

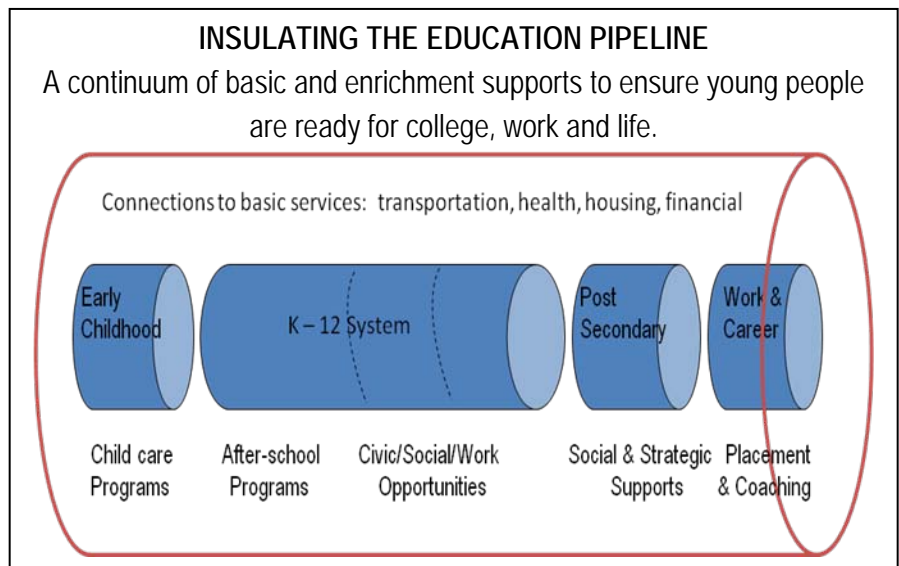
INSULATING THE EDUCATION PIPELINE

The path to adulthood is rapidly changing for youth across the United States. Few young people follow the traditional sequence of high school graduation, postsecondary education, employment, marriage and family by age 25.¹ In the last 50 years, the process of moving into adulthood has become longer, more complex and less orderly, increasing the need for appropriate support structures. Despite this changing reality, conversations about student success still focus largely on reducing the dropout crisis and improving schools. Schools fill only a small portion of the developmental space. Focusing on these issues alone will not ensure that all young people are ready for college, work and life. In order to achieve these goals, a broad range of stakeholders must assume responsibility for student success.

There are a number of very good reasons for tightening the joints in the education pipeline (the links between pre-K and elementary, between middle school and high school, etc.), and reducing the corrosion inside the pipe to increase the flow of students (e.g. increasing the number of 9th graders who graduate in four years). However, if we want to ensure young people are truly ready when they reach the end of the pipeline, we must do more than fix the leaks and increase the flow. We must insulate the pipeline.

The first layer of insulation is the family, supported by a range of formal and informal organizations. This should include community based organizations that connect youth and families to critical supports and resources and broker between systems, as well as employers who provide students with opportunities to apply their learning, pursue their interests and build social capital. A second layer of insulation should ensure that

young people have access to quality basic services that will allow them to successfully make their way through the pipeline itself—health care, transportation, housing, and financial supports. Furthermore, it is vital that these supports, services and opportunities are in place from birth through adulthood.



¹ MacArthur Network on the Transition to Adulthood.

Finally if all young people are to make a successful transition to adulthood, supports cannot end when students leave high school, either as graduates or dropouts. Ensuring student success requires broadening our thinking – beyond school, beyond the school day, beyond academics and beyond the age of 18. Given the dramatic changes in the labor and wage market in the United States, it also requires thinking beyond high school graduation and even beyond college readiness as end goals.

BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS: THE CASE FOR POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

Completion of some postsecondary credential is an increasingly critical milestone along the pathway to a successful adulthood. Occupation projection data show that more than half of the jobs that will be created between 2006 and 2016 will require a postsecondary credential.² A post-secondary degree or credential allows young people to secure employment in a changing labor market. It also increases their earning capacity, provides an opportunity to develop and hone skills employers' value in the workforce, and ensures better life outcomes.

- *Young people with post-secondary education have a distinct advantage over their less-educated peers in the workforce.* The income premium for adults with any post secondary education was \$9,000 to \$25,000. In 2006 the average high school graduate earned \$30,072, while associates degree holders earned \$39,846 and those with bachelor's degrees earned \$56,897. People with some postsecondary credential are also more likely to have access to other forms of compensation such as health insurance and retirement benefits.³
- *Higher education leads to better life outcomes.* It is a critical pathway for breaking out of poverty and influences every facet of a person's life. Higher levels of education correlate with better health outcomes and higher rates of civic engagement, from voting to volunteering. Family educational attainment levels drive children's futures more than race, health and family assets. Children of educated parents tend to pursue higher levels of education, be healthier, be better prepared for school and engage in extracurricular activities.⁴
- *Young people themselves, irrespective of race or class, view higher education as essential to career advancement and economic security.* A Public Agenda survey that measured high school students' hopes and aspirations revealed that 8 in 10 young people believed that a college degree increased societal standing and 9 in 10 young adults thought a college degree was crucial for career

