



# OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PLAYBOOK:

A GUIDE TO RECONNECTING BOYS AND YOUNG MEN  
OF COLOR TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

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# ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH NETWORK

The Opportunity Youth Network brings together national nonprofits, businesses, philanthropy, and government—along with young leaders—to align efforts to achieve the collective goal of reengaging one million young people who are disconnected from education and employment pathways to success. This population is often referred to as “opportunity youth.” The Forum for Youth Investment manages the Opportunity Youth Network in partnership with the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions and Gap, Inc .

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” dedicated to helping communities and the nation ensure all young people are ready by 21—for college, work, and life. [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org).

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# GUIDE TO THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook highlights promising practices, strategies, and resources to help My Brother's Keeper communities support boys and young men of color who are 16 to 24 years old and are neither in school nor employed. Such young people—commonly referred to as “opportunity youth” or “disconnected youth”—have distinct talents and needs, and require dedicated strategies beyond those targeted to boys and young men of color more generally.

## PLAYBOOK SECTIONS

The playbook is organized by the six critical milestones enshrined by the White House's My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge. Additionally, this playbook includes a section that outlines Strategies and Resources that Span the Milestones.

### SECTION A: STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES



### SECTION B: PREVENTING INTERGENERATIONAL DISCONNECTION BY ENSURING BOYS OF COLOR ENTER SCHOOL READY TO LEARN AND READ AT GRADE LEVEL BY THE THIRD GRADE



#### Milestone 1: Entering School Ready to Learn

All children should have a healthy start and enter school ready – cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally.



#### Milestone 2: Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade

All children should be reading at grade level by age 8 – the age at which reading to learn becomes essential.

### SECTION C: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL READY FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER



#### Milestone 3: Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career

Every American child should have the option to attend postsecondary education and receive the education and training needed for quality jobs of today and tomorrow.

### SECTION D: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR COMPLETE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING



#### Milestone 4: Completing Postsecondary Education or Training

All Americans should receive the education and training needed for quality jobs of today and tomorrow.

### SECTION E: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR SUCCESSFULLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE



#### Milestone 5: Successfully Entering the Workforce

Anyone who wants a job should be able to get one that allows them to support themselves and their families.

## SECTION F: REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROVIDING A SECOND CHANCE FOR DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR



### Milestone 6: Reducing Violence and Providing a Second Chance

All children should be safe from violent crime. And individuals who are confined should receive the education, training and treatment they need for a second chance.

## ► TYPES OF CONTENT CONTAINED IN THE PLAYBOOK

Within each section, you will find:

**Overview** // An introduction to the topic and relevant research.

**Strategies for Action** // Concrete steps to help boys and young men of color reconnect to education and employment pathways. Includes detailed hyperlinks to allow you to learn more about each type of action.



**Field Favorites** // Excerpts from some of the most influential publications in the field.



**Spotlights** // Leading examples of places that are already implementing one or more strategies for action effectively.



**Voices** // Quotes from young people sharing their lived experience.

## ► ACRONYMS USED IN THE PLAYBOOK

**BMOC** // boys and men of color

**BYMOC** // boys and young men of color

## ► KEY TERMS CONTAINED IN THE PLAYBOOK

### Disconnected Youth or Opportunity Youth

“Disconnected youth” was popularized by Douglas Besharov<sup>1</sup> and others around the turn of the century, as a more accurate and less pejorative term than “idle youth.” “Opportunity youth” was first widely used by John Bridgeland in 2012 as a more positive and optimistic way to refer to these young people, since they “represent enormous untapped potential for our society.”<sup>2</sup>

In general, we prefer the term opportunity youth. At times, however, when using the term opportunity youth leads to an awkward sentence structure, we may use disconnected youth instead. Throughout this playbook we use the terms “disconnected youth” and “opportunity youth” interchangeably.

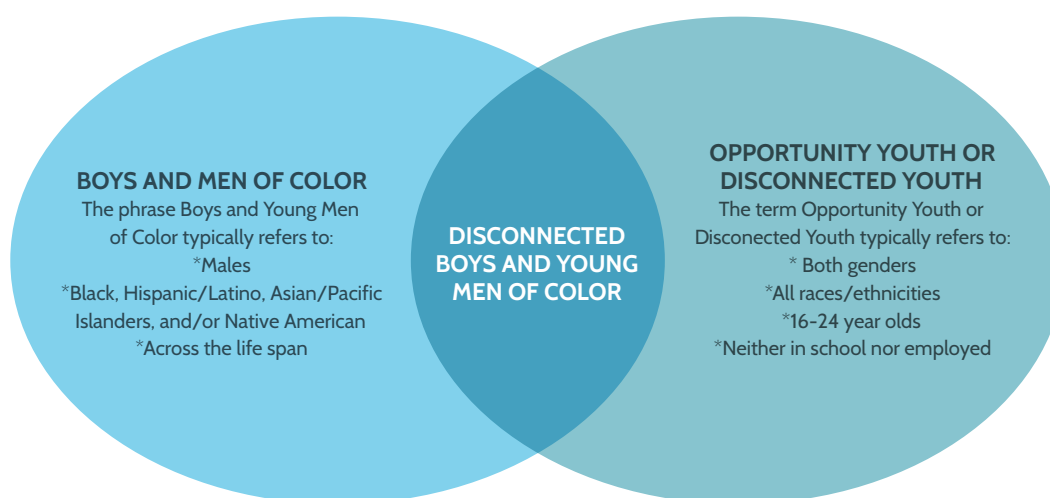
For simplicity, we generally define and measure this population in the manner employed by Measure of America. Their methodology defines this population as “people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working.” Young people in this age range who are working, who attend school part-time, or who are in the military are not considered to be disconnected. Youth who are actively looking for work are considered to be disconnected. Not being in school means that a young person has not attended any educational institution and has not been home-schooled at any time in the three months before the survey date. Not working means that a young person is either unemployed or not in the labor force at the time they responded to the survey.”<sup>3</sup> When we use these terms in this playbook, we are generally not referring to high school and college graduates living with affluent parents, even though they are not filtered out using Measure of America’s methodology.

### Disconnected Boys and Young Men of Color

Disconnected boys and young men of color are defined as the intersection of two populations: opportunity youth and boys and young men of color:

- Males
- Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and/or Native American
- 16-24 years old
- Neither in school nor employed

Since saying “opportunity youth boys and young men of color” is awkward, in this report we often use the phrase “disconnected boys and young men of color” instead.



### THE PLAYBOOK COMPANION

Because no single document can do justice to the full range of extraordinary organizations and publications in the field, we created the online Playbook Companion which provides additional links to key organizations and resources. You can access both the playbook and the Playbook Companion at [forumfyi.org/OYN\\_MBK\\_Toolkit](https://forumfyi.org/OYN_MBK_Toolkit).

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Besharov, D. (1999). "America's Disconnected Youth: Toward a Preventive Strategy." Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, Inc.
2. Bridgeland, J., and Milano, J. (2012). "Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth." Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.
3. Lewis, K., and Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). "Zeroing in on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities." New York: Measure of America.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

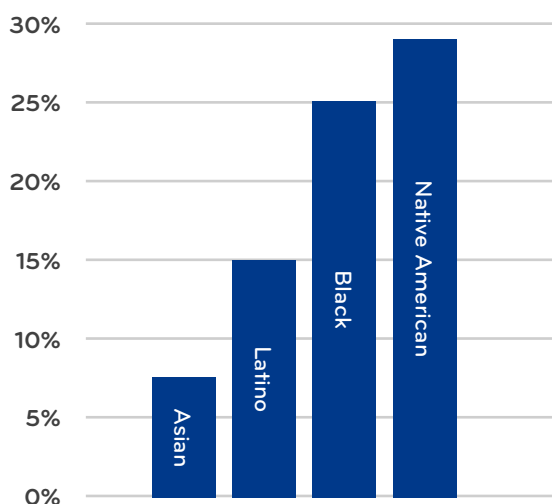
# OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PLAYBOOK: A GUIDE TO RECONNECTING BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

This playbook highlights promising practices, strategies, and resources to help communities support 16- to 24-year-old boys and young men of color who are neither in school nor employed. Such young people—commonly referred to as “opportunity youth” or “disconnected youth”—have distinct talents and needs, and require dedicated strategies beyond those targeted at boys and young men of color more generally. There are more than 1.5 million disconnected young men of color in the United States.<sup>1</sup> While overall rates of disconnection are likely to go down as the country continues to recover from the economic recession, history suggests that this population may never fully recover.<sup>2</sup>

Research has found that young men of color are disproportionately likely to be disconnected from school and work. The disparities are driven by the interplay of gender, race, and inequities among the communities in which they grow up. Boys and young men of color are resilient, but as leaders we have to do more than hope that they “make it” despite the adversities they are up against.

Accordingly, the Opportunity Youth Network developed this playbook to help communities take action to reconnect disconnected boys and young men of color. The playbook begins with a set of cross-cutting strategies. It is organized by the six critical milestones enshrined by the White House’s My Brother’s Keeper Community Challenge: entering school ready to learn; reading at grade level by third grade; graduating from high school ready for college and career; completing postsecondary education or training; successfully entering the workforce; and reducing violence and providing a second chance. Each section includes an overview, strategies for taking action, and links to key organizations and resources.

RATES OF DISCONNECTION AMONG YOUNG MEN OF COLOR



*Data Source: Lewis, K., and Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). Zeroing in on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities. New York City: Measure of America.*



## SECTION A: STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

Some of the most effective strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color span across the milestones established by My Brother's Keeper. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting in place integrated approaches can be a particularly effective place to start.



### STRATEGIES FOR ACTION



- Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.
- Use a racial- and gender-equity lens and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of your work.
- Gather data on your community's disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to accomplish your goals.
- Ensure there is a mechanism in place to align governmental efforts to aid disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilots site.
- Learn from networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.



## SECTION B: PREVENTING INTERGENERATIONAL DISCONNECTION BY ENSURING BOYS OF COLOR ENTER SCHOOL READY TO LEARN AND READ AT GRADE LEVEL BY THE THIRD GRADE



Nearly one-quarter of disconnected youth are parents of young children. If you include non-custodial parents, that number is even higher.<sup>3</sup> Research and practice reinforces common sense: the success of disconnected youth and that of their children are inextricably linked. However, programs and services are often created and structured in a way that focuses primarily on either the parent or the child.

A “two-generation” approach is needed to help disconnected fathers and their children simultaneously, ensuring families as a whole have the tools they need to thrive and to break free from intergenerational cycles of poverty. Not only do these approaches provide the necessary interventions for young fathers, but they also help prevent their children from becoming disconnected later in life. Quality early education is critical to laying the groundwork for future success. Not reading at grade level by the third grade is a significant indicator—more so than poverty alone—that a young person will drop out of high school.<sup>4</sup> By the fourth grade, white boys are two times more likely than Hispanic boys and three times more likely than black boys to read at grade level.<sup>5</sup>

### STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

#### Supporting Disconnected Boys and Young Men of Color through Two-Generation Approaches

- Learn the different features that make a policy or program two-generation.
- Cultivate partnerships across agencies and sectors.
- Align and link systems, and coordinate administrative structures between entities supporting disconnected men of color and their children.
- Identify and blend or braid funding streams to serve disconnected youth and their children.
- Leverage federal programs to apply two-generation strategies, like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

#### Supporting Disconnected Fathers of Color

- Ensure academic reengagement efforts by using strategies, such as flexible scheduling hours, that support young men of color with children.
- Consider the needs of parenting students on college campuses by encouraging collaboration between postsecondary institutions and health and human service agencies to provide and improve wraparound supports and services.
- Find and connect with local Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Include support services and programming geared specifically to fathers and noncustodial parents.

### Supporting Boys of Color to Prevent Future Disconnection

- Eliminate zero-tolerance policies in early childhood education.
- Prioritize and address the needs of children with incarcerated parents.
- Design innovative and culturally competent curricula that boys of color find relatable.
- Implement small-group instruction and other pedagogies that promote active engagement.
- Minimize learning loss and maximize opportunities during the summer months.
- Employ strategies such as educational technology and media solutions.
- Become a mentor, ensure that there are quality mentor programs in the area, and incorporate mentoring as a part of education, community, and youth development programs.



## SECTION C: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL READY FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

A high-school diploma or credential is an essential step on a young person's path to gainful employment and a successful future. However, in today's economy such a credential no longer guarantees a family-sustaining wage. Compared to those who do not graduate from high school, however, the auxiliary benefits are undeniable. These include better overall health, a longer life expectancy, a lower chance of involvement with the juvenile justice system, and a greater propensity to vote and volunteer.<sup>6</sup>

Young people disconnect from high school for a variety of reasons, some of which are in their control. Surveys show that disconnected youth take accountability for their decisions: over 75 percent believe they are personally responsible for getting a good education and job.<sup>7</sup> Other reasons stem from things that are out of their control, such as being born in the wrong neighborhood and consequently being zoned for under-resourced schools with high dropout rates; dealing with toxic stress from severe adverse life experiences; and being subjected to harsh, ineffective school discipline policies that disproportionately remove young men of color (especially those with learning disabilities) from school, forming a "school to prison pipeline."

### STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

#### Supporting Young Men of Color to Prevent Disconnection from High School

- Ensure programs incorporate "elements of success:" rigor and academic support, nurturing relationships, college knowledge and access, relevance, youth-centered programming, and effective instruction.
- Increase dedicated staff, counselors, and mentors to promote well-being; invest in teacher and staff professional development; and implement trauma-informed approaches.
- Find out how boys and men of color are faring academically.
- Become a mentor, ensure there are quality mentoring programs in the area, and incorporate mentoring into education, community, and youth development programs.
- Improve school climate, eliminate zero-tolerance policies and adopt restorative discipline practices to help reduce the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Ensure that policies and practices promote college and career readiness for all high-school students, including young men of color with disabilities.

#### Supporting Young Men of Color Who Are in the Process of Disconnecting from High School

- Establish an accurate and timely early warning signs tracking system.
- Pinpoint students who are chronically absent from school, and address their needs through strategies such as mentorship and parent/family outreach and engagement.
- Identify, target, and design systems for overage and under-credited youth who are likely to fall off track before earning their diploma.
- Ensure curricula are culturally competent and incorporate social and emotional learning.

### Supporting Young Men of Color Who Have Disconnected from High School

- Use data to make an economic case for investing in reconnecting students who have left school.
- Conduct segmentation analyses.
- Encourage Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to partner to create multiple pathways to graduation.
- Leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 to implement a statewide reengagement system and use average daily attendance funds to reconnect disconnected youth at scale.
- Eliminate seat-time requirements and time-based graduation requirements in favor of performance-based ones.
- Utilize blended learning strategies and other forms of learning via technology.
- Expand comprehensive residential programs.
- Create or expand reengagement centers.



