconnecting Youth

A framing document for the October 17, 2003 convenings on 'A Nation At-Risk'

Situation analysis

Disconnected youth are young people who have left high school, lack credentials and are unemployed or essentially unemployable without interventions such as job training and placement. For the purpose of our discussion, we define them as jobless, out-of-school 16- to 24-year-olds. They represent both a loss of human potential and a drain on public resources, studies show. Where do these young people go?

While the problem has reached crisis proportions, with many disconnected youth on the street engaging in high-risk behavior, a growing body of research and several tested best practices demonstrate appropriate interventions lead to improved education, social, and jobs skills to reconnect these youth. (See table)

Overview of 16- to 24-year-olds and disconnected status¹

	<i>United States</i>		<i>Illinois</i>		<i>Metro Chicago</i>		<i>Chicago City</i>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	34,987,262	100.00%	1,556,564	100.00%	1,014,764	100.00%	396,654	100.00%
Out of school	15,491,128	44.30%	693,598	44.60%	475,009	46.80%	204,706	51.60%
Dropouts	4,791,991	13.70%	210,193	13.50%	154,443	15.20%	78,944	19.90%
Jobless	15,686,797	44.80%	674,728	43.30%	454,272	44.80%	207,997	52.40%
Unemployed	2,941,783	13.50%	138,848	13.80%	90,735	14.10%	48,457	20.50%
Out of school and jobless	5,036,635	14.40%	223,785	14.40%	158,885	15.70%	87,832	22.10%

Reconnecting the disconnected

The primary focus of current research and practice is on creating 'alternatives,' broadly defined as routes beyond traditional public schools to the skills, socialization, and credentials these disconnected youth require. From community-public school collaborations such as Milwaukee Partnership Program to the federal Jobs Corps program, these programs reach some 200,000 young people nationally—to serve a national population of more than 5 million jobless and out-of-school young people.

Unlike traditional dropout prevention efforts these are programs that young people actively seeking to become reconnected choose to join. Although the numbers served by such programs are currently small, many feel they can be scaled up. Key stakeholders are ready to adopt the concept of a 'continuum of care' approach—i.e., a complete range of programs and services offered in conjunction with each other—complemented by the kinds of 'wraparound' social services whose success with this population is proven. This document explores the need for and existing capacity in Chicago to create such a continuum of care, and concludes by outlining some possible next steps.

Social dependency and demographics: a need for greater resources

The negative outcomes for jobless, out-of-school youth are relatively well understood. Bluntly put, dropouts earn less, are more likely to be on public assistance and have health problems, and are more prone to incarceration. Dropouts are about three times as likely as high school completers who do not go on to college to be welfare recipients, according to a 2002 GAO study.²

Some 80 percent of male inmates are high-school dropouts in Illinois prisons, where costs range from a low of \$16,000 to a high of almost \$60,000 per inmate depending on the facility and level of security. Indirect costs are high as well. A recent study in the *Journal of Preventive Medicine* estimated hospitals billed or paid more than \$802 million for firearm-related injuries in 1997; more than half the charges were associated with assault-related cases, at an average cost of nearly \$24,000 per incident.³

Lost revenues and social costs

While the cost of additional services these youth require over their lifetimes is in the billions, the economic loss in terms of income-generation and tax benefits is far higher. The Chicago Panel on School Policy in 1985 calculated that the 12,000 dropouts in the class of 1982 cost \$1.8 billion in lost earnings and \$451 million in lost taxes, welfare costs, and the losses and costs of crime—in other words, each dollar spent to reduce the number of dropouts could save \$12 in future costs.⁴ In today's dollars, each Chicago high-school dropout represents a lifetime loss in income not generated and resultant loss of tax revenue of \$327,670.⁵

In a study done for the city of Los Angeles, sociologist J.M. Catterall estimated a year's cohort of dropouts from the city school system cost \$3.2 billion in lost earnings and more than \$400 million in lost taxes, welfare costs, and the losses and costs of crime.⁶ A cost-benefit analysis of Texas public schools found that from 1985 to 1998, more than 1.2 million students dropped out, costing the state \$319 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenues and increased criminal justice, welfare, unemployment and job training.⁷