² Soares, L., & Mazzeo, C. (2008). *College-Ready Students, Student-Ready Colleges: An Agenda for Improving Degree Completion in Postsecondary Education*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2009). *Postsecondary Success*. Seattle, WA: Author.

advancement. Furthermore, young people are putting beliefs into action, with 75 percent of high school graduates pursuing some form of post secondary education within two years of graduation.⁵

UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

If college completion is the goal, how well are we doing? High school and colleges are losing too many students before graduation. While nationally about 70 percent of students graduate from high school on time and with a regular diploma, less than 20 percent of college students complete a degree or credential on time.⁶ Too few young people who graduate from high school are well-equipped for college or work, and too few of those who want to attend college get the support they need to complete their studies.

- **Young people do not feel prepared to pursue higher education or enter the workforce.** According to a recent survey by Achieve, Inc., 39 percent of public high school graduates surveyed feel they do not have adequate mastery of skills and abilities expected by employers and/or higher education institutions. Whether in college or in the workforce, 86 percent feel they have some gaps in crucial skill areas. 35 percent of college students and 39 percent of students in the workforce believe they have large gaps in preparation in at least one crucial skill area.⁷
- **Higher education institutions feel young people are not prepared when they enter.** The Achieve Inc. poll also revealed college instructors believe that 42 percent of their students are not adequately prepared. Furthermore, 70 percent of instructors estimate spending some class time reviewing high school materials and skills and 24 percent of instructors reported spending significant class time on these skills.⁸ Nationally, 42 percent of community college freshman and 20 percent of four year college freshman take at least one remedial class.⁹
- **Employers feel young people are not prepared when they enter the workforce.** Employers believe 39 percent of high school graduates are not prepared for their current job and 45 percent are unprepared for advancement.¹⁰ According to Corporate Voices for Working Families, the top five skill categories identified by employers were professionalism/work ethic, teamwork/collaboration, oral communication, ethics/social responsibility, and reading comprehension. Employers reported only 4 in

⁵ Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2005). *Life After High School: Young People Talk about Their Hopes and Prospects*. New York, NY: Public Agenda.

⁶ The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. *Student Pipeline—Transition and Completion Rates from 9th Grade to College* [Data File]. Retrieved from <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=119&year=2006&level=nation&mode=data&state=0>

⁷ Achieve, Inc. & Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies. (2005). *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College & Work?* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/node/548>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006). *Paying Double: Inadequate high schools and community college remediation*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹⁰ Achieve, Inc. & Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies. (2005).

10 high school graduates were proficient in these areas.¹¹ Employers also rated two and four year college graduates deficient in several applied skills, particularly leadership skills. Employers also reported that 46.4 percent of two-year college graduates and 26.2 percent of four-year college graduates were deficient in writing and communications.¹²

- **High school dropout rates are rising in most states.** The Educational Testing Service reports that dropout rates are rising in all but seven states and that a higher percentage of students are dropping out between ninth and tenth grades as opposed to later grades.¹³
- **College failure rates are too high.** Although the number of students attending college has increased, completion rates remain low. The national average for college completion is 19 percent, which includes 29 percent of students that complete an associate's degree in three years and 56 percent that graduate with a bachelor's degree in six years.¹⁴ Low-income and minority students fare worse. While 35 percent of white students earn a bachelor's, only 19 percent of African American and 11 percent of Latino students earn a B.A. or higher. In addition, 75 percent of young people from high socio-economic families are likely to earn a bachelors degree, while by age 24 only 9 percent of their low-income peers do so.¹⁵

THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS IN INSULATING THE PIPELINE

While college completion is a critically important goal, ensuring student success requires looking beyond credentials for clear signs that young adults are competent, connected and contributing. Youth organizations and intermediaries can play a key role in supporting young people in their journey through the educational pipeline. As the first layer of insulation, community-based youth organizations can provide specific supports and resources, and play the critical role of brokering between systems and supports. Based in the community, such organizations can mobilize local solutions and connect young people to local resources. They can provide opportunities for youth to have voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Many of these organizations already play these roles, formally and informally, and therefore bring a wealth of knowledge and capacity that can be mobilized in support of young people.

¹¹ Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Conference Board, Partnership, & et. al. (2006). *Are They Really Ready to Work: Employer's Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*. Washington, DC: Corporate Voices for Working Families.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Barton, Paul. (2005). *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*. Princeton, NJ: Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Services.