## SECTION D: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR COMPLETE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING

Postsecondary education and training is more critical now than ever. The job market is increasingly populated with middle- and high-skilled positions, while low-skilled jobs, which once allowed for those with just a high-school credential or less to secure a decent paycheck, are becoming harder to find. Estimates predict that jobs requiring a postsecondary credential will increase to 63 percent of the economy before 2020.<sup>8</sup> As the Center on Education and the Workforce found, “postsecondary education has become the gatekeeper to the middle class and upper class.”<sup>9</sup> Young people who are born into the bottom 20 percent of household income and go on to obtain a college degree improve their odds of getting out of the bottom bracket of income distribution by over 50 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Transitioning to and completing postsecondary education and training poses unique challenges for disconnected boys and young men of color. Many report that they did not know how to apply to college or research federal aid and scholarships to help pay for it. Other barriers include the lack of: support and resources needed to navigate education institutions and systems, necessary life and fiscal management skills, and general advisement and assistance. Another common obstacle is the requirement to complete noncredit-bearing remediation courses, which expends grants and scholarships.<sup>11</sup> Connecting these young men to postsecondary education requires multiple entry points attuned to different types of young people with different strengths and facing different obstacles.

### STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

#### Form partnerships among high schools, employers, and postsecondary institutions.

- Design pathways that provide enriched academic preparation, bridge programming, and postsecondary support geared specifically to 16- to 24-year-olds who are off-track to graduate or disconnected from education and work.
- Develop multiple on-ramps and off-ramps when students need to start or stop postsecondary education.
- Improve the quality of remedial coursework and GED programs and adopt competency-based principles instead of relying on seat-time.
- Blend education and workforce opportunities, combine delivery of services across systems, and provide professional development for staff serving disconnected young men of color.
- Dedicate staff to support men of color in navigating college and balancing personal, academic, and financial obligations.
- Support and improve dual-enrollment programs and policies.
- Adopt an “Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework” when working with young men of color in postsecondary environments.
- Learn about the efforts of higher-education institutions to promote opportunities to attend and graduate from college for young men of color.
- Promote strategies that encourage and support engagement in postsecondary programs for young men of color.
- Identify students who left college before attaining a credential but who were near completion or entitled to an associate degree or other certificates.
- Encourage corporations and businesses to support employee efforts to complete postsecondary education or training.



## SECTION E: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR SUCCESSFULLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE

The unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 is double the national average.<sup>12</sup> The numbers are even worse for young men of color who are not in school. The employment-to-population rate of 16- to 24-year-olds who do not attend school is 71.7 percent for whites, 68.7 percent for Latinos, and 46.9 percent for blacks.<sup>13</sup> In addition to depriving youth of a paycheck to help support their families, unemployment also robs them of the opportunity to accrue early work experiences that lead to higher wages later in life.<sup>14</sup>

These young people need supports that will place them on a pathway to employment and ensure their success after obtaining a job. To provide these supports, stakeholders across sectors must act in concert. Having businesses provide jobs in isolation, without the aid of partners to provide the training and postplacement support necessary to ensure long-term success, is generally insufficient. Alternatively, training and supports provided by nonprofits mean little if the young person can't get a job at the end of the program.

In the past several years, corporations have increasingly recognized the business imperative to recruit opportunity youth and young men of color as a vital part of a company's talent pipeline. As described in the My Brother's Keeper Alliance Playbook for Corporations and Businesses, businesses that support young men of color will build their brand, diversify their talent pool, and reap both recruitment and retention benefits from this recruitment. For example, graduates of This Way Ahead—the paid internship program Gap Inc. has created for low-income opportunity youth—had higher engagement scores and double the retention rate of employees who did not participate in the program.<sup>15</sup>

### STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

- Engage your business community to recognize the untapped talent represented by disconnected young men of color.
- Change employers' perceptions of opportunity youth and young men of color with atypical résumés.
- Align training programs to reflect employers' needs.
- Use an intermediary to retain and recruit opportunity youth and young men of color.
- Adopt sectorial strategies by working with a partnership, identifying small- and medium-sized businesses, and building a program based on industry-specific needs.
- Encourage local small businesses to take steps to become a part of the solution to combat youth unemployment.
- Train, hire, mentor, graduate, and revive.
- Create, preserve, and expand YouthBuild programs.
- Support and utilize national service and the Conservation Corps.
- Leverage the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and help your local Workforce Investment Board use this funding to create a system of comprehensive career pathways.
- Pass local or state budgets that include subsidized employment for disconnected youth.
- Use state workforce data in analyses and research.
- Construct and strengthen state, regional, and local career pathways systems.
- Implement or expand apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.
- Identify federal programs and resources to develop career pathways.
- Discover private funding opportunities to expand promising or scale evidence-based approaches to reengaging disconnected young men of color to employment pathways.
- Support and implement equitable transportation policies, and adopt "ban the box" and other fair-chance hiring policies.
- Utilize best practices and positive youth development approaches in employment programs.



## SECTION F: REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROVIDING A SECOND CHANCE FOR DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Not only do disconnected boys and young men of color deserve a second chance, but many never really had a first chance. Genes, environment, and experiences work in concert to impact behavior. Recent research reveals that important changes in brain function occur not only in childhood but also during the late teens and early twenties, especially in those areas affecting impulse control and forward planning.<sup>16</sup> Most young people are raised by supportive families living in safe neighborhoods, which affords them an opportunity to bounce back from the types of mistakes and “youthful indiscretions” that are a normative part of brain maturation.

However, many disconnected boys and young men of color have not been so lucky. Many have grown up in families and communities that compound rather than mitigate youthful missteps. In fact, many have already faced more challenges and traumatic experiences than a typical adult faces in their entire lifetime. Too often, these boys and young men live in communities with high levels of poverty, violence, and punitive punishment, in which the effects of mass incarceration play a dominant role.<sup>17</sup> More than 37 percent of black children and almost 32 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty compared to 12 percent of white children.<sup>18</sup> American-Indian/Alaskan-Natives are more likely than any other racial group to be incarcerated for school-related and status offenses (such as skipping school and drinking alcohol) by state courts.<sup>19</sup>

Not only do such environments contribute to disconnection, but they also make reconnection considerably more difficult. Individuals, who have returned from correctional facilities are unable to access student loans to finance an education to find gainful employment, or to receive public benefits because of their prior conviction. Disconnected boys and young men of color are also more likely than their peers to be victims of homicide and other violent crimes.<sup>20</sup> Black youth are more likely than their white counterparts to witness violence—even when controlling for household income.<sup>21</sup>

Ill-advised decisions are a normal part of adolescent development, disconnected boys and young men of color must deal with this in addition to a challenging family and community environment, as well as a series of violent and traumatic experiences. Consequently, it comes as little surprise that so many end up in homeless shelters, the foster care system, and the juvenile justice system. These systems often push young people away from rather than toward a productive adulthood.

- Boys and young men of color are disproportionately represented in the justice system and are more likely than white youths to be detained and given long sentences.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, those who are incarcerated are frequently exposed to overcrowded facilities, physical and sexual violence, and trauma.<sup>23</sup> More than 65 percent of young people involved with the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders.<sup>24</sup> Youth returning from the justice system are much more likely than their peers to be disconnected from education and employment, which leaves them at a high risk of reoffending.
- More than 22,000 young people age out of the child welfare system each year without a permanent connection to an adult or a family.<sup>25</sup> More than 67 percent of young people transitioning out of foster care identify as a racial minority.<sup>26</sup> Young people who age out of foster care are significantly less likely to be employed, to graduate from high school, or to attend or complete college. They are significantly more likely to be arrested, incarcerated, and experience periods of homelessness.<sup>27</sup>
- On any night, more than 46,000 youth can be found living on the streets throughout the United States. Every year, almost two million young people experience at least one night of homelessness.<sup>28</sup> Youth experiencing homelessness are often victims of abuse, neglect, trauma, sexual exploitation, and poverty.<sup>29</sup> Young people who have experienced homelessness are 87 percent more likely than their peers to stop going to school.<sup>30</sup>

Leaders should provide targeted interventions for specific vulnerable subpopulations of disconnected boys and young men of color. These include youths who have been involved with the juvenile justice system, who are in or have recently aged out of foster care, or who are experiencing homelessness, especially those who identify as LGBTQ.

## STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

### Reducing and Mitigating Exposure to Violence

- Tackle youth violence through cross-agency and cross-sector approaches.
- Promote community policing in neighborhoods of color and in low-income areas.
- Promote equity in discipline and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Identify evidence-informed and evidence-based programs and practices to address crime, juvenile delinquency, prevention, and child safety.
- Provide mental health supports and address exposure to toxic stress using trauma-informed care.

### Supporting Disconnected Boys and Young Men of Color in Second-Chance Systems

#### *Disconnected boys and young men of color involved in the juvenile justice system*

- Advocate for federal policy reform, including the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP Act).
- Collect and track data disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and offense, and implement plans to minimize disproportionate minority contact across different points of interaction in the justice system.
- Advocate and support reform of the status offense system and promote the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration.
- Ensure practices and policies in the juvenile justice system are developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed.
- Shift to a Balanced and Restorative Justice approach.
- Provide programming and supports to disconnected boys and young men of color in correctional facilities.
- Form cross-system collaborations and partnerships between the justice system and other agencies, including workforce, mental health, arts and culture, and colleges to meet the comprehensive needs of disconnected young men of color.
- Reduce recidivism by adopting rehabilitative models and behavioral interventions to help reconnect young men of color released from the justice system to education and employment pathways.
- Support and utilize national service and the Conservation Corps for formerly incarcerated youth and those at risk of being incarcerated.

#### *Disconnected boys and young men of color in, or recently aged out of, the foster care system*

- Prevent youth from becoming disconnected when they age out of the foster care system by leveraging youth permanence, extended foster care, and research on brain development.
- Adopt cross-system approaches to address the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care.
- Invest in the social, emotional, and physical well-being of older youth in foster care.
- Use a race and gender lens.

#### *Disconnected boys and young men of color experiencing homelessness*

- Create and implement a comprehensive community plan to end youth homelessness.
- Ensure your community is employing effective strategies to reconnect homeless boys and young men of color, including runaway and trafficked youth.
- Help homeless boys and young men of color stay in school.
- Support LGBTQ homeless youth.

## NOTES

1. Lewis, K., and Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). "Zeroing in on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities." New York: Measure of America.
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# INTRODUCTION: WHO ARE DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

**DISCONNECTED YOUTH—ALSO REFERRED TO AS OPPORTUNITY YOUTH —ARE 16- TO 24-YEAR-OLDS WHO ARE NEITHER IN SCHOOL NOR EMPLOYED. THERE ARE MORE THAN 1.5 MILLION DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN THE UNITED STATES.<sup>1</sup>**

Overall, across all races, there are 5.5 million disconnected youth in the country. Women comprise 2.6 million; men 2.9 million.<sup>2</sup> And while overall rates of disconnection are likely to go down as the country continues to recover from the economic recession, history suggests that disconnected young men of color may never fully recover.<sup>3</sup>

**YOUNG MEN OF COLOR ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LIKELY TO BE DISCONNECTED FROM SCHOOL AND WORK.**

Among 16- to 24-year-old males, 11 percent of whites are disconnected, compared with 15 percent of Latinos , 25 percent of African-Americans, and 28 percent of Native-Americans.<sup>4</sup> Researchers have found that race and the place in which young people grow up can have compounding effects on whether they will disconnect from school and work.<sup>5</sup>

RECENT DATA-BASED YOUTH DISCONNECTION REPORTS

RESEARCHER/ ORGANIZATION	DEFINITION	AGE RANGE	PRINCIPAL DATA SOURCE	NATIONAL ESTIMATE/RATE	CALCULATIONS FOR OTHER GEOGRAPHIC UNITS
MEASURE OF AMERICA THE SSRC, 2015	Not in school or work	16-24	American Community Survey, 2013	5,500,000/ 13.8%	State; state by race/ ethnicity; county; metro area; metro area by race/ ethnicity and gender; Public Use Microdata Area
BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, 2016	Not in school or work below 200% of poverty line less that associate degree, not in group quarters	16-24	American Community Survey, 2012-2014	3,000,000/7.6%	Metropolitan area by gender, race/ethnicity, nativity, and educational attainment
CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, 2015	Not in school or work at any time in the last year, not married with kids, no in group quarters	16-24	Current Population Survey, 2014	2,400,000/6.1%	National only
CLIVE BELFIELD ET AL., 2012	Not in school or work	16-24	Multiple sources: American Community Survey, 2009; Current Population Survey 2006-2010; National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997; Educational Longitudinal Survey, 2002, and ADD Health, 2007 wave 3.	6,700,000/ 17.3%	National only
ANDREW SUM ET AL., 2003	Not in school or work, not in group quarters	16-24	Current Population Survey, 1989-2001	5,200,000/ 14.6%	Metropolitan areas

Source: Lewis, K., & Burd-Sharps, S. (2016, September 26). *Young and Adrift: Measuring Youth Disconnection in American Today*. The Huffington Post. Retrieved October 03, 2016, from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kristen-lewis/young-and-adrift-measuring-youth-disconnection-in-american-today>

## THIS DISPROPORTIONALITY IS DRIVEN BY THE INTERPLAY OF GENDER, RACE, AND DISPARITIES AMONG THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR GROW UP.

For boys and young men of color—as with all young people—the environment in which they grow up shapes their mental, social, emotional, and developmental health.<sup>6</sup> The domains of family, community, systems and institutions, and society and culture act in conjunction to influence young people’s readiness for school, work, and life.<sup>7</sup> At best, these settings are welcoming, safe, and structured. They allow children and young people to (1) learn and acquire skill sets and form positive habits, attitudes, and beliefs; (2) be engaged and challenged; and (3) develop authentic, positive, and productive relationships.<sup>8</sup> But when these settings fail to foster positive environments and healthy development, they leave young people without the tools and access to opportunities they need to lead productive and successful lives. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that “disconnected young people tend to come from communities that are themselves disconnected from the mainstream by segregation and concentrated disadvantage, and young people’s struggles with education and employment mirror those of their parents and neighbors.”<sup>9</sup>

Taken together, the interplay of race, gender, and neighborhood disparities has created a vicious cycle of intergenerational disadvantage among males.<sup>10</sup> As the Urban Initiative report [“Understanding the Environmental Contexts of Boys and Young Men of Color”](#) affirms, the environments we create “can either support or constrain their development and well-being as they mature into manhood. And though most boys and young men do have the power to make their own decisions, we—as adults and as a society—are responsible for the choice sets and consequences they face.” Moreover, as Forward Change

Consulting’s report,

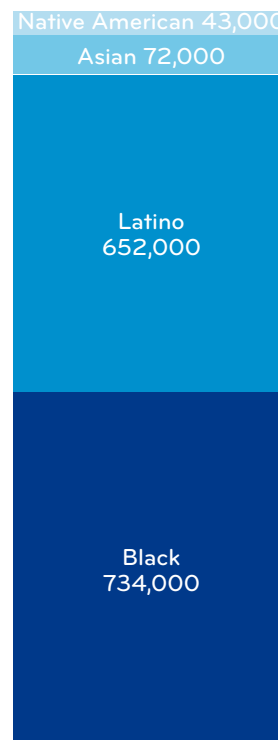
[“Life Course Framework for Improving the Lives of Boys and Men of Color”](#) demonstrates, the choice sets and consequences

that boys and young men of color face systemically stack the deck against them.<sup>11</sup> Poor policymaking and resource allocation (including the off-shoring of jobs, suburbanization of low-skilled jobs, mass incarceration, and school discipline policies) have created a decline in employment, earnings, and educational attainment, and an increase in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage among boys and men of color.<sup>12</sup>

## DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR HAVE DISTINCT TALENTS AND NEEDS, AND REQUIRE DEDICATED STRATEGIES BEYOND THOSE TARGETED AT BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR MORE GENERALLY.