Surge in disconnected youth

The nation's 34.4 million 16-to-24-year-olds in 2001 will grow to nearly 39 million by 2010.⁸ Nearly 60 percent of growth will be among Black and Hispanic families, groups that experience higher dropout rates (Hispanics, in particular, drop out at high rates, even adjusting for the number of immigrants reported in the U.S. who never attend high school here). The total number of 16- to 24-year-old out-of-school and jobless youth increased 2000-2002 by 11 percent, from 4.9 million to 5.4 million. Underlining the growing numbers of disconnected youth, a study of 2001 data found 97,000 jobless and out-of-school youth in Chicago, compared to just 87,000 such young people reported based on 2000 Census data, slightly higher than the national rate of increase.

Second chances: successful interventions for jobless, out-of-school youth

Lack of systemic educational reform and job training

High-school dropouts have been a concern of educators and policymakers at least since the 1960s, but significant educational reforms have tended to affect this population indirectly. The last major legislation targeting dropouts, the Youth Act of 1980, would have funded programs for disconnected youth at \$1 billion a year, but failed to pass Congress. The authors of the landmark study *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* predicted in 1990 that without a massive overhaul of our educational system, including the creation of community-based learning

centers, a wide swath of young people would find themselves out of the labor pool to the detriment of employers.⁹ That prediction has come true, although its impact has been eased by an unforeseen wave of immigration to the U.S.

Beyond traditional settings: second-chance educational methods

This is not to say that the picture on education issues remained static. The trends of the past decade have included emphasis on achievement and a move toward school choice. Emphasizing achievement through policies such as retention has tended to drive up the number of dropouts. Meanwhile proliferation of options for students, such as charter schools, has gained at least some acceptance of the premise that public dollars can follow students to settings beyond the traditional public school. This has created a potentially favorable climate for what’s known as “second-chance education”—methods to reconnect jobless and out-of-school youth.

Programs that reconnect jobless and out-of-school youth through diploma and General Equivalency Degree (GED) offer a familiar curriculum but exist in unique settings and employ a set of distinctive methods and program components. (See diagram)

Second-chance education components and curricula

Program components

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recruitment, assessment, admission process</i> • <i>Support through involved teachers and small class size</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Program goals individualized for each student</i> • <i>Self paced, experiential and other learning methods</i> • <i>Overall size 100 to 200</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Local administration and governance</i> • <i>Relevant curriculum materials (e.g, culturally sensitive)</i> • <i>Comprehensive program engaging youth 35+ hours/week and year-round</i> |
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Curriculum: reconnecting jobless and out-of-school youth skill set

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| <p>Educational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading at 10th grade level</i> • <i>Math at 10th grade level</i> • <i>Composition</i> • <i>Critical thinking and verbal communication</i> • <i>U.S. history/government and other subject knowledge</i> | <p>Work-related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Job placement</i> • <i>Training</i> • <i>Internships</i> • <i>Resume builders and interview practice</i> | <p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Regular attendance</i> • <i>Ability to work cooperatively with others</i> • <i>Greater self-understanding and self-confidence</i> • <i>Punctuality, following through on tasks, following instructions</i> |
|--|---|---|

Like public schools, these programs are located in communities. Second-chance programs differ in that they function as stand-alone agencies or operate within social-services, community-based, or institutional settings such as correctional facilities. These programs vary widely in approach; some go under the rubric of “learning centers” rather than schools. They have both benefited from and influenced the belief that small schools are the most effective educational settings. Local control, flexibility to create culturally sensitive curricula and individualized educational plans for students, and intensive faculty and administrator development are keys to the success of second-chance programs, as are a 35-to-40 hour work-week schedule and year-round attendance.¹⁰

The value of these aspects was recognized in February 2003, when a consortium of funders led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a \$31 million initiative to create a nationwide network of 168 alternative schools expected to get 36,000 young people off the street.