¹⁴ The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. *Student Pipeline—Transition and Completion Rates from 9th Grade to College* [Data File]

¹⁵ Haycock, Kati. (2009). *College Access and Success: Can We Do More?* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Product+Catalog/presentations-archive-Jul09.htm>

- Positive, meaningful relationships are critical to the success of young people. A 2002 study by Gambone and Connell demonstrated that young people who enter high school with strong relationships and have strong relationships with adults throughout their high school years are five times more likely to be doing well when they graduate. Doing well included graduating but also having good grades, and college or career plans. These same students were also four times more likely to be doing well as adults.¹⁶ A recent Public Agenda poll further confirmed this finding. According to the poll 67 percent of young adults that had a parent, teacher or coach who took an interest, inspired, motivated and encouraged them to aim for college enrolled in post secondary education. Community organizations are poised to be an advocate or champion to young people but also to foster positive and meaningful relationships.¹⁷
- In addition to fostering positive relationships with caring adults, youth programs and organizations are unique developmental contexts where young people can develop important skills and interests and be exposed to a range of positive experiences, people and institutions. Research by Reed Larson suggests that young people exhibit unusually high levels of motivation and initiative when participating in voluntary youth organizations.¹⁸ Evaluations of a wide range of summer and after-school youth programs have demonstrated they can positively impact a range of important outcomes in the academic, social, and psychological domains.¹⁹
- Youth organizations are an important untapped resource in ensuring young people receive the supports they need. In addition to providing direct services, youth organizations and intermediaries have the potential to play a range of brokering roles that link young people, systems, organizations and services together. There are many promising examples, including organizations like the Youth Development Institute and YouthBuild USA that broker between CBOs and community colleges, between individual young people and higher education institutions, and across community-based services.

While their value is clear, what is unclear is how many such organizations are currently ready to step more intentionally into these roles. Some may be well positioned to expand the number of adolescents and young adults they serve, or to focus more intentionally on how they can support postsecondary completion, but many will need additional capacity and support themselves in order to fully embrace these roles.

¹⁶ Gambone, M.A., Klem, A.M. & Connell, J.P. (2002). *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development*. Philadelphia: Youth Development Strategies, Inc., and Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

¹⁷ Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2005).

¹⁸ Larson, R. (2000). Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development. *American Psychologist*. 55(1), 170-183.

¹⁹ Durlak, J. & Weissberg, R. (2007). *The Impact of Afterschool Programs That Promote Personal and Social Skills*. Charlottesville, VA: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

POLICIES THAT HELP INSULATE THE PIPELINE

Over the past few years, states have dedicated significant time and effort to improving academic rigor, preparation and completion. While some progress has occurred at the elementary and middle school levels, achievement at the secondary and post secondary levels remains flat.²⁰ Policy makers have opportunities to implement several approaches that can help ensure young people move through the pipeline and receive the appropriate insulation supports they require (for more detail, see brief/appendix).

- Alignment of secondary and post secondary education is critical to ensuring that young people move through the entire pipeline. Lack of alignment causes many young people, particularly low-income and minority students, to slip through the cracks. A first step is to align high school standards with college entrance requirements. Another is to use coordinated assessments that support young people in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Finally, exposing students to college level work by expanding opportunities for dual enrollment (e.g. Tech Prep) is another alignment opportunity.²¹
- Increase systemic support for community colleges. Community colleges have played an important role in expanding access to postsecondary education for many young people, particularly low-income and minority students. However, extremely low completion rates at community colleges suggest the need for restructuring of practices at these institutions. Policy makers can support improvement by increasing support for proven and innovative practices that provide student centered social and academic supports for students.
- Support collaboration and communication among colleges, state agencies, and across states. According to results of the Achieving the Dream initiative, learning communities across the above entities fostered innovation, created a stronger voice in state policy planning, and resource allocation to support promising practices and scaling up efforts.²²
- Expanding financial aid opportunities. College costs continue to skyrocket while financial aid remains stagnant. A cornerstone of financial aid, the federal Pell Grant covers roughly 35 percent of the cost of college. At the same time, federal, state and institutional aid has increasingly shifted from need-based to merit-based funding making college unaffordable for some populations of young people.²³ For students that need remedial coursework, cost becomes a barrier that can lead to dropping out. According to a Public Agenda survey, 53 percent of young people believe that lack of funds is a major barrier for many qualified people from pursuing a postsecondary education.²⁴

²⁰ Achieve, Inc. & Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies. (2005).

²¹ The Education Resources Institute, Inc. & Pathways to College Network. (2007). *Pathways to College. Aligning P-12 and Postsecondary Education: Toward a Seamless P-16 Education System*. Boston, MA: Author.

²² Achieving the Dream Partners. (2009). *Lessons from Achieving the Dream for Federal Efforts to Improve College Completion Rates*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

²³ Haycock, K. (2009).