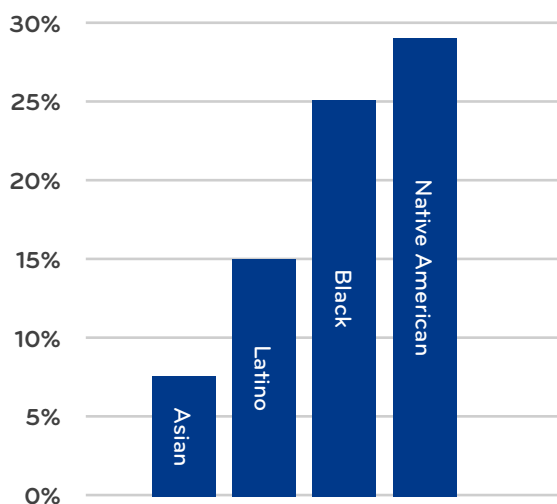
My Brother’s Keeper strives to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. MBK’s work cuts

### DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR



Data Source: Lewis, K., and Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). *Zeroing in on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America’s Cities*. New York City: Measure of America.

### RATES OF DISCONNECTION AMONG YOUNG MEN OF COLOR



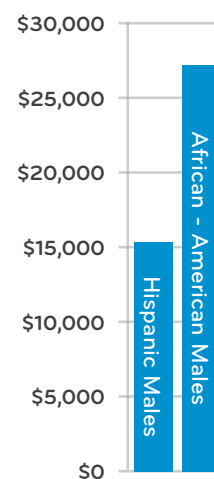
Data Source: Lewis, K., and Burd-Sharps, S. (2015). *Zeroing in on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America’s Cities*. New York City: Measure of America.

across ages and subpopulations. Many strategies, such as mentoring, are effective at helping a wide range of boys and young men of color. However, helping those who are disconnected requires a specialized strategy. Since this population is not in school, it will not benefit from education reforms. Since it is not employed, it will not benefit from labor protections, wage increases, and family-friendly policies. Different strategies are needed to find boys and young men of color (since you can't track them down at schools or workplaces), serve them (since they often have multiple overlapping needs), and interact with them (since their ages and life experiences warrant considerable respect).

## UTILIZING THE STRATEGIES IN THIS PLAYBOOK IS LESS COSTLY THAN INACTION.

Many of the strategies in this playbook could be implemented with modest resources. Others require substantial investment. However, even implementing all of the strategies at once would be less costly than inaction. Factoring in criminal justice system and corrections expenses, welfare and social service payments, taxpayer-funded health care costs, as well as lost tax revenue (which must be made up by other taxpayers), failing to reconnect disconnected youth (of any race or gender) adds an annual financial burden of \$13,890 per youth to taxpayers, and \$235,680 over the course of the disconnected youth's lifetime.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the costs to society don't end there. If you include other costs borne by citizens—such as lost gross earnings, lost productivity spillovers across the workforce, and criminal justice victim costs—the true cost is \$51,340 per year per youth and \$939,700 over the course of a lifetime.<sup>14</sup> Young adults who are not in school or working cost taxpayers nationwide about \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services. These costs are even higher for young men of color and are shouldered primarily by state and local governments.<sup>15</sup> As the following pages show, we know what works to reconnect disconnected boys and young men of color. What's more, the return on investment for implementing effective programs for opportunity youth is estimated to be at least 500 percent.<sup>16</sup>

ANNUAL COST TO TAXPAYERS  
PER DISCONNECTED YOUTH



Data Source: Belfield, C. & Levin, H. (2012). *The Economics of Investing in Opportunity Youth*. New York: City University of New York and Columbia University.

## BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR ARE RESILIENT.

Despite the barriers they face—poverty, violence, and insufficient access to education and health supports—some disconnected boys and young men of color are beating the odds each and every day. As leaders, we must do more than hope that disconnected boys and young men of color “make it” despite the adversities they are up against. We have to change the game altogether. Fortunately, there is promising work happening across the

country to do just that.

With young people at the helm, leaders at all levels are taking a hard look at systemic and institutionalized racism, violence, and bias, and are pushing for change. National attention focused on boys and young men of color and My Brother's Keeper has brought a diverse group of stakeholders into the conversation. Cradle-to-career initiatives, collective impact approaches, and place-based efforts are providing the comprehensive and holistic supports necessary to re-engage disconnected boys and young men of color and to prevent disconnection in the first place. Countless leaders across levels of government have examined their policies and programs and developed an agenda to improve the lives of these people in their communities. Businesses and philanthropic organizations have stepped up to underscore the untapped potential of disconnected youth and the economic imperative of addressing youth unemployment.

*However, there is still much to be done to improve the environments in which disconnected boys and young men of color grow to ensure they reconnect and remain engaged. Accordingly, the Opportunity Youth Network developed this toolkit to help communities take action to reconnect disconnected boys and young men of color. The toolkit begins with a set of cross-cutting strategies and approaches, and is organized by the six critical milestones enshrined by the White House's My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge: entering school ready to learn, reading at grade level by third grade, graduating from high school ready for college and career, completing postsecondary education or training, successfully entering the workforce, and reducing violence and providing a second chance. Each section includes an overview as well as strategies for taking action and provides links to resources and key organizations.*

## NOTES

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# SECTION A: STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES



# STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

Some of the most powerful strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across My Brother's Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place some of these integrated approaches can be a particularly valuable place to start.

## ► INCLUDE DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR STRATEGY.

Jason Warren, a 17-year-old participant in Youth Force in New York City, said, "If you had a problem in the black community, and you brought in a group of white people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there would probably be a public outcry. It would be the same for women's issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us." This statement is poignant and powerful but hardly new: Jason said it more than a decade ago. His words still ring true, and that needs to change.

Fortunately, the situation is changing. [Opportunity Youth United](#) has demonstrated how bringing formerly disconnected youth into leadership positions can help shape efforts to reconnect them to their peers. Community leaders should adopt the policy recommendation they developed and outlined in its report, "[Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America](#)." Young leaders should be encouraged to create an Opportunity Youth United Community Action Team in your city.

The National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color highlights three guiding principles in its [National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color](#):

1. Ensure the active participation and leadership of boys and young men of color at all levels of decision making. In other words, nothing for us without us. No one understands the plight of young people of color better than we do, because we deal with it daily. Our voices, experiences, ideas, and solutions not only need to be included in a meaningful way, they must be central to the conversation and process.
2. Invest deeply in programs and strategies that build the power of communities to eliminate the structural inequities that impact boys and young men of color. Contrary to the messages often propagated about us, the challenges we face are not the result of laziness, violence, or apathy. They are due to hundreds of years of oppression and the persistence of inequity in our communities, including under-resourced schools, a lack of jobs, and discrimination by the police and courts. Traditional one-on-one mentorship programs alone cannot address these issues. The focus must be placed on eliminating these longstanding inequities. Youth and community organizing are especially needed because they empower us to take collective action and transform ourselves as individuals and communities at the same time. We take seriously our responsibility for strengthening our communities; we also call on our country's leaders to join us in addressing the real barriers to equal opportunity that still surround us.
3. Employ an expansive frame that recognizes the diversity of boys and young men of color as well as the importance of empowering and improving the lives of girls and women of color. Boys and young men of color have complex identities beyond the black and brown binary. Often excluded from the conversation are our indigenous Native-American, Asian Pacific-Islander, and Southeast Asian brothers. In addition, expanding the frame of "masculinity" to include queer- and transgendered- identified boys and young men of color is a critical shift that will ensure a more inclusive set of strategies. We also recognize that we cannot improve the lives of boys and young men of color if we leave behind our sisters and mothers.

Read the full [brief](#) to learn about the policies and philanthropic recommendations of the National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color.





# FIELD FAVORITES

Opportunity Youth United's National Council of Young Leaders created ["Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America."](#) Their six priority recommendations are:

1. **Expand Effective Comprehensive Programs—bring what works to everyone in need**
  - The comprehensive programs that are already succeeding with opportunity youth should be expanded. These are typically full-time programs that include education, job training, counseling, personal supports and mentors, leadership development opportunities, a positive peer group, pathways to college and jobs, and service opportunities in which young people can learn that it is possible to be paid for doing something good.
2. **Expand National Service—ensure that national service opportunities are accessible to all**
  - Increase the inclusion of low-income people of all ages in community service through national service programs like AmeriCorps, NCCC, Senior Corps, Service Learning, Volunteer Generation, and VISTA.
  - The impact of providing service dramatically changes the identity of low-income individuals, encouraging long-term civic engagement. When we experience our own neighbors and peers as service-givers, rather than passive recipients of charity from people of different class and racial backgrounds, the effects are impressive.
3. **Expand Private Internships—incentivize pathways forward**
  - Support internships that offer low-income people paid employment experience with private corporations that provide appropriate supports and the potential for long-term hiring. Establish a corporate tax credit of up to \$4,000 for each six-month paid internship that results in employment. Some of us have experienced amazing internships in the private sector through Year Up, coupled with college prep and a supportive community.
4. **Increase All Forms of Mentoring—mentoring is proven to have a positive impact**
  - Expand mentoring programs and elevate both formal and informal mentoring as a core component for all programs serving opportunity youth. Young people need caring individuals to give us confidence, respect, and support in planning and working toward a productive future. We need mentors with a similar background who have overcome familiar obstacles, as well as those of different backgrounds who can open completely new horizons.
5. **Protect and Expand Pathways to Higher Education—enable access to meaningful credentials**
  - Ensure that college and registered apprenticeships are both affordable and attainable for low-income students. Protect and expand education awards, scholarships, low-cost community and state colleges, loans that are not predatory or excessively burdensome, and Pell Grants. Eliminate barriers to obtaining financial assistance and strengthen pathways. We understand that higher education is one key to lifelong success.
6. **Support Diversion and Re-entry Programs in the Justice System—enable people to get themselves back on track**
  - We must focus on better re-entry pathways and supports for people coming out of lockdown and out of the justice system, for both juveniles and adults. We need second chances for youthful offenders to rebuild their lives through community-based supports, high-quality education, and re-entry programs that smooth the path to employment, education, and community service.
  - We also must make the reduction of disparities in juvenile justice a high priority. Too many young people of color are referred to the system for infractions that do not land their nonminority peers in handcuffs or lockup. In addition, we must address the root causes of the obstacles faced by low-income people of color, and end the pipeline to prison for both children and youth. Too many of our peers are expected to be dead or in jail before they reach age 25, and many internalize this expectation for themselves. We see evidence all around us that this is what happens in our neighborhoods when young men and women fall off track. It appears that the pipeline to prison has been well laid. We need to provide young people with the tools to break this cycle.

Opportunity Youth United is on the steering committee of the [National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color](#), which works to (1) bring together national networks and key organizations that empower young men of color by building relationships, sharing resources and practices, and developing shared strategies; (2) ensure that the voices of boys and young men of color are included in new initiatives to improve outcomes; and (3) create opportunities for young leaders to meet directly with policymakers and funders to share their recommendations.

Learn about the set of guiding principles and recommendations developed by the National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color in the [Boys and Young Men of Color National Youth Table Statement](#).

Are you interested in more opportunities to hear what disconnected youth have to say? Explore what America's Promise Alliance learned in a powerful series of group and individual interviews and surveys with opportunity youth, summarized in [“Don't Call Them Dropouts”](#) and [“Don't Quit on Me.”](#)

Some additional resources on youth engagement include: [“Jim Casey Youth Opportunities' Achieving Authentic Youth Engagement: Core Values & Guiding Principles”](#) which focuses on foster-care youth, and the [“Forum for Youth Investment's Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy,”](#) which concentrates on all youth. If your community has an existing youth council, ensure that disconnected boys and young men of color are well represented on it.

## ► USE A RACIAL AND GENDER EQUITY LENS TO PROMOTE CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND SENSITIVITY IN ALL FACETS OF WORK WITH DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Equity isn't a program or a one-time event. It is a lens that needs to be applied to every effort we take on as we analyze issues and identify solutions. Leaders need to understand the role of race and gender, and to pay close attention to disparities and their structural root causes. A wide range of nonprofits and foundations have rallied around the [Life Course Framework](#) to ensure such a lens is applied consistently and rigorously. Proponents of collective impact initiatives have emphasized the importance of embedding an explicit focus on equity, as described in the [“Stanford Social Innovation Review”](#) series.

Such a racial and gender equity lens can be applied to a wide range of populations, sectors, and agencies. For example, in the child welfare arena, the [Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare](#) provides national leadership to support improved outcomes for children and families of color involved with the nation's child welfare system. The National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators created a [Disproportionality Diagnostic Tool](#) to help examine disproportionate representation of children of color within a child welfare agency's jurisdiction. In the afterschool programs/youth development arena, the YMCA of Madison created a [“Race to Equity Toolkit for Conversation”](#) to help schools and faith and community groups that want to discuss the data presented in the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families' “Race to Equity” project report, and what steps they can take to narrow racial disparities in their organizations. This toolkit could be adapted to support conversations anywhere in America. Also, take advantage of [“Racial Equity Tools,”](#) which provides curricula and resources to help those hoping to increase their own understanding of racial equity, or to work toward justice at the system, community, and organization levels. In the communications arena, [Story for All](#) helps groups share stories in ways that address equity; harness the power of a story to document, preserve, share, and promote dialogue about valuable wisdom and experiences; and support cultural traditions as well as tolerance, respect, and health. Additionally, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's [“Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities”](#) is a messaging guide to help leaders garner support across sectors to close gaps in health and opportunities for young men of color.



## ► GATHER DATA ON YOUR COMMUNITY'S DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

The [Opportunity Index](#) measures 16 indicators, including rates of disconnected youth, in every state; in Washington, DC; and in more than 2,600 counties (select the indicator: “young people in school or working”). Do you live in one of the 25 largest U.S. cities? If so, you are in luck—[Measure of America](#) has compiled [rates of disconnection](#) down to the neighborhood level, including racial and ethnic breakdowns. Are you located in one of the 100 biggest cities? Measure of America covers rates of disconnection in these areas as well, along with those of every state, county, and congressional district in the country, disaggregated by gender, race, and ethnicity. If you reside in one of the 35 cities that participate in [The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership](#), you can get access to data mapped down to the most granular neighborhood level.

If you have searched for data on any child and youth topic, you have likely found your way to the [KIDS COUNT data center](#), an invaluable source of information about demographics, economic well-being, education, family and community, health, safety, and risk behaviors. The center includes data for the United States arranged by state, by territory, and by county; information covering city and congressional districts is also available.

The [Schott Foundation for Public Education](#) recently declared that “Most astonishing has been the fact that year after year, and still true in 2015, most districts and states have failed to adopt a uniform way of counting and making publicly available the graduation rates for black males and other subgroup populations.”<sup>1</sup> The foundation filled this gap by creating an [interactive map dashboard](#) of black male graduation rates as part of their “[Black Boys Report.](#)” [PolicyLink](#) sits at the epicenter of the movement for boys and young men of color, so it comes as no surprise that they have a comprehensive [National Equity Atlas](#) with data on changing demographics, racial inclusion, and the economic benefits of equity in the 100 largest cities, in the 150 largest regions (SMAs), in all 50 states, and in the nation as a whole. The [Campaign for Black Male Achievement](#) has a widely acclaimed [Black Male Achievement Life Outcomes Dashboard](#) where you can obtain indicators that track opportunities for black males in the United States. The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University launched a [state-of-the-art research project](#) designed to meet the urgent need for a national, integrated information source. The project helps communities understand who their children are by documenting and tracking the rapidly changing demographics of children and families in the United States. To ascertain what their children need, the project has designed a system for monitoring not only child outcomes, but also key factors (including opportunities, conditions, and resources) that drive child outcomes. The system also provides guidance on how to improve opportunities for all children, especially those who may need the most help, by focusing explicitly and rigorously on issues of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic equity in child health and well-being.