Techniques for reconnecting jobless and out-of-school youth

Unfortunately, the most recent data on effective methods for reconnecting jobless and out-of-school youth mixes findings from dropout prevention for students still in school but classified as at-risk with findings for dropouts who have chosen to return to some form of second-chance program. However, a mid-1990s federal study of a School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program found that in both prevention and second-chance education, techniques included counseling and support services; attendance monitoring; challenging curricula; accelerated learning strategies; culturally sensitive parental outreach; enhanced links between middle schools and high schools; and career-awareness activities.¹¹ In 2002 the first national study of public alternative schools found that 55 percent provided some form of social services.¹²

Need for more research

More research is needed on second-chance programs' outcomes. One indicator comes from a January 2003 independent audit of Chicago's Youth Connections Charter School, YCCS, the parent of 24 local alternative high schools, which found the graduation rate for both GED and high school participants to be 68 percent. Exclusive of GED graduates, the rate was 57 percent. The YCCS reports that 66 percent of its graduates go on to a job, the military or further education. Other programs across the country offer similar figures.

Based on the existing research, programs can serve a maximum of 350 students (but much smaller schools are likely) and can be evaluated based on: students' attendance, skill gains, credits earned, and graduations (or GED attainment for certain programs), and transitions to work, college, or some other form of training. While more needs to be done to examine existing programs, it is clear that a growing number of programs are graduating students who dropped out of the public high schools, giving them a second chance at success in the workplace and society at large.

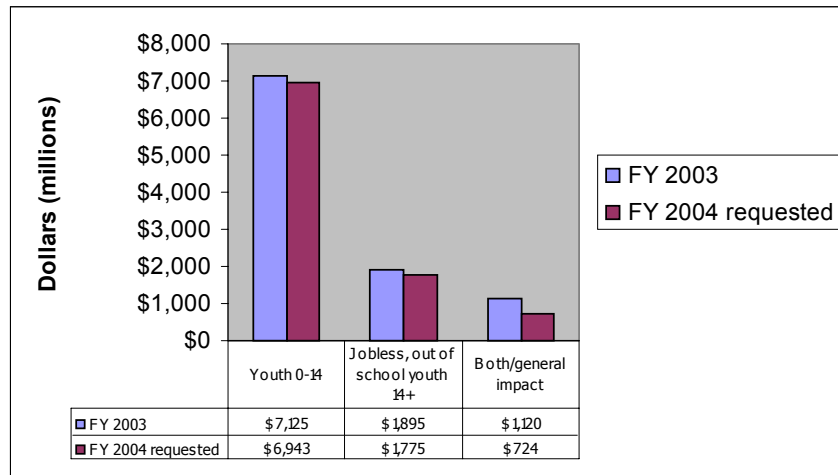
The funding picture: limited funds continue to shrink

Lack of coherent youth policy and funding

A recent report summed up our nation's policy on jobless and out-of-school youth this way: "The United States does not have a coherent youth policy to prevent at-risk youth from becoming disconnected and to help disconnected youth become productive members of society. Instead we have a patchwork of fragmented and often poorly funded programs at the federal level that do not have common objectives or accountability measures. Nor do state and local areas typically have comprehensive youth policies."¹³

From 1985 to 2003, inflation-adjusted federal spending for programs targeting at-risk youth dropped 63 percent. While some \$275 billion is routed by the federal government to traditional schools, a much smaller amount of money targets disadvantaged youth. Relatively little of these funds go to 16- to 24-year-olds. The lion's share is dedicated to young children, in part thanks to the documented success of programs like Head Start in preventing a range of undesirable outcomes for children. (See table)

Federal funds for selected programs impacting educational attainment*



Funding for programs that target youth 0 to 14 may seem plentiful only when placed side-by-side with meager support for programs that target jobless, out-of-school youth. Their effectiveness points the way toward a continuum of care concept that includes jobless and out-of-school youth. Successful interventions at the ‘front end’—in the 0-5 age range with Head Start, for example—already exist.