²⁴ Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2005).

- Fragmented data systems waste resources and let young people fall through the cracks. There is an enormous amount of data available about what happens in school including courses, attendance, performance and promotions. As federal opportunities have expanded, many states and localities are developing parallel data systems. A comprehensive data system would allow education, child welfare, early childhood, juvenile justice, workforce development, health and other systems to better track and understand how well youth are doing across systems. An integrated system with information on the entire pipeline, including the insulation, will ensure attention is paid to the full range of goals we have for young people including academic, vocational, social/emotional, civic/cultural and physical.

CONCLUSION: PARTNERSHIPS AND LEADERSHIP ARE KEY

Student success will not improve at scale until the pipeline is fixed and insulated. Yet many of the strategies that are being developed and implemented will remain ineffective and contribute to fragmentation if implemented in isolation. The pipeline cannot be effectively insulated unless efforts are coordinated and collectively, we are able to assess that they add up to what is needed. Therefore, changing the way leaders think and go about their work is key to success. Changing the way leaders think will change the way they do business – individually but also together. Leaders must be willing to ask bigger questions that lead to better data, bolder strategies and broader partnerships. Leaders who are committed to improving child and youth outcomes need to be challenged to:

- Believe they have the capacity to do more by working together and that changes in youth outcomes, at scale, are possible;
- Develop strong partnerships and coordinating structures to ensure that their specific interests and initiatives add up to a coherent whole;
- Ensure that they have the capacity to do ongoing (versus one-shot) planning, decision-making and priority setting;
- Collect and connect data on the status of youth outcomes, community supports and leaders efforts so that they can ask more complex questions and get more precise answers.

The economic costs of not fixing and insulating the leaky pipeline are significant. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the United States loses 3.7 billion dollars a year as a result of poorly prepared students. This includes \$1.4 billion dollars in remedial education for high school graduates and an estimated \$2.3 billion loss due to college drop-outs and reduced earning potential.²⁵

²⁵ Alliance for Excellent Education. (2006).

READY BY 21, CREDENTIALLED BY 26: POLICY APPROACHES FOR SUPPORTING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SUCCESS

A postsecondary degree or credential is an increasingly critical milestone along the pathway to a successful adulthood. Occupational projection data and wage data show that young people with vocational certificates or two and four year degrees have a distinct advantage over their less-educated peers in the workforce. In 2006, adults with any postsecondary education earned between \$9,000 and \$25,000 more than their peers with a high school diploma.²⁶ Furthermore, adults who complete a postsecondary credential are more likely to have access to other forms of compensation such as health insurance and retirement benefits. Postsecondary completion is also increasingly important to accessing the workforce. More than half the jobs that will be created between 2006 and 2016 will require a postsecondary credential.²⁷ Employers consistently cite that high school diplomas alone do not adequately prepare young people for the 21st century workforce.²⁸

Young people are responding to this changing reality by attending postsecondary institutions at unprecedented levels:

- A 2001 Public Agenda survey indicated that 78 percent of high school students “are definitely planning to go to college” after graduation.²⁹ Young people are putting these aspirations into practice
- 75 percent of high school graduates enter some form of postsecondary institution within two years of high school graduation.

Unfortunately the increase in access has not translated to an increase in completion:³⁰

- The national average for college completion is 19 percent, which includes the 29 percent of students that complete an associate's degree in three years and 56 percent of students that graduate with a bachelor's degree in six years.³¹
- Race and income matter for college completion rates, as only 9 percent of low-income students complete a degree compared with 75 percent of high-income students. Only 19 percent of African American students and 11 percent of Latino youth complete a postsecondary degree.³²

²⁶ Soares, L., & Mazzeo, C. (2008). *College-Ready Students, Student-Ready Colleges: An Agenda for Improving Degree Completion in Postsecondary Education*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Conference Board, Partnership, & et. al. (2006). *Are They Really Ready to Work: Employer's Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*. Washington, DC: Corporate Voices for Working Families.

²⁹ Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2005). *Life After High School: Young People Talk about Their Hopes and Prospects*. New York, NY: Public Agenda.

³⁰ Haycock, K. (2009). *College Access and Success: Can We Do More?* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Product+Catalog/presentations-archive-Jul09.htm>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

As federal opportunities such as the American Graduation Initiative promise to infuse states with funds to improve their post secondary education systems to lead more students towards graduation, policy makers have a critical role to play. Policymakers have dedicated much time and effort to improving academic rigor, preparation and completion. These efforts yielded improvements for elementary and middle school students, but achievement at secondary and postsecondary levels remain flat. Policymakers need to create and strengthen supports, particularly for young people on the margins of the system, to help ensure more young people not only access but succeed in postsecondary education. Some specific policy opportunities include:

- Establishing common placement assessment standards
- Implementing reforms in the community college system (or individual institutions)
- Restructuring financial aid processes
- Utilizing federal funds to increase rigorous collaboration between colleges and state agencies
- State level intermediaries (i.e. Children's Cabinets) extending their role of brokering systems to ensure rigorous collaboration between colleges and state agencies
- Integrating data systems

INNOVATIONS IN STATE POLICY

Recognizing the importance of a skilled and educated workforce, many states have begun to implement innovative policy solutions to ensure a greater percentage of young people not only have access to but also succeed in postsecondary education. Initiatives such as the Achieving the Dream: Community College Count Initiative (ATD), seek not only to increase the rate of students that succeeding in community colleges but also embedding promising practices on campuses and ensuring sustainability by spurring public policy changes that would promote improved outcomes. Innovative policies emerging from these states range from aligning expectations, standards and assessments, improving financial aid policies to promote persistence, incentive based higher education funding formula, and building and utilizing strong data-driven accountability systems.

- **Better alignment of secondary and postsecondary education**

Many states recognize that better alignment of secondary and postsecondary education is key to better prepared students and successful transitions from one education system into another. This alignment should not only standardize benchmarks of success but also expand opportunities and pathways that young people have to connect to postsecondary education and career education.

Florida has expanded industry credentialing, which allows dual enrollment in high school and post-secondary institutions through Career Technical Education (CTE) programs. The state has also increased Career Academies, which are learning communities inside high schools that allow students to engage in a college-preparatory but career oriented curriculum. Finally, the state also developed an Interagency Agreement to ensure that all vulnerable populations of young people have meaningful career paths upon high school graduation, including access to postsecondary degrees and credentials.

Tennessee seeks not only to better align but also create multiple pathways for students. Through the American Diploma Project and the Gates Foundation funded College and Career Policy Institute, the state is aligning college entrance standards with new high school graduation requirements. The goal is to ensure high school graduates are adequately prepared to enter and succeed in college and as a result reduce the number of students enrolling in remedial courses.

- **Common placement assessment standards**

Nearly 42 percent of first year students in community colleges take remedial courses, but these courses are also a significant barrier to postsecondary education success. Developing clear, accurate and high-performance standards will not only ensure consistency among colleges but it will also reduce the number of students that need to enroll in these courses. Consistent placement standards can be utilized to align secondary and postsecondary education ensuring more students are prepared to enter college.

In 2007, the Connecticut state legislature mandated the Connecticut Community College System and Connecticut State University System to “develop specific proficiency levels for all matriculated students entering college level courses.” The colleges established committees comprised of faculty members and led by respected academic deans. While working to create common standards, the committee members realized the problem was larger than the assessment score but the real problem was lack of alignment between remedial courses and gatekeeper courses, which are major specific required introductory courses. [Special Act 07-7 (Connecticut 2007)]

- **Reforming the community college system (or individual institutions)**

Although community colleges have played a key role in increasing access to higher education, these institutions are struggling just as much as the underprepared students they educate. Policymakers can support innovative practices that integrate academic and social supports as well as implement better learning and teaching delivery practices. Promising practices such as partnerships between community based organizations, developing learning communities, and innovation in the delivery of developmental education to adults should receive funds to conduct evaluations and develop scaling up plans. Supporting systemic improvement should include accountability. Policymakers can ensure improvement and accountability by shifting to a performance based budgeting structure.

Washington State’s Gateway to College Program is a dual credit program operating within a community college or a charter school located on a community college. The program serves young people 16 to 20 years old and helps them earn a high school diploma while progressing toward a college degree or certificate. At the beginning of the program, students learn in a small community of peers designed to increase their academic and personal skills which prepares them to have a successful transition to taking college courses with the general population. During the first term, participants take academic courses and college skills courses to practice the skills and habits needed to succeed in postsecondary education. The program offers wrap-around supports including mentors, coaches, and one-on-one advising and support ranging from transportation and study habit issues to course selection and financial aid. Classes are offered during the day and evening to accommodate schedules of working and parenting students. Furthermore, by locating the program on a college

campus they feel fully integrated into the college setting and feel they are being treated as adults and respond more positively.

Washington and New Mexico successfully revised state funding for colleges to include performance incentives. Washington State secured \$4 million dollars (biennium) of legislative funding to reward institutions that get students through “momentum points” that predict successful outcomes. Since 2007, New Mexico began to award college and universities performance funding increases for freshman retention rates and increases in graduation among Hispanic and Native American students.

- **Restructuring financial aid policies**

Working while attending college is the norm. Of the 11 million young people in college, 58 percent are in the workforce. For those students in community colleges, they are more likely to work full time and attend school part-time.³³ However, current financial aid systems are skewed away from need based aid and benefit traditional students. Pell Grants, a cornerstone of low-income students’ financial aid package, only covers 35 percent of the cost of college. Policy makers can redesign state aid programs to shift funding towards need based aid and expand aid programs to include students that are enrolled less than half time, include indirect educational costs such as books, living expenses, and transportation, and extend aid to students enrolled in non-degree programs.