## ► DETERMINE HOW MUCH FUNDING IS AVAILABLE AND IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE FUNDS TO SERVE DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Determine how much federal funding is available for opportunity youth, based on the list of funding streams compiled by the Campaign for Youth in “[Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future: A Road Map for Investment in the Nation’s Talent Pipeline](#)” Also, take a look at the “[Bridge to Reconnection: A Plan for Reconnecting One Million Opportunity Youth Each Year](#)” which provides guidance on how much funding would need to be added to various funding streams to meet the reconnection goal. You can also see if your community is participating in any of the federal government’s signature “place-based initiatives” by consulting its [interactive map](#). Are you interested in federal funding streams to cover the vital summer months? Discover the resources compiled by the White House as part of the Summer Opportunity Project.

Do you want to map out state and local funding streams as well? Read “[Adding It Up: A Guide for Mapping Public Resources for Children, Youth & Families](#)” by the Forum for Youth investment.

## ► ENSURE THERE IS A MECHANISM TO ALIGN GOVERNMENTAL EFFORTS FOR DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

This can be a focus area within a broader intergovernmental structure, such as a children's cabinet. A children's cabinet is a policy-coordinating body comprising the heads of all government agencies with child- and youth-serving programs. Cabinet members work together to coordinate services and collaboratively develop a common set of outcomes and plans that foster the well-being of young people. Check to see if your community or state has a [Children's Cabinet](#) and if it does, encourage members to create a subgroup focused on disconnected boys and young men of color. If your state or community does not have anything resembling a children's cabinet, take a look at the [“Elements of Success Issue 1: Structural Options”](#) to help determine the right structural characteristics for a newly formulated council or cabinet.

## ► CONSIDER APPLYING TO BECOME A FEDERAL PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP PILOT (P3) SITE.

Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) allow selected local, tribal, and state agencies to enter into an agreement with the federal government that grants broad flexibility in how the site uses existing discretionary federal funds. These pilots will implement evidence-informed practices while committing to achieve significant improvements for disconnected youth. P3s can request to (1) blend their existing federal discretionary funds across multiple eligible programs, and/or (2) receive flexibility from federal program requirements. Learn more by visiting the [P3 Online Hub](#).

## ► LEARN FROM NATIONAL NETWORKS AND PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR AND OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.

A number of national initiatives are helping communities across the country better serve opportunity youth and boys and young men of color. If there are any located in your community, reach out to them as a possible partner. You can also search the links below to gather ideas to bring into your community.

- The [Alliance for Boys and Men of Color](#) is a coalition of change agents committed to improving the life chances of California's boys and young men of color.
- [Campaign for Youth](#) is a coalition of national organizations whose mission is to devise and implement strategies that help to reconnect and increase chances for success among young people who are out of work, out of school, or out of the mainstream.
- [Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network](#), led by the Center for Law and Social Policy, brings together workforce and youth development professionals in communities across the country to improve the opportunities and well-being of young people by establishing innovative partnerships among local youth-serving systems by creating effective cross-system collaborations in communities.
- [Gateway to College National Network](#) supports communities in building sustainable pathways for disconnected youth (former high-school dropouts) to achieve a high-school diploma and a meaningful college credential.
- The [Intermediary Network](#) connects local and national organizations to share effective strategies, learn from one another, and grow and professionalize intermediary practice across the country. INet's special focus is on opportunity youth.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential \(LEAP\)](#) initiative focuses on youth and young adults, aged 14 to 25, particularly those who have been involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems or are homeless. LEAP partners with three national organizations—Jobs for America's Graduates, Jobs for the Future, and MDRC—and is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund.
- [NLC Reengagement Network](#), managed by the National League of Cities, assists cities in exploring and pursuing reengagement policy and programming.
- The [Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund](#), managed by the [Aspen Forum for Community Solution](#), supports community collaboration focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth.
- [Opportunity Works](#) is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund and managed by [Jobs for the Future](#) in partnership with the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions. It supports communities that bring together local stakeholders—K-12 systems, colleges, employers, community organizations—to collaborate across systems, and to build education and career pathways for unemployed or underemployed young people.





## FIELD FAVORITES

PolicyLink's ["Building Place-Based Initiative for Boys and Men of Color and Vulnerable Populations: A Community Planning Guide"](#) highlights steps community can take to conduct a policy review and to formulate recommendations for action that improve the lives of boys and men of color. The guide also includes a Policy Review Matrix (appendix 1) that highlights opportunities to examine important issues, target populations and sub-populations, and relevant departments/agencies across the six milestones.

- » Review data on milestones and indicators
- » Bring together a team
- » Identify policies
- » Analyze impact
- » Develop recommendations
- » Identify a leadership organization
- » Broaden constituencies
- » Establish infrastructure
- » Target and concentrate resources
- » Develop an implementation strategy

For further information on how to get started in each of the areas listed above, learn from examples of places across the country, and explore the Policy Review Matrix, read the ["Building Place-Based Initiative for Boys and Men of Color and Vulnerable Populations: A Community Planning Guide."](#)

# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

1. *Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.*
2. *Use a racial and gender equity lens, and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of work with disconnected boys and young men of color.*
3. *Gather data on disconnected boys and young men of color in your community.*
4. *Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.*
5. *Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.*
6. *Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) site.*
7. *Learn from national networks and place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.*



## NOTES

1. Schott Foundation for Public Education. (2015). "Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males. Cambridge, MA: Schott Foundation for Public Education.

ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN\\_MBKA\\_TOOLKIT](http://forumfyi.org/OYN-MBKA_TOOLKIT)



MILESTONE 1: ENTERING SCHOOL READY TO LEARN  
MILESTONE 2: READING AT GRADE LEVEL BY THIRD GRADE

# SECTION B: PREVENTING INTERGENERATIONAL DISCONNECTION BY ENSURING BOYS OF COLOR ENTER SCHOOL READY TO LEARN AND READ AT GRADE LEVEL BY THE THIRD GRADE

> > > SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO PREVENT DISCONNECTION FROM HIGH SCHOOL

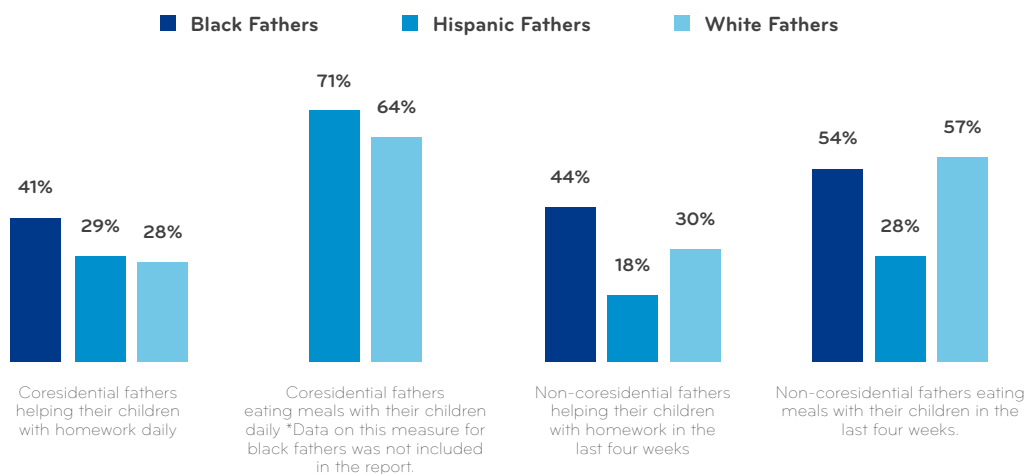
> > > SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DISCONNECTING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

> > > SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR THAT HAVE DISCONNECTED FROM HIGH SCHOOL



# OVERVIEW

Nearly one-quarter of disconnected youth are parents of young children. When noncustodial parents are included, that number is even higher.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular misconceptions about the roles young men of color play in their children's lives, a [study](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that fathers of color were just as, or even more, involved with their children compared to other groups.<sup>2</sup> As the charts below show, black fathers are more likely than white fathers to help their children with their homework, and Hispanic fathers are more likely than white fathers to share meals with their children daily.<sup>3</sup>



Source: Jones J. Mosher WD. (2013). *Fathers' Involvement with their children: United States, 2006-2010. National Health Statistics reports: no 71.* Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

Existing research and data reinforces what we already know. The success of both disconnected youth and their children is inextricably tied together. Research shows, for example, that there is a unique correlation between a father's level of educational attainment and his son's future success. Moreover, sons of fathers who have graduated from high school are less likely to come in contact with the justice system.<sup>4</sup> The challenges facing parents—low wages, poor health, and limited education—affect their children's educational, social, and emotional development.

Programs and services are often created and structured in a way that focuses primarily on either the parent or the child. A “two-generation” approach is needed to help disconnected fathers and their children simultaneously, ensuring families as a whole have the tools they need to thrive.

## VOICES

*“My dad is my role model because he pays attention to me a lot and he pays attention to his kids and he wants us to go to college and be successful and we want to put him in a safer place when he gets older.”*

– The Griots of Oakland

Source: Zusman, A. (2013). *The Griots of Oakland: Voices from the African-American Oral History Project.* Oakland, CA: Story for All



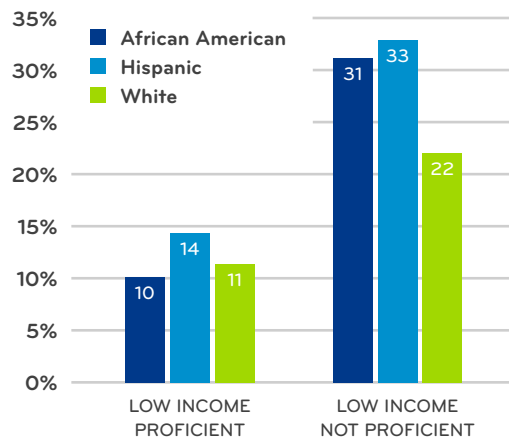
Two-generation approaches, programs, and policies are essential to eliminate intergenerational cycles of poverty. Not only do these approaches provide the necessary interventions for young parents, but they also help prevent their children from becoming disconnected later in life. Leaders serving disconnected fathers of color should consider and address the unique needs of this population through strategies such as providing flexible schedules and child care. Leaders serving young boys of color should take into consideration the employment, educational, and health and human service needs of the fathers of these boys, including noncustodial fathers. Programs should also provide opportunities for intergenerational projects and co-learning, along with opportunities for peer-to-peer support.

In addition to employing a two-generation approach to support young fathers of color and their children, preventative strategies can help ensure boys achieve critical milestones early in life. Quality early education is critical to laying the groundwork for future success. Not reading at grade level by the third grade is a powerful indicator – more so than poverty alone – that a person will drop out of high school.<sup>5</sup>

An alarming statistic is that by the fourth grade, white boys are two times more likely than Hispanic boys and three times more likely than black boys to read at grade level.<sup>6</sup> Strategies such as innovative and culturally competent curricula, small-group instructions, effective summer educational activities, educational technology, and mentorship can help boys of color achieve academic, social, and emotional success.

*Not reading at grade level is a powerful indicator of dropping out of high school later in life. Among low-income students, proficiency in third grade reading is a better predictor of dropping out of high school than is race/ethnicity.*

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL: BY POVERTY, RACE-ETHNICITY AND 3RD GRADE READING SCORES



Source: *Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Scores and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. 2012

## VOICES

*"Growing up, my mom, when she was single, my dad was never around. And then I had a younger sister I had to take care of. My mom, we barely had the minimum. She provided food and everything that we needed. She was always busy, so we never really saw her, so I was always in charge of my little sister. Going to school, I did good...then once I hit high school, I had to step up and get a job and help out. So I started going away from school, and I got a job, and helped my mom out and take care of my little sister, so little by little I fell out of school. At the time money was more important, 'cause we had to get by day by day. So that's when I lost track and just dropped out."*

- Freddy

Source: *The Center for Promise at America's Promise Alliance*. (2015). "Don't Quit on Me: What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships." Boston: Center for Promise, Tufts University.

## STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

# SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR THROUGH TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

### ► LEARN THE DIFFERENT FEATURES THAT MAKE A POLICY OR PROGRAM TWO GENERATION.

Read the [“Ascend Two-Generation Playbook”](#) to understand the essential components of the two-generation approach. The playbook includes snapshots of programs and policies from across the nation that are addressing the social capital, educational, health, well-being, and economic needs of parents and their children holistically. In addition, consult the Foundation for Child Development’s [“Promoting Two-Generation Strategies: A Getting Started Guide for State and Local Policy Makers,”](#) which describes how to facilitate factors that support two-generation approaches, presents local examples, provides steps to get started, and offers state and local policy recommendations.

### ► CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS AGENCIES AND SECTORS.

Foster partnerships between organizations and agencies, both inside and outside of government, that provide services for disconnected youth and young children. Determine ways to unite efforts in a cohesive and coordinated manner that goes beyond referrals to external services. To get started, find champions in your community to help advocate for and lead the effort to change the status quo. Identify potential partners in employment, education, and health and human services. Convene partners to share the types of steps and supports needed to employ two-generation approaches. Finally, establish ways to break through the current siloed ways of operating, including creating communication channels across agencies and levels of leadership.

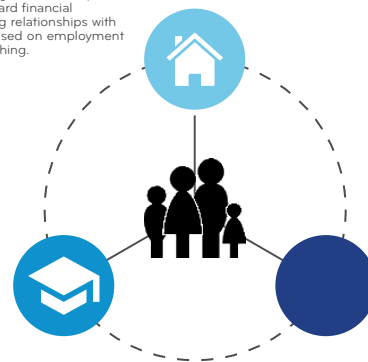
*Effective two-generation approaches require partnerships. The image below, adapted from the Annie E. Casey Foundation report [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach](#), describes three existing channels in which you can infuse two-generation strategies by addressing the needs of children and their parents together.*

#### CREATING PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

Schools and early-education, home-visiting and job-training programs are just some of the existing platform that offer opportunities to factor in the needs of parents and children at the same time.

##### HOME VISITING

Home-visiting programs can help families move toward financial stability by building relationships with organizations focused on employment and financial coaching.



##### SCHOOLS AND EARLY EDUCATION

An elementary school or early-education program can collaborate with parents to expand their involvement in their child’s development and create programs for their own educational advancement.

##### JOB TRAINING

Job-training programs and community colleges can help parents access employment, high-quality child care for school and work and financial coaching to plan now and for the future.

Source: (2014). [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach](#). Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation.



## ► ALIGN AND LINK SYSTEMS, AND COORDINATE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES AMONG ENTITIES SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED MEN OF COLOR AND THEIR CHILDREN.

It is important to measure and account for outcomes for both disconnected men of color and their children, including eligibility standards and performance benchmarks. Make sure that accountability systems use indicators that reflect the whole family's well-being. Integrated data systems allow providers, policymakers and the public to use data to make informed decisions.