It makes sense to invest more public resources in older children. Such investment will not only protect these successful interventions and insure that taxpayers’ investment in them is recouped, but also operates to the benefit of those now in the system that did not experience early interventions. These programs are subject to review by a White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth whose final report is due out in October 2003.

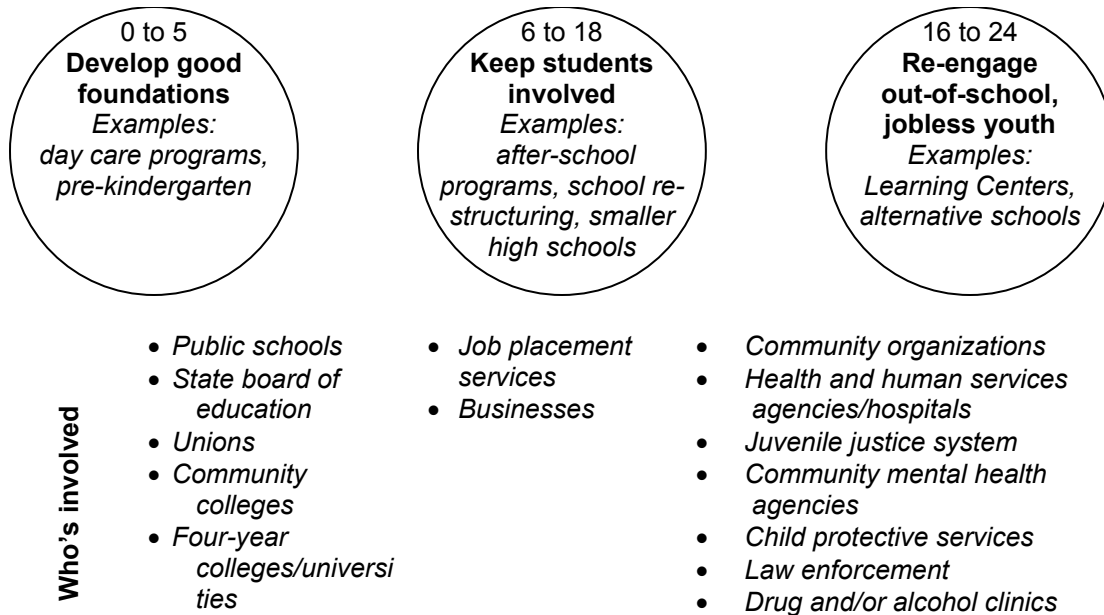
A continuum of care for dropouts: what it looks like

The education community can learn from the coordinated approach recently undertaken by government, service providers, advocates and others in the homeless community: a continuum of care. Such an approach to reconnecting youth is attractive for a number of reasons, not least because of two significant parallels between otherwise different issues. First, the populations served (the homeless and high-school dropouts) are diffuse groups—anyone can drop out or become homeless, and the numbers of both groups in society are similarly difficult to track. Second, and perhaps most importantly, both groups of service providers are increasingly recognizing their clients’ need for ‘wraparound’ social services—a holistic approach to individuals that evaluates and provides for a person’s needs on a case-by-case basis.

Such a continuum can operate chronologically, through a student’s educational development, while at the same time matching resources to differing students’ needs. (See diagram)

* ‘Youth 0-14’ programs include Head Start and other early interventions. ‘Jobless out-of-school programs’ include Workforce Investment Act youth programs and adult learning (including GED) programs.

Continuum of care model for reconnecting youth



What defines a “crisis” is a moment of need and a moment of opportunity. On the issue of jobless and out-of-school youth, both are present. While the problem is understood and successful approaches are available, practically speaking it will require a joint effort on the part of all stakeholders to impact the lives of these young people. The lessons of the past and present show that bringing together federal, state, and local government, policymakers, and other key stakeholders including youth themselves is necessary for success to be achieved.