Washington State recently passed legislation revising the minimum eligibility requirements to qualify for State Need Grants. The bill reduced the number of credits to less than half-time enrollment (three credits per quarter as opposed to six credits). Furthermore, it also allowed for students to receive State Need Grants for up to one year, even if a student is not matriculated in a degree or certificate program. [HB1179 (Washington, 2007)]

New Mexico and Virginia increased the availability of need based financial aid. Virginia established a Transfer Scholarship program and secured partial funding from the state legislature. The scholarships would lock in community college tuition rates for the students transferring to four year institutions. New Mexico secured 49 million dollars in need-based aid and as a result was able to expand benefits to the state tribal college system.

- **Rigorous collaboration between college and state agencies**

State coordinating bodies, such as Children’s Cabinets, are uniquely situated to tackle the issue of postsecondary completion. As entities that routinely bring stakeholders together to coordinate policies and efforts, coordinating bodies can help ensure policies enable state agencies, colleges and nonprofits to collaborate, coordinate services and align policies to support young people as they travel through the education pipeline. Coordinating structures can be leveraged to secure federal funding through initiatives such as the American Graduation Initiative, and utilize their collaborative structure to identify innovative strategies and effectively allocate resources. Increased college and state agency collaboration, which created structures for sharing innovation and utilizing lessons learned for resource allocation, was a powerful success of the Achieving the Dream initiative.

³³ McIntosh, M. & Rouse, C. (2009). *The Other College: Retention and Completion Rates Among Two-Year College Students*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is a coordinating body for public universities, colleges and technology centers in the state. The charge of the commission was to develop a master plan for public higher education. As a result, the state was able to implement a plan that expanded promising practices and policies, such as aligning high school curriculum standards with college entrance exams, restructuring higher education funding formula to not only impact access but also reward completion, and implement promising policies that emerged from the Making Opportunity Affordable initiative. Currently, Florida, through the state's Children's Cabinet, is working to establish an Interagency Agreement which articulates goals and responsibilities for the 11 departments and agencies involved. In addition to coordinating and aligning services and policies, the agreement would mandate that young people have clear pathways to access post-secondary education as well as support services for employment and training.

- **Integrate data systems to ensure better educational outcomes**

Young people need a range of supports as they travel through the education pipeline. Not surprisingly, education systems alone cannot provide the adequate insulation necessary to guarantee educational success. As federal opportunities have expanded, many states and localities are developing parallel data systems in each of those systems that are involved in a young person's life. Integration of data would allow education, child welfare, early childhood, juvenile justice, workforce development, health and other systems to better track and understand how well youth are doing across systems. Furthermore, an integrated data system that provides information on the entire pipeline including the insulation will ensure that attention is paid to the full range of ways that young people grow and develop, including academic, vocational, social/emotional, civic/cultural and physical.

As part of Maine's longitudinal data system, the commissioner of education uses a single student identifier and is looking to use that identifier within her role in the Maine Governor's Children's Cabinet to link critical data across state agencies. Supporting her efforts, the Maine Legislature passed LD 1356, Chapter 448, to improve the ability of the Department of Education to conduct longitudinal data studies and compile, maintain and disseminate information concerning the educational histories, placement, employment and other measures of success of participants in state educational programs through the use of Social Security numbers. These steps lay the foundation for linking data across agencies that include postsecondary institutions, workforce, health and human services, corrections, and the finance authority.³⁴ [LD1356 (Maine)]

FEDERAL OPPORTUNITIES³⁵

Recognizing the importance of postsecondary degrees and credentials, the current administration has made an unprecedented commitment to promoting college access and completion and improving community colleges so that they are better prepared to meet the demands of students and the workforce.

- **Race to the Top.** This 4 billion dollar funding stream targets investment in school reform. The money will be divided into two phases. Among the targets of reform will be funds to build integrated data systems.

³⁴ This is an excerpt from a brief written by the Forum for Youth Investment and the Data Quality Campaign, "Linking Data Across Agencies: States that Are Making It Work."

³⁵ This section is adapted from Amy Ellen Duke Benfield's Presentation at the Ready by 21, Credentialed by 26 Meeting in August 2009.