A helpful set of related [resources and case studies](#) is available from Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (AISP), which supports a network of cities and states as they work toward integrating their data systems. For example, their website discusses how Illinois is connecting administrative data on early childhood programs, employment, education, health care, juvenile justice, and child welfare.

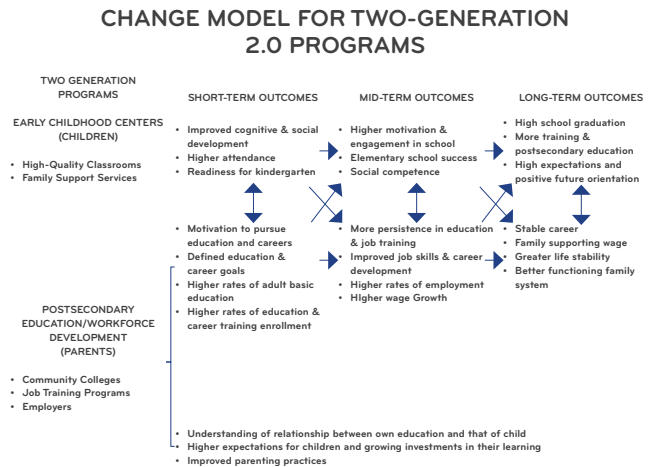
## ► IDENTIFY AND BLEND OR BRAID FUNDING STREAMS TO SERVE DISCONNECTED YOUTH AND THEIR CHILDREN.

Find flexible funds that can be used to support existing two-generation programs, as well as to incentivize existing “single-generation” programs to incorporate two-generation strategies. For example, Durham, North Carolina and New Orleans completed a fiscal map—a cross-department analysis of public funding—to identify all their existing funding for opportunity youth and their children. Take a look at [“Adding It Up: A Guide for Mapping Public Resources for Children, Youth & Families”](#) if you are interested in mapping your existing funds. Review the [“Colorado Guide 1: Blending and Braiding”](#) or the [“Accelerating Opportunity Braided Funding Toolkit”](#) to learn the steps that can be taken to combine and coordinate different pots of funding. In addition, consider applying for a federal [Performance Partnership Pilot](#), described in the Strategies and Resources that Span the Milestones section of this toolkit. [One of the first cohort of pilots](#) used policy flexibility to support a two-generation effort.

## ► LEVERAGE FEDERAL PROGRAMS, SUCH AS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF), THE CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CCDBG), AND THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA) TO APPLY TWO-GENERATION STRATEGIES.

The TANF block grant provides states with broad flexibility in determining which families to prioritize and the type of services to provide. CCDBG supports working families in accessing quality child care and other services provided to parents. CCDBG offers states the opportunity to integrate funding across Head Start, TANF, prekindergarten, and other child development programs. Access your state's fact sheet on CCDBG and profile on Head Start via [CLASP's interactive publications map](#).

The figure below is an example of a two-generation program's theory of change from *The Future of Children's* report, [Helping Parents, Helping Children: Two-Generation Mechanisms](#). The figure includes short-, mid- and long-term outcomes for children and their parents, and depicts the synergistic influence of one generation achieving outcomes onto the other.



Source: Chase-Lansdale, P. L and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2014, Spring). *Two Generation Programs in the Twenty First Century. Helping Parents, Helping Children: Two-Generation Mechanisms*, 24(1), 18.



# FIELD FAVORITES

## LEVERAGING THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is federal legislation that encompasses the core federal programs in skill development programs, such as employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth; Job Corps; and Youth Build. Visit the [Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration WIOA page](#) for more information on the legislation.

WIOA provides a unique opportunity to develop a comprehensive system of supports for serving out-of-school youth and their children. Ascend at Aspen Institute, a hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success and economic security, has developed the [“Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Two-Generation Strategies brief”](#) which outlines the following “Five Strategies for Two-Generation Engagement” through WIOA.

1. **Design state plans that provide enhanced coordination between human services providers and workforce training and postsecondary education programs to identify and better serve shared populations.** WIOA explicitly prioritizes services to low-income individuals and those with barriers to employment, many of whom also receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. By integrating human services and workforce development programs, local, state, and national service providers can more effectively and efficiently serve at-risk populations, including low-income parents who are students.
2. **Take advantage of wioa’s significant investment in low-income young adults, many of whom are parents.** WIOA mandates that 75 percent of statewide grants and funds available to local areas under Title I of the law be spent on workforce development programs for out-of-school youth. These funds can be used to help young adults secure living-wage jobs or return to school.
3. **Recognize the importance of providing convenient, affordable child care to parents attending school or workforce development programs.** Use WIOA resources to incentivize partnerships with childcare providers that deliver high-quality early childhood education programming.
4. **Provide year-round support for student parents.** Coordinate workforce development or postsecondary education programs with human services, housing and food assistance, and childcare programs so that low-income parents can access the support they need 12 months a year, regardless of their school schedule.
5. **Workforce development programs to count towards tanf work requirements and child care subsidy eligibility terms** Student parents are more likely to achieve educational success if their enrollment in school or workforce training programs is treated as work.



# SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED FATHERS OF COLOR

## ► ENSURE ACADEMIC REENGAGEMENT EFFORTS BY USING STRATEGIES, SUCH AS FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING HOURS, THAT SUPPORT YOUNG FATHERS OF COLOR.

Reconnecting to school is a daunting endeavor. Trying to do so while taking care of children can be nearly impossible. Programs cannot effectively reconnect disconnected youth without also helping them succeed as parents. Consider implementing extended and flexible hours for support services, and on-site early childhood education programming, to accommodate work schedules that are often inflexible.

## ► CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF PARENTING STUDENTS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES BY ESTABLISHING A COLLABORATION BETWEEN POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE AGENCIES TO PROVIDE AND IMPROVE WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS AND SERVICES.

Find ways to maximize federal resources like the [Child Care Access Means Parents in School](#) program, which provides a grant to universities and colleges to deliver campus-based child care services, program supports to parents, and curriculum development for faculty and staff.

## ► FIND AND CONNECT WITH LOCAL HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START PROGRAMS.

Head Start, one of the most well-known federal programs to use a two-generation approach, provides comprehensive development services for children under five, as well as comprehensive support services for parents and their families. Although underfunded—in 2013, [only 40% of eligible three and four year olds were served](#)—local programs can be a great partner in implementing two-generation strategies in your community. For example, the [Chicago Department of Family and Support Services is leading a Performance Partnership Pilots \(P3\) for Disconnected Youth](#), through which they are working with the Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership, to blend WIOA and Head Start funds to create a two-generation approach for young mothers. Elements of the pilot include social-emotional learning and cognitive-behavior therapy sessions led weekly by a mentor; biweekly home visits; paid work experience and job training in early learning education; and parent/child activities. [Find Head Start programs in your area.](#)

The Office of Head Start at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services spotlights Dwayne Drummond and the Philadelphia Head Start Program's two-generation approach to serving fathers. Here is an excerpt:

"At the school district of the Philadelphia Head Start program, I was introduced to a program called FAMILY -- Father's Advocating Male Involvement in the Lives of the Youth," he said. "And when I first went to this meeting, I just got hooked on it and I have been there ever since." Drummond was surrounded by mentors who show program participants who never had a father in their lives how to be a father, but most importantly how to be an effective father. "I appreciate that group," said Drummond. "They give that whole family-oriented feeling."

"We have a lot of students from all around the world -- some from Bangladesh, some from Iraq, some are Cajun, and some are African-American," said Drummond. "Cultural diversity made me a better person dealing with parents. It also made my child a better person by giving her that experience that she might not be given in my neighborhood."

[Access the full article here.](#)



## ► INCLUDE SUPPORT SERVICES AND PROGRAMMING SPECIFICALLY FOR FATHERS AND NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS.

Provide opportunities for meaningful two-generation programming in which fathers and their children work together on community, civic, or arts/cultural projects. Adopt a model similar to that developed by Philadelphia's Office of Early Childhood and Education, which implements a program called Fathers Advocating Male Involvement in the Lives of Youth (FAMILY) through their local Head Start effort. [FAMILY](#) involves men in their children's education, with fathers participating in monthly meetings and events focused on promoting child and family well-being.

# SUPPORTING BOYS OF COLOR TO PREVENT FUTURE DISCONNECTION

## ► ELIMINATE ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

Preschools and other early childhood education settings are expelling and suspending three- and four-year-olds at disturbing rates, with boys of color being expelled far more frequently than other children. States like California have taken steps toward rethinking discipline practices that expel students in prekindergarten to third grade. Recommendations on how your state can develop a road map to reduce and ultimately eliminate zero-tolerance policies in early childhood education can be found in "[Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings](#)," a policy brief from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. The brief includes recommendations and resources for program leaders.

## ► PRIORITIZE AND ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS.

As the Annie E. Casey Family Foundation reports in "[A Shared Sentence Report: the devastating toll of parental incarceration on kids, families and communities](#)," "... in America's age of mass incarceration, millions of children are suffering the consequence of their parents' sentences and our nation's tough-on-crime practices." The report outlines recommendations for addressing the needs of, and strengthening supports for, the children, families, and communities of those incarcerated. The reports calls out the importance of "ensuring children are supported while parents are incarcerated and after they return," through counseling, preservation of a relationship with the parent, appropriate and safe family reunification, and family caregiver supports. Other recommendations include "connecting parents who have returned to the community with pathways to employment," such as reforming policies to suspend child support orders during a parent's incarceration, and "strengthening communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by incarceration and re-entry, to promote family stability and opportunity." "[Rights to Realities – An Agenda for Action](#)," by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, outlines steps a community can take to implement the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights.

## ► DESIGN INNOVATIVE AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT CURRICULA THAT BOYS OF COLOR FIND RELATABLE.

Cultural competence goes beyond the demographics of staff and students. Culturally competent curricula in early education provides diverse and relevant opportunities for students and their families. Staff are sensitive to family values, culture, and identity, and they use information about the family to adapt environments, curricula, and teaching methods. For examples of cultural competent criteria that span culture, special needs, ability, family, religion, race, socioeconomic status, gender, and general diversity, view the National Association for Education of Young Children brief, "[Supporting Cultural Competence: Accreditation of Programs for Young Children Cross-Cutting Theme in Program Standard](#)."

► **IMPLEMENT SMALL-GROUP INSTRUCTION AND OTHER PEDAGOGIES THAT PROMOTE THE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF BOYS OF COLOR.**

Small-group instruction, free play, guided reading, and hands-on learning that are developmentally appropriate are strategies teachers can use to engage students. Learn how schools and programs across the nation are using innovative and promising practices to promote literacy among young children. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading highlights “[bright spots schools](#),” “[bright spots programs](#),” and “[bright spots communities](#)” in promoting school readiness, preventing chronic absence, combating summer learning loss, and supporting quality teaching.

► **MINIMIZE SUMMER LEARNING LOSS AND MAXIMIZE SUMMER OPPORTUNITIES.**

Summer is a time when students who are not engaged in effective educational activities can lose academic knowledge. Many students in high-poverty communities lose access to healthy meals and adult supervision. The [Summer Opportunity Project](#)—a collaboration among the White House, the National Summer Learning Association, and other agencies—has created resources to empower community leaders to provide quality summer learning opportunities, meals, and jobs for the young people that need it the most. View their “[2016 Summer Opportunities Funding Resource Guide](#)” and the “[Mayor’s Summer Learning Playbook](#).”

► **EMPLOY STRATEGIES SUCH AS EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA SOLUTIONS.**

Advancements in technology make it easier than ever to access information and education. “[Pioneering Literacy in the Digital Wild West: Empowering Parents and Educators](#),” a report by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, highlights digital products and promising practices and programs that use technology to promote literacy. [The Obama Administration’s ConnectED initiative](#) highlights resources for schools, teachers, and students made possible through corporate commitments. Among these are Adobe free teacher trainings and curriculum resources, edX access to online Advance Placement-level courses, and Sprint high-speed wireless broadband service. Also, be sure to leverage [Open eBooks](#), an application that allows educators, program leaders, and librarians who work with youth in need to access high-quality books and educational resources for free or at a low cost.

► **BECOME A MENTOR, ENSURE THAT THERE ARE QUALITY MENTOR PROGRAMS IN YOUR AREA, AND INCORPORATE MENTORING AS A PART OF YOUR EDUCATION, COMMUNITY, AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.**

Quality mentoring can play a significant role in addressing absenteeism and behavior problems. Chronic absenteeism is described as missing 10 percent of schools days in one academic year. The Ad Council, My Brother’s Keeper (MBK), the U.S. Department of Education, and the Mott Foundation are working together to launch [Absences Add Up](#), a public service announcement campaign focused on educating and empowering parents by providing information regarding chronic absenteeism and its effects. Additionally, MBK, the U.S. Department of Education, and Johns Hopkins University have launched the [MBK Success Mentors Initiative](#), which uses an evidence-based mentoring model at scale to reduce chronic absenteeism. The initiative aims to reach over one million students in kindergarten to 12th grade over the next three to five years. Become a mentor and connect with local My Brother’s Keeper efforts on [iammbk.org](#). To learn more about the campaign and the MBK Success Mentors Initiative, review this [fact sheet](#). Also, visit [Mentor.org](#) to access tools such as the [Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring](#) and [Mentoring Immigrants and Refugee Youth](#). Also available on this website is the [My Brother’s Keeper Alliance and MENTOR’s webinar series and virtual trainings](#), which include “[The Black Male Mentoring Handbook](#),” “[Men in Mentoring Toolkit](#),” and “[Culture and Class Conflicts in Mentoring-Mentee Matches](#).”

# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## PREVENTING INTERGENERATIONAL DISCONNECTION BY ENSURING BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR ENTER SCHOOL READY TO LEARN AND READ AT GRADE LEVEL BY THE THIRD GRADE

### SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR THROUGH TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

1. *Learn the different features that make a policy or program two-generation.*
2. *Cultivate partnerships across agencies and sectors.*
3. *Align and link systems, and coordinate administrative structures among entities supporting disconnected men of color and their children.*
4. *Identify and blend or braid funding streams to serve disconnected youth and their children.*
5. *Leverage federal programs to apply two-generation strategies, like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).*

### SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED FATHERS OF COLOR

6. *Ensure academic reengagement efforts by using strategies such as flexible scheduling hours that support young fathers of color.*
7. *Consider the needs of parenting students on college campuses by establishing a collaboration between postsecondary institutions and health and human service agencies to provide and improve wraparound supports and services.*
8. *Find and connect with local Head Start and Early Head Start programs.*
9. *Include support services and programming geared specifically to fathers and noncustodial parents.*

### SUPPORTING BOYS OF COLOR TO PREVENT FUTURE DISCONNECTION

10. *Eliminate zero-tolerance policies in early childhood education.*
11. *Prioritize and address the needs of children with incarcerated parents.*
12. *Design innovative and culturally competent curricula that boys of color find relatable.*
13. *Implement small-group instruction and other pedagogies that promote the active engagement of boys of color.*
14. *Minimize summer learning loss and maximize summer opportunities.*
15. *Employ strategies like educational technology and media solutions.*
16. *Become a mentor, ensure that there are quality mentoring programs in your area, and incorporate mentoring as a part of your educational, community, and youth development programs.*



## STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

Some of the most effective strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across the My Brother's Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place integrated approaches can be a particularly useful place to start.

- Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.
- Use a racial and gender equity lens and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of your work.
- Gather data on your community's disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilots site.
- Learn from networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.