Next steps: some suggestions

- ***Statewide task force:*** Develop a gubernatorial/mayoral appointed task force to examine current and future challenges facing our communities in regard to jobless and out-of-school youth, and create a set of potential legislative and funding sources to expand programming based on a continuum of care model. Potential legislation from the Taskforce could include:
 - ***Legislation to build incentives:*** A bill that builds strong incentives through the state’s average daily attendance funding formula for school districts to re-enroll current dropouts into smaller community-based schools and learning centers and for other incentives for community colleges.
 - ***State law reforms:*** Reforms to state law to allow for a criminal and juvenile diversion program for non-violent offenders who are high school dropouts; this type of legislative program may work in conjunction with the recently developed Redeploy Illinois program out of the Juvenile Justice System (Redeploy Illinois based on House Bill 2545 incents and enables counties to build a continuum of care for youth in the juvenile justice system by allowing the county to receive payment from the state, based on the equivalent cost of housing youth in the Department of Corrections. The county may then use these funds to place youth in community-based settings in the juvenile justice system).

- ***Alternative learning environments:*** Expand locally based alternative schools and community learning centers in conjunction with programs such as Redeploy Illinois (the Youth Connections Charter School is an example of a successful program reaching high school dropouts).
- ***Creation of state summer youth employment program:*** Develop a Summer Youth Employment Program through the use of State Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, TANF, funding. This program would target communities with the highest level of youth joblessness. New York State has established a Summer Youth Employment Program with \$25 million of TANF funding. There are probably other sources of state funding that could be allocated to a Summer Youth Employment Program.
- ***Resurrection of federal summer youth employment program:*** Push to re-develop a federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program. For the first time since 1964, there is no federal commitment for a stand-alone Summer Youth Employment Program. Such a program is critical to the community security of local neighborhoods.
- ***'YouthCount' data bank:*** Follow the model of the Annie E. Casey Fund's "KidsCount" database tracking trends and outcomes for children's programs to create a 'YouthCount' that tracks and reports vital statistics regarding disconnected, jobless and out-of-school youth needs to be established. Other imperative research includes an up-to-date economic impact study of the direct and indirect costs and benefits of reconnecting disconnected youth (An example of valuable data a YouthCount could tabulate and publicize includes joblessness and dropout status of 20- to 24-year-olds by race and sex; the Census Bureau collects such data but currently does not release it publicly).

ENDNOTES

This document was researched and written by the Alternative Schools Network.

¹ Center for Labor Market Studies "Youth Labor Market and Education Indicators for the State of Illinois," Northeastern University, Boston, October 2003.

² *School Dropouts: Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies*, Report 02-240, Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office, 2002.

³ Dr. Jeffrey H. Cohen and Dr. Claudia Steiner, "Hospitalization for Firearm-Related Injuries in the United States, 1997," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 24, Number 1, 2003.

⁴ G. Alfred Hess, Jr., "Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools: an Analysis of the Classes of 1982-1983-1984," Chicago: Chicago Panel on Public School Finances [now the Chicago Panel on School Policy], 1985.

⁵ This figure is based on Hess's data and adjusted for inflation to 2003 dollars.

⁶ J.M. Catterall, "On the Social Costs of Dropping out of School," Stanford: Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, 1985.

⁷ Josie Danini Supik and Roy L. Johnson, *Missing: Texas's Youth*, San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association, 1999.

⁸ Andy Sum, et al, *Left Behind in the Labor Market*, Chicago: Alternative Schools Network, 2003.

⁹ National Center on Education and the Economy. *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* Rochester, New York, 1990.

¹⁰ Gary C. Wehlage, *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support*, New York: Falmer Press, 1989. Also see Mary Anne Raywid, "Current Literature on Small Schools" (EDO-RC-98-8) ERIC Digest, January 1999.

¹¹ Mark Dynarski and Philip Gleason, *How Can We Help? Lessons from Federal Drop-Out Prevention Programs*. Princeton: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 1999.

¹² Brian Kleiner, Rebecca Porch, and Elizabeth Farris, *Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Educational Failure: 2000-01* (NCES 2002-004) Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002.

¹³ Jodie Levin-Epstein and Mark H. Greenberg, eds., *Leave No Youth Behind: Opportunities for Congress to Reach Disconnected Youth*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003.