- **American Graduation Initiative.** This new initiative will infuse 9 billion dollars into the nation's community college system with express goal of having an additional 5 million students graduate from community college by 2020 (degrees and credentials). The money will be divided into two funding streams, the Community College Challenge fund and College Access and Completion fund. One major focus of the entire initiative is to increase postsecondary education degrees and certificates, particularly among underrepresented groups.
- **Community College Fund.** These funds will be jointly administered by the Departments of Education and Labor and will be divided into two grant programs, Community College Reform Grants and Grants to State for Community College Programs. During 2010-2013, funds will target community college reform. A second wave of funding, from 2014-2019, will consist of grants to states to support community college programs. Community College Reform grants are intended to spur innovative policies and practices or demonstrate effectiveness of existing programs to increase the number of students that obtain a degree or certificate, including providing student support services. Resources will be allocated on a competitive basis and the minimum grant level is \$750,000 over four years. The State Grants program is a six-year grant awarded directly to states to implement policies and practices that will lead to systemic reform and improvement of community colleges. The programs must demonstrate effectiveness based on evaluation criteria specified in the guidelines. At least 90 percent of funds must be allocated for community colleges.
- **College Access and Completion Fund.** This fund will focus on promoting innovative practices and policies by colleges, states, and nonprofits to increase completion rates and entrance into the workforce upon completion. It will focus on increasing the number of degrees and credentials among underrepresented groups in particular. According to current allocations, the fund will receive \$600 million dollars each year for four years, beginning in 2010. States are eligible to apply for both State Innovation Completion Grants and College Access Challenge Grants. The State Innovation Completion Grant is a matching grant to states to promote student persistence and completion in postsecondary institutions. College Access Challenge Grants will be awarded to partnerships between federal, state, local governments and philanthropic organizations. This will also require matching funds and will focus on improving policies and practices that support postsecondary education completion.

Policymakers are an integral part of ensuring that young people have access to and succeed in postsecondary education. They can ensure policies enable state agencies, colleges and nonprofits are able to collaborate, coordinate services and align policies to support young people as they travel through the education pipeline. Furthermore, they can also expand opportunities for young people to attain postsecondary degrees or credentials by removing bureaucratic barriers to expand multiple pathways into the higher education system and allow them to succeed in their educational pursuits.

INSULATING THE EDUCATION PIPELINE: HOW YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS CAN SUPPORT POST SECONDARY SUCCESS

Completion of some post secondary credential is an increasingly critical milestone on the pathway to a successful adulthood. Young adults with vocational certificates or two and four year degrees have a distinct advantage over their less-educated peers. In 2006 the average high school graduate earned \$30,072, while associate degree holders earned \$39,846 and people with a bachelor's degree earned \$56,897.³⁶ Adults with postsecondary credentials are also more likely to have access to other forms of compensation such as health insurance and retirement benefits. Occupation projection data demonstrates that postsecondary attainment is also increasingly important in terms of workforce access. More than half the jobs that will be created between 2006 and 2016 will require a postsecondary credential.³⁷

Despite the importance of higher education, many young people are not prepared to succeed in postsecondary institutions. Many high schools and colleges lose students before graduation. Nationally only 70 percent of young people graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma and only 20 percent of college students complete a degree or credential on time.³⁸ Though 75 percent of high school graduates enroll in some form of postsecondary education within two years of high school graduation,³⁹ the national average for overall college completion is 19 percent.⁴⁰ This includes the 29 percent of students that complete an associate's degree in three years and 56 percent of students that graduate with a bachelor's degree in six years.⁴¹

Disaggregating data by race and class provides a more nuanced picture. Only 19 percent of African American students and 11 percent of Latino students earn a college degree.⁴² The data on college completion by socio-economic background paints an even bleaker picture. While 75 percent of students from high income families complete a college degree, only 9 percent from low-income families do.⁴³ For students that are struggling or have dropped out of school, the path to a postsecondary degree is even more elusive.

Many students, despite their backgrounds, struggle with similar risk factors, barriers, and needs in their pursuit of postsecondary educational success. The vast majority of students face academic barriers including a lack of academic preparation and limited skills for doing things like managing their time, building relationships with instructors and navigating complicated college bureaucracies. Young people, particularly low-income and minority students, also struggle with financial barriers that go beyond the obvious cost of college attendance, such as transportation and child care. Many students also struggle with personal challenges like lack of confidence, limited social capital and little

³⁶ Soares, L., & Mazzeo, C. (2008). *College-Ready Students, Student-Ready Colleges: An Agenda for Improving Degree Completion in Postsecondary Education*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. *Student Pipeline—Transition and Completion Rates from 9th Grade to College* [Data File]. Retrieved from

<http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=119&year=2006&level=nation&mode=data&state=0>

³⁹ Haycock, K. (2009). *College Access and Success: Can We Do More?* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Product+Catalog/presentations-archive-Jul09.htm>

⁴⁰ The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. *Student Pipeline—Transition and Completion Rates from 9th Grade to College* [Data File].

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Haycock, K. (2009).