## NOTES

1. Ferber, T., with Matthew, S. (2015). "My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge and Opportunity Youth." Washington, DC: Opportunity Youth Network and the Forum for Youth Investment.
2. Jones J., and Mosher W. D. (2013). "Fathers' Involvement with Their Children: United States, 2006–2010." National Health Statistics Reports, no. 71. Hyattsville MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
3. Ibid.
4. Chandler, A. (2014). "A Life Course Framework for Improving the Lives of Boys and Men of Color." San Francisco: Forward Change Consulting.
5. The Campaign for Grade Level Reading. (2014). "Data Sheet: Early Reading Proficiency and Young Men of Color." Baltimore, MD: The Campaign for Grade Level Reading.
6. Ibid.



ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN\\_MBKA\\_TOOLKIT](https://forumfyi.org/oyn_mbka_toolkit)

# SECTION C: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL READY FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

> > > SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO PREVENT DISCONNECTION FROM HIGH SCHOOL

> > > SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DISCONNECTING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

> > > SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO HAVE DISCONNECTED FROM HIGH SCHOOL



# OVERVIEW

A high-school diploma or credential is an essential step on a young person's path to gainful employment and a successful future. In today's economy, a high-school credential is no longer enough to ensure a family-sustaining wage. However, the auxiliary benefits, compared to those who do not graduate from high school, are undeniable. Young people who graduate from high school have better overall health and a longer life expectancy, are less likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system, and are more likely to vote and volunteer.<sup>1</sup>

The overall national high-school graduation rate is on the rise: 82.3 percent for the 2013–2014 school year,<sup>2</sup> up from 81.4 percent in 2012–2013.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the academic achievement gap between young people of color and their white peers persists. National graduation rates for American- Indians/Alaskan-Natives are 69.6 percent; for African- American/blacks, 72.5 percent; and for Hispanics/Latinos, 76.3%. In contrast, the graduation rate for whites is 87.2 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Young people disconnect from high school for a variety of reasons. Many are outside their control, such as the compounding effects of being born in the wrong neighborhood. Other factors include:

- Being zoned for schools with unusually high dropout rates. Some schools only graduate one or two out of every 10 students. In 2013, about 19 percent of African-American/black and 12 percent of Hispanic/Latino students attended such a school. This is compared to only 4 percent of white students.<sup>5</sup>
- Dealing with toxic stress from sustained negative exposures and severe adverse life experiences. Research shows toxic stress adversely impacts learning, as well as young people's mental and physical development throughout their lifetime.<sup>6</sup>
- Being subject to disparate and harsh discipline policies. This results in the disproportionate removal of young men of color, especially those with learning disabilities, from school. Research shows that being suspended or expelled—even once—significantly increases the likelihood of a student dropping out.<sup>7</sup>

Even with the myriad challenges these young people face, and despite the multiple systems that have often failed them, research shows that young people who are not in school accept responsibility for their situation and continue to have high aspirations.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, when trying to re-enter school, they face significant barriers, such as needing to earn money to take care of their families, lacking knowledge of how to return to school, and even having their attempts to return rebuffed by schools.<sup>9</sup> Finding a pathway that leads to a secondary-school credential requires comprehensive services that address academic needs (for example, opportunities for dual credit, innovative teaching and learning, and small class sizes). Also needed are wraparound supports to address housing, mental health, and physical wellness; life management skills; and the compensation necessary to support their families.

As Measure of America points out, “disconnection is not a spontaneously occurring phenomenon; it is an outcome years in the making.”<sup>10</sup> Serving opportunity youth requires: (1) identifying young men of color at risk for disconnection through strategies such as establishing an early warning system, effectively mentoring students, and implementing equitable discipline practices; (2) intervening with young men of color who are in the process of disconnecting from school through the development of policies that target over-age and under-credited young men of color and that incorporate trauma-informed approaches; and (3) reconnecting those who have already been pushed out or have dropped out of school by creating multiple pathways to graduation.



## STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

### SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO PREVENT DISCONNECTION FROM HIGH SCHOOL

- ENSURE PROGRAMS INCORPORATE “ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS:” RIGOR AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT, RELATIONSHIPS, COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE AND ACCESS, RELEVANCE, YOUTH-CENTERED PROGRAMMING, AND EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION.

“[Success at Every Step: How 23 Programs Support Youth on the Path to College and Beyond](#)” highlights six programmatic elements of success that promote college and career readiness based on the evaluations of 23 effective initiatives and other related research. The study finds that curricula should be challenging and taught by staff who are equipped to ensure students’ success and who create a culture of high expectations. Young men of color should have positive relationships with mentors, caring adults, and peers. Family involvement, small learning groups, and safe and supportive environments are important. In addition, they need to be exposed to college early on, and provided with project and work-based learning opportunities, comprehensive individualized social support services, and culturally and community-relevant curricula that incorporate the voice of youth similar to them.

#### VOICES

*“Teacher didn’t care, principal didn’t care ... I told my counselor and a couple teachers, but I didn’t want to because they didn’t care ... you know from the way that they come at me on a regular basis ... they don’t try to talk to me.”*

– Antonio

*Source: America’s Promise Alliance GradNation. (2014). [Don’t Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation](#). Washington, DC: America’s Promise Alliance and Boston: Center for Promise at Tufts University.*

- INCREASE DEDICATED STAFF, COUNSELORS, AND MENTORS PROMOTING THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG MEN OF COLOR; INVEST IN TEACHER AND STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT; AND IMPLEMENT TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES.

Young men of color should have a diverse group of caring adults who can provide positive support and guidance. Teachers, counselors, coaches, and mentors can play an important role in students’ successful and healthy development. [Youth Guidance’s Becoming A Man](#) program in Chicago creates a safe space on middle- and high-school campuses where young men of color can express themselves and receive the social and emotional supports they need. A study of the program found a reduction in violent crimes arrests and increased school engagement, performance, and graduation rates.<sup>11</sup>

Efforts like community schools are viable ways to ensure students have case management and comprehensive supports from a wide range of adults and experts. Community schools bring together a range of partners, with the public school at the center, to offer an array of supports to students and their families. School site coordinators work



## FIELD FAVORITES

*“Students who feel that people at their school care about them and who believe that their absence from school will be noticed and missed are more likely to attend regularly. Because regular attendance is so critical to academic success, many districts have also put in place measures to help ensure that students come to school – and stay there – every day.”*

– Relationships, Rigor and Readiness (MDRC)

**Relationships, Rigor and Readiness Strategies for Improving High Schools** by MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve programs and policies that affect the poor, highlights strategies from mid-sized districts across the nation that are cultivating an environment in which students feel interested, engaged and prepared. Below are a few strategies from the report:

- Increase opportunities for adults and students to interact (including “stepped up” counseling, mentoring, summer orientation events or welcome events).
- Create personalized or small learning communities.
- Work with other agencies to address students’ social and emotional needs.
- Implement staff and faculty advisor systems in which teachers and staff are assigned individual students, to ensure student success by intervening with any academic or family challenges.
- Ensure curricula is rigorous and relevant.
- Involve parents and community.

Read the **full report** for more information on how to help students stay the course throughout high school and how to prepare for college, recommendations for fostering high quality academic experience, suggestions for improving instructions, and tips on getting freshman year right.



individually with at-risk students to devise a plan to meet their needs and to monitor their progress. Learn more about community schools through the [Coalition for Community Schools](#), as well as a recent study, “[Case Management for Students at Risk of Dropping Out: Implementation and Interim Impact Findings from the Communities in Schools Evaluation](#),” which highlights positive impacts on student outcomes. Learn more about Trauma-Informed Approaches and Trauma-Specific Interventions by visiting the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website, which highlights [six key principles](#) and provides examples of intervention models.

## ► FIND OUT HOW BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR ARE FARING ACADEMICALLY.

The [Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males’ Interactive Map Dashboard](#) includes the rates of high school graduation, Advance Placement enrollment, eighth-grade reading and math levels, and suspensions among black, Latino, and white males by state and district. The [Black Male Achievement Life Outcomes Dashboard](#) allows you to download city-level data on how black males are advancing on education-related, health, safety, work, and other indicators.

## ► BECOME A MENTOR, ENSURE THERE ARE QUALITY MENTOR PROGRAMS IN YOUR AREA, AND INCORPORATE MENTORING INTO YOUR EDUCATION, COMMUNITY, AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.

According to research conducted by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, young adults who were at risk of falling off track and had a mentor were 55 percent more likely to pursue a postsecondary education than were their peers who did not have a mentor.<sup>12</sup> Quality mentoring can play a significant role in addressing absenteeism and behavior problems among young adults.<sup>13</sup> The positive impact of mentorship carries over into the daily lives of opportunity youth by minimizing stress and worry, and reducing drug and alcohol use. Visit [MENTOR](#) to access the tools “[Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring](#)” and “[Mentoring Immigrants and Refugee Youth](#),” as well as webinar series and virtual trainings provided by [My Brother’s Keeper Alliance](#) and [MENTOR](#). These utilize the “[Black Male Mentoring Handbook](#),” “[Men in Mentoring Toolkit](#)” and “[Culture and Class Conflicts in Mentoring-Mentee Matches](#).”

## ► IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ELIMINATE ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES TO HELP REDUCE THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE.

The newly passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015—the legislation that replaces No Child Left Behind—provides an opportunity for community leaders, school district leadership, and relevant stakeholders to look at and address harsh discipline practices that minimize learning time and do not adequately address the root causes of student misbehavior. ESSA requires that accountability systems use indicators that go beyond academic achievement. These could include school climate, student engagement, and other holistic environmental conditions that support student learning. A good place to rethink current discipline practices is the Council of State Governments Justice Center’s “[School Discipline Consensus Report](#).” The report highlights questions to consider and action steps to take to promote a culture of equity in school discipline across four key pillars: conditions for learning, targeted behavioral interventions, school-police partnerships, and courts and juvenile justice.

### VOICES

*“I just didn’t like school. It wasn’t because I’m dumb. I get sick just entering the building. I feel like I’m in prison. It’s how the school was set up. They had iron bars like [the area prison]. Cuz back then [the prison] was like mad gangster, with gangbangers and whatever ... Cameras everywhere. I don’t feel safe.”*

– Jeff

Source: America’s Promise Alliance GradNation. (2014). *Don’t Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation*. Washington, DC: America’s Promise Alliance and Boston: Center for Promise at Tufts University.

Learn from or join the [Supportive School Discipline Communities of Practice](#) (SSDCoP), a network of education and justice leaders across the country who share experiences, tools, and resources to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. The Dignity in Schools Campaign's database has a wealth of research on pushout, school discipline, and positive alternatives. The campaign highlights suspensions and expulsions, school-based arrests, and high-stakes testing as three pathways to pushout.<sup>14</sup> Take a look at the [Fact Sheet on Pushout and Alternatives 2015](#) and [Fact Sheet: Creating Positive School Discipline](#) to learn more.

### ► IMPLEMENT POSITIVE BEHAVIOR AND RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE PRACTICES.

Restorative justice practices focus on rehabilitation through a process in which all stakeholders work together to achieve conflict resolution, instead of the current punitive systems in which misbehavior is merely punished. [The Center for Justice and Reconciliation](#) provides a wealth of information on restorative justice, including tutorials, articles, manuals, and tools to start a new program. Explore The Equity Project detailed in “Discipline Disparities: A Research-to-Practices Collaborative,” a [series of briefs](#) on interventions, policy, and research published by Indiana University. Also, take a look at the list of exemplary models of partnerships, schools, and organizations included in “[Promising Approaches for Reducing Disciplinary Disparities in School](#).” The U.S. Department of Education’s “[Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#)” provides tools and steps that policy and school leaders can draw on to create safer schools and positive learning environments.

### ► ENSURE THAT POLICIES AND PRACTICES PROMOTE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS FOR ALL HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS, INCLUDING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WITH DISABILITIES.

“[Designing Statewide Career Development Strategies & Programs](#)” is a two-part guide that provides an introduction to quality youth career development systems and functional steps to implement them. Based on recommendations offered by My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) task force, the U.S. Department of Education recently proposed a new rule in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), called the [Equity in IDEA rule](#). The rule addresses the disparities in the treatment of students of color with disabilities. Districts will have to identify and give attention to inequities and disparities across races and ethnicities in special education.



# SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DISCONNECTING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

## ► ESTABLISH AN ACCURATE AND TIMELY SYSTEM TO TRACK EARLY WARNING SIGNS.

Early warning systems use data such as attendance and grades to identify students who are at the highest risk of disengaging from school. In order to work, the indicators (for instance, attendance) must be accurate and timely. A designated person or entity is responsible for reconnecting young people who have been flagged by the system. The [Data Quality Campaign's primer](#) on early warning systems includes a set of recommendations, an outline of the role of states, and a list of state-level examples. The primer's "[Early Warning System High School Implementation Guide](#)" is an effective tool designed for school leaders.

The [Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report](#) by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and Communities in Schools, Inc. shared results from a study to identify the significant risk factors that increase the chances that a students will drop out of school.

### INDIVIDUAL DOMAIN

#### Individual Background Characteristics

- Has a learning disability and/or emotional disturbance

#### Early Adult Responsibilities

- High number of work hours and/or parenthood

#### Social Attitudes, Values, & Behavior

- High-risk peer group, high-risk social behavior and/or highly socially active outside of school

#### School Performance

- Low achievement and/or retention; over-age for grade

#### School Engagement

- Poor attendance, low educational expectations, lack of effort, low commitment to school and/or no extracurricular participation

#### School Behavior

- Misbehavior and/or early aggression

### FAMILY DOMAIN

#### Family Background Characteristics

- Low socioeconomic status, high family mobility, low education level of parents, large number of siblings, not living with both natural parents and/or family disruption

#### Family Engagement/Commitment to Education

- Low educational expectations, sibling has dropped out, low contact with school and/or lack of conversations about school

The [full report](#) also includes risk factors at the school level and 50 programs that have been effective in addressing the risk factors described.



## FIELD FAVORITES

[“Don’t Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation”](#) (2014) and the follow-up report [“Don’t Quit on Me: What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships”](#) (2015), two reports by America’s Promise Alliance and its Center for Promise at Tuft University, provide valuable information based on the voices of young people that have disconnected from high school. The reports shares what these young people have to say about why they disengaged, and the critical role that positive relationships and caring adults can play in their decisions to stay in or leave school.

Findings from the reports include:

- Disengagement and reengagement both result from clusters of factors.
- Young people who leave high school are often navigating toxic environments, which include: family violence and abuse; unsafe school; neighborhood violence; family health challenges; and unsupportive, unresponsive schools and policies.
- Young people consistently seek supportive connections with others; in toxic environments, this search can lead them toward or away from school.
- Young people who stop going to school are persistently resilient in their day-to-day lives; they are bouncing back, but need additional support to “reach up” toward positive youth development.
- Students who leave school before graduating are stronger than popular opinion and current research literature describe. With the right supports, these strengths could allow them to stay in school, and, if they do, ultimately help many to re-engage.
- Students who leave school before graduating are often struggling with overwhelming life circumstances that push school attendance further and further down on their priority lists.
- Young people who leave high school need fewer easy exits from the classroom and more easy on-ramps back into education.
- Young people who leave high school are telling us how much peers, parents, and other adults matter.
- Everyone in a young person’s life and community can do something to help.
- Too many young people are facing too many hurdles to high-school graduation with too little help.
- Relationships matter, but their importance to graduation varies by type, source, and intensity of support.
- Social supports from multiple sources buffer the effects of adverse life experiences for most young people. However, those facing the greatest adversity need more intensive support than family, school, and friends can provide.