⁴³ Ibid.

exposure to college going culture. As a result, they often are unable to access important services such as counseling, academic guidance, tutoring and learning labs, and independent living resources.⁴⁴

Education systems alone simply cannot provide the comprehensive supports necessary to address all of these challenges and ensure postsecondary success. The education pipeline needs to be insulated with a broad range of supports and services from early childhood through young adulthood to ensure that all young people, especially those who are disadvantaged, develop academic skills, are ready for the workforce, and make a successful transition to adulthood.

Youth organizations, both direct service providers and intermediaries, are a crucial part of the support network that must be mobilized to insulate the education pipeline and ensure academic success for all students. They are often uniquely positioned to mobilize community-based solutions and connect young people to critical resources. When support networks are comprehensive and connected, barriers can be anticipated and addressed. Because young people entering postsecondary institutions are at different stages of engagement and preparation, community based organizations can ensure that supports and services are designed to meet young people where they are and incrementally move them towards their goals.

In this brief we share two promising examples where youth development organizations are actively involved in efforts to increase postsecondary completion.

Youth Development Institute: Brokering between CBOs and community colleges

In 2004 the Youth Development Institute (YDI), an intermediary organization in New York City, developed a partnership with Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (Cypress Hills) and the New York City College of Technology (City Tech) of CUNY. The goal was to develop a model that supported college access and success for youth that were over-age but under-credited, dropped out of school or returned for a GED or diploma. The strategy was to jointly select, enroll and support a cohort of students through the first two years of college.

The majority of students recruited to participate graduated from high school or obtained a GED but were not necessarily ready for college level coursework. For many community college students across the nation, remedial courses are a big obstacle to completion. Recognizing this barrier, the partnership devised a placement exam preparation program. While City Tech offered to enroll qualified students in the University Summer Immersion Program (USIP), Cypress Hills designed a preparatory program at the organization. As a result, many students were able to test out of remedial classes and the others entered at higher levels.

Each student was assigned a counselor at Cypress Hills and at City Tech. Counselors were crucial in guiding young people through the complex financial aid process during the summer and continued to troubleshoot throughout the semester. Many students were overwhelmed in their first semester, in part because they had to take remedial classes which did not link to their major in a meaningful way. Although counselors were able to provide informal academic advising, City Tech recognized they needed to increase the quantity and quality of academic advising and make clear links between remedial courses and later academic and career success. Beyond academic and emotional support, financial literacy coaching was critical in order for students to manage living expenses, transportation and other education

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related expenses (e.g. books). When financial issues did arise, the partnership was able to mobilize their extended service and support networks to meet the needs.

The most important lesson that emerged from the partnership was the importance of integrating academic and social supports. The role of YDI was to be an informed broker and to facilitate that integration. Both the college and the community organization were reaching beyond their traditional roles. YDI brought staff from both organizations together for weekly meetings where collectively, they reviewed each student's circumstances and progress. These conversations allowed each institution to identify areas of success and potential obstacles, and to draw upon each other's resources in order to deploy the most appropriate support.

As a result of the collaboration, students in this cohort had significantly higher retention rates compared with comparable City Tech students. The students in the program also earned more credits on average than their non-cohort peers. In subsequent cohorts as the support delivery system became smoother, the program sought further improvement in academic outcomes and retention rates.

YouthBuild: Brokering between individual youth and higher education institutions

In YouthBuild programs nationwide, low-income youth ages 16-24 who have dropped out or been pushed out of high school, work toward GEDs or high school diplomas while learning marketable job skills building or refurbishing affordable housing for homeless and low-income people. Emphasizing leadership development and community service along with basic education and work related skill development, YouthBuild programs and schools create a positive peer group and develop new young leaders who transcend poverty by being prepared for post secondary and career success.

YouthBuild programs operate at the intersections of multiple systems – K-12 education, higher education, workforce development, criminal and juvenile justice, and foster care. With approximately 40% of YouthBuild's student population being court involved, programs provide a wide spectrum of comprehensive supports ranging from housing, transportation, financial help, mental health and counseling, child care, and advocacy with the CJ/JJ system in order to achieve post secondary and career access and success. As part of a national pilot, YouthBuild USA received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to work with seven local YouthBuild programs to strengthen postsecondary outcomes for participating youth. As part of this work, programs are building and strengthening partnerships with local community colleges, technical colleges, apprenticeship and internship programs and employer based training opportunities to create mutual accountability for student success; deepening academic rigor and instructional practice to help better prepare young people for college level work; and providing intensive supports for young people throughout their postsecondary experience.

The intensive supports are based on the premise that young people need an ongoing support system and advocate as they take on post secondary education challenges. Services include financial incentives and supports in the form of AmeriCorps Education awards, Individual Development Accounts and scholarships and grants; child care, housing and transportation subsidies; consistent and early exposure to post secondary settings and systems; support with tutoring and mentoring; and overall skill building related to study skills, time management, skill acceleration through summer bridge programs and extended learning time; and effective goal setting.