Young people are more likely to graduate if they have access to a web of supportive relationships, which may include parents, adults inside and outside of school, and peers. At least one stable, anchoring relationship can act as a gateway to this wider web of support.

The reports also include: young people’s descriptions of establishing trust; direct quotes from young people themselves; recommendations at the individual, school and community levels; and a literature review of the topic.



► **IDENTIFY STUDENTS WHO ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT FROM SCHOOL, AND ADDRESS THEIR NEEDS THROUGH STRATEGIES SUCH AS MENTORSHIP AND PARENT/FAMILY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT.**

Missing classes in high school is a strong determinant of students' future likelihood of disconnecting from school. Chronic absenteeism is generally defined as missing at least 10 percent of school days in an academic year. School and community leaders should implement strategies and systems that identify students who are chronically absent, and determine why they miss school. These students and their parents require additional supports to improve attendance and ultimately place them on a path of success. The Ad Council, MBK, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Mott Foundation are working together to launch "[Absences Add Up](#)," a public service announcement campaign focused on educating and empowering parents by providing them with information on chronic absenteeism and its effects. A program launched by MBK, the U.S. Department of Education, and John Hopkins University is the [MBK Success Mentors Initiative](#), which uses an evidence-based mentoring model at scale to reduce chronic absenteeism by connecting students with mentors. The initiative aims to reach over one million students in kindergarten through 12th grade over the next three to five years. Become a mentor and get connected to local My Brother's Keeper efforts on [iammbk.org/](http://iammbk.org/). To learn more about the campaign and the MBK Success Mentors Initiative, view this [fact sheet](#).

► **IDENTIFY, TARGET, AND DESIGN SYSTEMS FOR OVER-AGE AND UNDER-CREDITED YOUTH WHO ARE LIKELY TO FALL OFF TRACK BEFORE EARNING THEIR DIPLOMA.**

School leaders should establish multiple pathways that allow over-age and under-credited youth to receive a credential through intentional program and system designs that build partnerships and leverage resources. By having alternative programs and pathways in place, high schools can avoid pushing these students out or giving them inferior instructors, curricula, opportunities, and supports. Students should be able to choose their academic plan and placement, including the choice to return to a traditional high school or utilize an alternative program.

MDRC describes core principles of promising pathway programs, and highlights pathway programs that have been found effective—including Career Academies and California Partnership Academies—in the policy brief "[New Pathways to Careers and College: Examples, Evidence, and Prospects](#)." Additionally, the [Back on Track through College Model](#) helps educators design pathways to credentials for 16- to 24-year-olds who are off track to graduate. The model has three program phases: enriched preparation, post-secondary bridging, and first-year support. The report "[Back on Track: Pathways through Postsecondary](#)" outlines the key elements and operational features of the model. For descriptions of the strategies schools across the country are using to serve over-age and under-credited youth, see the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' report "[Over-Age, Under-Credited Students and Public Charter Schools: An Exploration of Successes, Strategies, and Opportunities for Expansion](#)."

MDRC describes core principles of promising pathway programs in the brief [New Pathways](#). Principles include:

- keeping students' options open,
- the choice of which pathway is up to the student and their parents,
- providing personal supports for students,
- integrating curriculum across subjects with real applications,
- employer partnerships and work-based learning,
- collaboration between high schools and postsecondary institutions,
- accountability systems and data-driven decision-making and
- intermediaries to support the programs.

The [New Pathways](#) brief also highlights pathway programs that have been found effective, including Career Academies and California Partnership Academies.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' report [Over-Age, Under-Credited Students and Public Charter Schools: An Exploration of Successes, Strategies and Opportunities for Expansion](#) highlights profiles of schools using the below strategies to support overage and under credited youth.

- real work application
- flexible calendar and extended learning time
- holistic student supports



## ► ENSURE CURRICULA ARE CULTURALLY COMPETENT AND INCORPORATE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

Many effective programs for disconnected young people not only address academic competencies but use culturally competent and relevant curricula, and provide social and emotional learning (SEL) opportunities. Culturally responsive pedagogy fosters achievement for all students by identifying, nurturing, and utilizing students' strengths.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, teaching and learning occur in culturally supported and learner-centered environments.<sup>16</sup> The "[National Education Association Diversity Toolkit](#)" provides introductory information and links to resources on topics such as cultural competence for educators, gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, and social justice.

"[Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning](#)," by the Susan Crown Exchange and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, is a field guide that bridges research and practice. It provides curriculum features that support SEL through three domains: safe space, responsive practices, and staff supports. The guide features case studies of and standards for SEL practices in emotional management, empathy, teamwork, responsibility, initiative, and problem solving. Access a variety of tools and resources, such as [Assessing Youth SEL Skills](#) and the [SEL Strengths Builder Method](#), at [www.selpractices.org/](http://www.selpractices.org/). The [Guide on Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs – Middle and High School Education](#), by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), provides a systematic framework for evaluating the quality of SEL programs, and provides best practices for schools and districts in selecting and implementing SEL programs. Learn more about [School Positive Behavior Interventions and Support](#), a proactive approach to create positive school climates by supporting and teaching appropriate student behavior in a manner that is similar to teaching core subjects, –and explores core principles and what it takes for schools and districts to implement them.

# SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO HAVE DISCONNECTED FROM HIGH SCHOOL

## ► USE DATA TO MAKE AN ECONOMIC CASE FOR INVESTING IN RECONNECTING STUDENTS WHO HAVE LEFT SCHOOL.

The Graduation Effect is a project that explores the economic impact of high-school graduation rates through a variety of resources and tools, including an [interactive map](#) that disaggregates economic benefits by race. The map also breaks down the economic benefits by metro area; a one-page infographic of this information can be downloaded. These data demonstrate the negative impact of lost potential and contributions of disconnected youth—especially boys and men of color—on society as a whole. In addition, the data make a case for why school reengagement centers and similar approaches are well worth the investment of time and money.

## ► CONDUCT SEGMENTATION ANALYSES.

More and more districts are using segmentation analysis to identify populations of students who are significantly off-track (by two years or more) to provide targeted programming and alternative options. Such analyses can also be used to find students who recently disconnected from school but were fairly close to graduating. These students can benefit from programming that will help them collect their final credits and complete exit exams. For more information on how to implement a segmentation analysis, see section five (p. 26) of the U.S. Department of Education's "[Early Warning Indicators and Segmentation Analysis: A Technical Guide on Data Studies that Inform Dropout Prevention and Recovery](#)."

► **LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEAS), WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS (WIBS), AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOS) SHOULD PARTNER TO CREATE MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION.**

Disconnected young men of color who have been pushed out of high school need high-quality alternative programs to obtain a high-school degree or equivalent. Consider the role in providing disconnected youth a credential of (1) high-quality charter schools; (2) accelerated learning models; (3) twilight academies; (4) blended learning; (5) online high school; (6) Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST) models; (7) school/work models in partnership with WIBs; (8) GED Plus/Diploma Plus models and career; and (9) and technical education. [Diploma Plus](#), a student-centered alternative to traditional high schools that provides personalized learning pathways and competency-based education. The model works in partnership with school districts, community partners, and employers to create a performance-based system, a supportive school culture, a future focus, and effective supports.

► **LEVERAGE ESSA (THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT OF 2015) TO IMPLEMENT A STATEWIDE REENGAGEMENT SYSTEM, AND PROVIDE AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE FUNDS TO RECONNECT DISCONNECTED YOUTH AT SCALE.**

The recently authorized federal education bill (ESSA) requires states to describe how they will work in partnership with school districts to create a seamless transition across the education pipeline—from middle school to high school to postsecondary institutions. ESSA also establishes a new grant program, Student Support and Academic Enrichment, which provides funding for states and school districts to use for dropout prevention. ESSA requires states to determine how they will support migrant American-Indian and Alaska-Native youth who have disconnected from high school. States must also think about how they will support prevention strategies used to ensure that students remain in school. To learn more about how ESSA can be leveraged to support disconnected youth, youth in foster care, youth who are experiencing homelessness, and youth with disabilities, read the primer “[Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: High School Dropout Prevention and Reengagement of Out-of-School Youth](#)” by the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Center for Law and Social Policy, and the National Youth Employment Coalition.

A few states, such as California, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin, allow average daily attendance funds—allocated to schools based on students’ actual attendance in school—to follow young people that leave traditional high school and choose alternative education options such as adult education or dual-enrollment programs. Washington State has an “[Open Doors](#)” policy to provide education and other services to students who are not on track to graduate by age 21. The policy encourages community partnerships, creates multiple pathways for students to realize success, and provides an on-ramp to postsecondary achievement through a performance-based, individualized support model. Washington State has an initiative called [Graduation: A Team Effort](#), which uses a collective impact approach to align dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement efforts across agencies inside and outside of government at the state, regional, and local levels. Review the [Essential Elements of a Comprehensive Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Reengagement System](#).

VOICES

*“Even though I was taking extra credit classes and doing after school work, they didn’t give me any of my extra credits or any credits from the credit recovery program. So, then I just kind of fell off, I figured there was no point in trying. There was no way I could win. No matter what I said about my lost grades, they just had the same excuse.”*

– Donald

*Source: America’s Promise Alliance GradNation. (2014). Don’t Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation. Washington, DC: America’s Promise Alliance and Boston: Center for Promise at Tufts University*

## ► ELIMINATE SEAT-TIME REQUIREMENTS AND TIME-BASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS IN FAVOR OF PERFORMANCE-BASED ONES.

Over-age, under-credited youth should not be required to spend more time in school than they need to develop the required competencies. Competency- or performance-based learning promotes students based on their mastery of skills and their readiness for progress, instead of for the amount of time they spend in a classroom. Students have the flexibility to receive credits through a variety of learning strategies, such as online and blended learning, dual enrollment, and project- and community-based learning. For more information, resources, and examples at the state, district, and school/program level, visit the U.S. Department of Education's [Competency-Based Learning or Personalized Learning webpage](#) or read the American Youth Policy Forum brief, "[State Policy to Support Competency-Based Education for Overage, Under-Credited Students](#)," which highlights state policy and local programmatic examples.

Also, learn about the [Readiness Project](#), created by the Forum for Youth Investment and SparkAction, which has synthesized research to define readiness and the conditions and contexts that promote readiness. For more information, read [The Science \(and Art\) of Youth Readiness](#), which shares the comprehensive, systems-neutral science of readiness and promotes readiness abilities, skill sets and mind-sets, and practices; common "traps and gaps" are also addressed.





## FIELD FAVORITES

**The Science (and Art) of Youth Readiness** is a compilation of research on brain science, social emotional learning, 21st century skills, employability skills and childhood well-being distilled into four systems-neutral components of readiness for young people.

**Readiness Abilities, Skillsets and Mindsets.** There are 10 universal abilities every person needs, regardless of age, background or circumstance, which every system and setting should support. These abilities are used every day, no matter who we are or what situations we are in. These abilities are supported by commonly used skillsets and mindsets (habits, attitudes and beliefs). Skillsets prepare and equip individuals to do something, while mindsets help individuals become willing to do something.

### Readiness Abilities:

1. I can get and stay healthy physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.
2. I can solve problems and make decisions about the intellectual, social, moral and emotional issues and problems I face.
3. I can relate to others and the world by forming, managing and sustaining my relationships.
4. I can use insights to grow and develop in each stage of life.
5. I can work and stay focused in each stage of life.
6. I can think and create in ways that help me navigate and experience life.
7. I can persist through struggles and maintain hope no matter my challenges.
8. I can engage with people and places by being present and engaging in meaningful, real and honest ways.
9. I can apply learning in the real world to meet life demands.
10. I can feel and express emotion appropriately and as a way to connect with others.

### Readiness Skillsets:

- Application
- Resource & Information Processing
- Coping
- Communication
- Organization & Planning
- Problem Solving & Decision-Making
- Reflection & Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Basic Life Management
- Thinking & Analysis
- Self-Care
- Relationship Management

### Readiness Mindsets:

- Fairness
- Open Mindedness
- Future Orientation
- Humility
- Pragmatism
- Agility
- Drive
- Adaptability
- Curiosity
- Compassion
- Courage
- Empathy
- Growth
- Orientation
- Optimism
- Persistence
- Purposefulness

**Readiness Practice.** There are four categories and characteristics of developmental practice that are essential to support young people in developing the Readiness Abilities. These are developmental:

1. Environments
2. Relationships
3. Experiences
4. The ways in which young people use space and time.

While intentionally system- and setting-neutral, the characteristics within these categories of Readiness Practice map to existing standards of practice for every major youth system (e.g., child welfare or education). Readiness Practice happens when adults put specific developmental practices in place, which build young people's connections and competence.



**Readiness Traps.** There are four common cultural and policy “traps”: detrimental yet often-unintended conditions in systems or settings where young people spend time. Traps arise when a system or setting’s official practices—whether defined by rules and regulations or expectations and norms—focus on an easy-to-monitor metric (e.g., time or completion) that does not guarantee growth or competence. To transform practice and support readiness for all, we must understand and mitigate these four traps:

1. Allowing age to be a proxy for stage
2. Completion a proxy for competence
3. Time a proxy for progress
4. Access a proxy for quality

**Readiness Gaps.** Readiness Traps fuel four Readiness Gaps, which are deep and persistent disparities among populations of young people and between what young people have and what they need in life, work, and civic and community engagement. The four prevailing gaps are in:

1. Achievement
2. Expectations
3. Opportunities
4. Skills

## ► UTILIZE BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGIES AND OTHER FORMS OF LEARNING VIA TECHNOLOGY.

Blended learning incorporates both in-person and virtual-educational instruction. Primary forms include:

- Flex model: used primarily online; pace can be customized for individual students
- Rotation model: operates on a set schedule and includes several learning modalities
- A la carte model: involves taking one class online, often to augment what the district offers, and the rest in a standard classroom setting
- Enriched virtual model: includes the entire population of students, some of who participate in some classes online and some in a classroom

Read more about blended learning, an approach that is particularly effective for reengaging disconnected youth, in the America's Promise Alliance's brief, "[Blended Learning Offers Promise as a Strategy for Re-engaging Students](#)."

## ► CONSIDER COMPREHENSIVE RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS.

One comprehensive residential program that has been studied extensively is the [National Guard ChalleNge program](#). This initiative offers 15- to 18-year-olds that have disconnected from school the opportunity to get a high-school equivalency diploma outside the traditional high-school setting.

A cost-benefit analysis conducted by RAND Corporation found that the program yielded a 166 percent return on investment. Enrollees participate in a two-week "acclimation period," a five-month residential phase, and a 12-month postresidential phase. Mentors are assigned halfway through the residential phase and maintain engagement throughout the post-residential phase. Core program components include: academic excellence, health and hygiene, job skills, leadership/followership, life-coping skills, physical fitness, responsible citizenship, and service to the community. View the [Washington Youth Challenge Academy Video Series](#) to learn more.

## ► CREATE OR EXPAND REENGAGEMENT CENTERS.

Connect disconnected young men of color with credit recovery, tutoring, child care, and other services that help them re-enroll and graduate from high school or complete an alternative education program leading to a diploma or GED.

### What are Reengagement Centers?

Reengagement centers are one-stop centers for students who left high school without a diploma. These centers offer a range of services such as individual academic assessments, opportunities to explore different education options and referrals to appropriate schools or other credential programs. Reengagement centers can either operate in a central physical location or through roving staff or other "virtual" connections. Regardless of the specific approach, the goal of reengagement centers and programs is the same: to provide caring, well-trained staff that help young people develop personalized plans to earn a high school diploma or GED.

The National League of Cities (NLC) manages the [NLC Dropout Reengagement Network](#).

The National League of Cities' [Municipal Action Guide: Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Reengagement Centers](#) highlights the following action steps to get started:

1. Conduct an inventory of local initiatives focused on dropout recovery.
2. Take the lead in developing a dropout reengagement strategy.
3. Determine the most appropriate roles for city government in the establishment of a dropout reengagement initiative, including attention to strategic investments.
4. Establish an accountability system for reengagement efforts.
5. Ensure continuous learning and improvement, especially during early implementation.

For more information including city examples, strategies and resources view the [Municipal Action Guide: Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Reengagement Centers](#), the U.S. Department of Education's [Bringing Students Back to the Center: A Resource Guide for Implementing and Enhancing Re-Engagement Centers for Out-Of-School Youth](#) and the book [Reengagement: Bringing Students Back to America's Schools](#).



## FIELD FAVORITES

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national nonprofit that develops and advocates for federal, state, and local policies to strengthen families and create pathways to education and work, outlines a set of recommendations and provides ideas for action in a brief titled, [Investing in Boys and Young Men of Color: The Promise and Opportunity](#). Below is an excerpt of policy recommendations and action steps that support high-school completion among disconnected young men of color.

**Promote school discipline approaches that address behavioral problems without pushing students out of school.**

- **Engage organizations that work directly with school district leaders in rethinking discipline strategies** with the goal of improving, rather than simply punishing, behavior. This includes re-evaluating police presence in schools and exploring opportunities to train teachers in such areas as cultural competency and classroom management.
- **Develop technical assistance resources that offer schools practical alternatives** to harsh suspension and expulsion policies, and that promote developmentally appropriate ways to improve student behavior and school safety. Share the lessons of schools that have made positive changes and are demonstrating success.
- **Support national policy efforts to address the unintended consequences of police in schools** and an overreliance on school suspensions and expulsions. Develop and promote commonsense policies that address behavioral problems without pushing young men out of schools, and that align with national goals for increasing graduation rates.
- **Expand community-based alternatives to juvenile detention**, such as evening reporting centers, home-based alternative services, and community-based therapy treatment. Specifically, use this strategy to address the disproportionately high rate of young men of color engaged with the justice system.

**Increase the use of data to target interventions at boys of color who are at risk for dropping out of school.**

- **Support districts to create an early warning signs tracking system** using readily available school data to identify boys of color in middle or high school who show early signs of struggle and potential high-school dropout.
- **Assist schools in the creation of systemic dropout-prevention strategies.** Identify successful models and document their work for wide dissemination across school districts and states.
- **Advocate for stronger dropout-prevention policies** and increased support for dropout-prevention work in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This includes the expansion of current dropout-prevention competitive federal grant programs, greater guidance on the use of data to inform dropout-prevention work in states and districts, incentives to partner with community-based organizations to provide dropout-prevention services, and increased collaboration across youth-serving systems to ensure that the most vulnerable youth receive supports to remain in school.



**Expand opportunities for young men of color to work, learn, and develop career-enhancing skills.**

- **Target resources at communities with high youth unemployment rates that have created a youth employment infrastructure** to expand work-based opportunities, including work experience, internships, apprenticeships, transitional jobs, community service, and on-the-job training. Assist communities in blending their workforce, education, and career-technology resources to provide career training and work experience options for youth who are disconnected from school.
- **Provide incentives to increase employer engagement in the development of pipelines and trial employment activities** to expose in-school and out-of-school youth to careers and emerging opportunities.
- **Offer support to organizations working to broker greater access to labor market opportunities for minorities** as a result of community or regional economic development.
- **Support efforts to help youth involved with the justice system** to successfully access and navigate the labor market.
- **Introduce incentives to leadership in the local workforce system** to prioritize the creation of paths to work opportunities for young men of color that offer higher wages and a meaningful career trajectory.

**Elevate the importance of a “caring adult” in policy and programmatic efforts to re-engage out-of-school males.**

- **Support national and local policy efforts to create cross-system approaches to dropout recovery and reengagement programming.** These approaches should emphasize the importance of a “case management” function to assist youth in navigating social, education, and employment options.
- **Provide technical assistance and professional development activities to professionals who work with youth in a variety of areas,** including alternative and traditional education, juvenile justice, employment and training, and youth development. These actions will support their practice with and understanding of working with males of color, the unique challenges facing out-of-school youth, and the role of caring adult advocates critical to the success of these young men.
- **Identify and fund culture-specific mentoring initiatives that have a proven track record of serving males of color** and have strong linkages to local education reform and collaborative youth employment efforts.

**Provide options for out-of-school males to attain a secondary credential with pathways to postsecondary education.**

- **Support national policy efforts to provide incentives to districts to recover and further the education of high-school dropouts.** Implement four-, five-, and six-year cohort graduation rates so that districts can accurately account for students who return to school and complete their education.
- **Encourage state- and district-level activities to plan for and fund dropout-recovery efforts,** and advocate for cross-agency efforts to support the reengagement of males of color in education.
- **Target resources to local cross-system approaches that engage youth-serving agencies** and organizations in the research, planning, funding, and implementation of appropriate school and work interventions for out-of-school males.
- **Invest in states and localities to provide flexible schooling options for older students.** Examples may include nontraditional school hours that enable students to attend school around their work schedules; school-work partnerships where students can earn school credit for relevant employment activities; competency-based education that assesses the knowledge of the student instead of the number of hours they attend class; concurrent enrollment in high school and community college; and career/technical education that trains students in a skill or career that will enable them to immediately enter the workforce.
- **Scale up local programmatic approaches with a demonstrated track record for out-of-school males within the context of a broader comprehensive local strategy.** Several communities with large minority populations have adopted sound programmatic approaches based on effective case management wraparound supports and partnerships with other systems to provide needed services.<sup>i 17</sup>

View the [full document](#) to access additional information and the action steps you can take to achieve the above recommendations.



## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHTS

### SEATTLE/KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

#### THE ROAD MAP PROJECT | [WWW.ROADMAPPROJECT.ORG/](http://WWW.ROADMAPPROJECT.ORG/)

The Road Map Project drives dramatic improvement in student achievement from cradle to college and career in South King County and South Seattle, Washington by creating a common goal and shared vision in order to facilitate coordinated action, both inside and outside schools. The Road Map Project includes a cross-sector Opportunity Youth Work Group to create better coordinated and aligned pathways to reconnect opportunity youth in their region. View The Road Map's [Opportunity Youth Action Plan](#)

### PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

#### PROJECT U-TURN | [WWW.PROJECTUTURN.NET/](http://WWW.PROJECTUTURN.NET/)

Project U-Turn is a citywide campaign to understand, focus public attention on and resolve Philadelphia's dropout crisis. Project U-Turn has expanded or established [multiple pathways to graduation \(MPG\) programs](#) including Accelerated High Schools, Gateway to College, Educational Options Programs, GED to College, E3 Centers and Occupational Skills Training Programs.

To learn more, read their recent study [A Promise Worth Keeping: Advancing the High School Graduation Rate in Philadelphia, as well as From Diplomas to Degrees: Examining the Path to and Through College](#) and [Unequal: A Path Forward for Neighborhood High Schools](#).

[YESPhilly](#), a member of the collaborative Project U-Turn, helps young people that have left school without a diploma get a high school education, counseling, training in media arts and preparation for college and careers. YesPhilly (Youth Empowerment Services) provides a wide-range of opportunities for more than 200 disconnected high school students each year. Students work individually with counselors to develop life and personal skills, create goals and establish a student development plan. Students participate in small classes that are at the appropriate level and that provide varied approaches to learning that are hands-on, relevant and interactive.



## SCHOOL SPOTLIGHTS

### BOSTON DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY | [WWW.BACADEMY.ORG/](http://WWW.BACADEMY.ORG/) BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) is an alternative public charter high school located in Roxbury, Massachusetts. BDEA was created to serve Boston Public School students who are over-age for high school, have had poor attendance, were held back in 8th grade, are not getting the attention in class that they need to succeed and/or has dropped out but is eager to come back to school to earn their diploma. BDEA is a student-centered, competency-based school, and uses neither Carnegie units (A, B, C, D, F) nor traditional grade levels (9th, 10th, 11th, 12th) to measure progress.



## **BIG PICTURE LEARNING | [WWW.BIGPICTURE.ORG/](http://WWW.BIGPICTURE.ORG/)**

Big Picture Learning (BPL) puts students at the center of their own learning. Hundreds of BPL network schools in the United States and around the world work together and in their communities to reimagine and reshape education. Each student at a Big Picture Learning school is part of a small learning community of 15 students called an advisory. Each advisory is supported and led by an advisor, a teacher who works closely with the group of students and forms personalized relationships with each advisee. Each student works closely with his or her advisor to identify interests and personalize learning. The student as the center of learning model engages and challenges each student and makes learning authentic and relevant. Each student has an internship where he or she works closely with a mentor, learning in a real world setting. Parents and families are actively involved in the learning process, helping to shape each student's learning plan, and are enrolled as resources to the school community. The result is a student-centered learning design, where students are actively invested in their learning and are challenged to pursue their interests by a supportive community of educators, professionals, and family members.

## **OPPORTUNITY HIGH SCHOOL | [WWW.OPP.ORG/](http://WWW.OPP.ORG/) HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT**

Opportunity High School (OHS) provides the three R's necessary to be successful in school: Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. The school is a small, academically-rigorous diploma-granting high school which combines the unique skills and expertise of Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) and Hartford Public Schools (HPS), the two school partners. School governance is shared equally between the school system and OPP. In addition to HPS instruction, each student is enrolled in OPP's relationship-intensive program and is assigned a Youth Development Specialist who helps them reach their academic goals, including post-secondary education goals and employment goals.

Opportunity High School serves students that are under-credited and have not experienced success in a traditional high school setting. OHS provides the individualized attention and intensive support services that help youth discover a path to academic success.

# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL READY FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

### SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO PREVENT DISCONNECTION FROM HIGH SCHOOL

1. *Ensure that programs incorporate “elements of success:” rigor and academic support, relationships, college knowledge and access, relevance, youth-centered programming, and effective instruction.*
2. *Increase the number of dedicated staff, counselors, and mentors to promote the well-being of young men of color; invest in teacher and staff professional development; and implement trauma-informed approaches.*
3. *Find out how boys and men of color are faring academically.*
4. *Become a mentor, ensure there are quality mentoring programs in your area, and incorporate mentoring into your education and community and/or youth development program.*
5. *Improve school climate and eliminate zero-tolerance policies to help reduce the school-to-prison pipeline.*
6. *Implement positive behavior and restorative discipline practices.*
7. *Confirm that policies and practices promote college and career readiness for all high-school students, including young men of color with disabilities.*

### SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DISCONNECTING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

8. *Establish a timely and accurate early warning signs tracking system.*
9. *Identify students who are chronically absent from school and address their needs through strategies such as mentorship and parent/family outreach and engagement.*
10. *Discover, target, and design systems for over-age and under-credited youth who are likely to get off track before earning their diploma.*
11. *Ensure curricula are culturally competent and incorporate social and emotional learning.*

### SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WHO HAVE DISCONNECTED FROM HIGH SCHOOL

12. *Use data to make an economic case for investing in reconnecting students who have left school.*
13. *Conduct segmentation analyses.*
14. *Emphasize the importance of Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) partnering to create multiple pathways to graduation.*
15. *Leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 to implement a statewide reengagement system and/or use average daily attendance funds to reconnect disconnected youth at scale.*
16. *Eliminate seat-time requirements and time-based graduation requirements in favor of performance-based ones.*
17. *Utilize blended learning strategies and other forms of learning via technology.*
18. *Consider comprehensive residential programs.*
19. *Create or expand reengagement centers.*



## STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

Some of the most effective strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across the My Brother's Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place integrated approaches can be a particularly useful place to start.

- Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.
- Use a racial and gender equity lens and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of your work.
- Gather data on your community's disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilots site.
- Learn from networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.

## NOTES

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3. Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., DePaoli, J., Fox, J., Gomperts, J., Ingram, E., and Maushard, M. (2015). "2015 Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic." Baltimore, MD: America's Promise, Civic Enterprise and Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education.
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12. Source: <http://www.mentoring.org/why-mentoring/mentoring-impact/>
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14. Source: Dignity in Schools Campaign's Fact Sheet: Pathways to Pathways.
15. Richards, H., Brown, A., and Forde, T. (2004). "Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy," Practitioner Brief Series. Denver: National Center for Culturally Responsive Education Systems.
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ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN\\_MBKA\\_TOOLKIT](http://FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN_MBKA_TOOLKIT)

# SECTION D: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR COMPLETE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING



# OVERVIEW

Postsecondary education and training is more critical than ever. The job market is increasingly populated by middle- and high-skilled positions. Conversely, low-skilled jobs, which once allowed those with only a high-school credential or less to secure a decent paycheck, are becoming harder to find. Estimates show that jobs requiring a postsecondary credential will increase to 63 percent of the economy before 2020.<sup>1</sup> A postsecondary credential is essential to the social and economic mobility of young men of color and their families. As the Center on Education and the Workforce found, “postsecondary education has become the gatekeeper to the middle class and upper class.”<sup>2</sup> Young people who are born into the bottom 20 percent and go on to obtain a college degree improve their odds of getting out of the bottom bracket of income distribution by over 50 percent.”<sup>3</sup>

## VOICES

*“Before I continue, I have to tell you, I’m no great scholar. In fact, in the traditional opinion of success, I am behind. Twenty-three years old, no degrees, though I have always loved to learn. I, like many young men growing up in the postindustrial ruins of the old American Dream, found myself disengaged with the concept of education at an early age.*

*A lack of connection results in people losing the love of learning. I know that at one point I had lost my love of learning.*

*Thankfully, I experienced Gateway to College, or else I probably would have never regained my love for learning. I discovered that learning comes in many forms to those who have curiosity about the world. We can learn from mentors, professors, and especially other students, as long as we keep our minds open to new information. Some information even conflicts with what we think we already know.*

*Education is communication. Listening and learning from the people and opportunities that change the course of our lives. It is more important now than ever for students who have fallen behind to re-engage.”*

*—Jahath Harriott Gateway Graduate*

*Source: <http://www.gatewaytocollege.org/success-story-2.html>*

Transitioning to and completing postsecondary education and training poses unique challenges for disconnected boys and young men of color. Many report that no one showed them how to apply to college or helped them figure out how to pay for it. Other barriers include the lack of support and resources needed to navigate educational institutions and systems, of necessary life and fiscal management skills, and of general advisement and assistance. Another common obstacle is the requirement to complete noncredit-bearing remediation courses, which expend grants and scholarships.<sup>4</sup>

Connecting disconnected boys and young men of color to postsecondary education requires multiple entry points attuned to different types of young people with different strengths who face different obstacles. Developmental and remediation coursework must be crafted to ensure students develop the skills and competencies they need to get into credit-bearing courses. Similarly, GED programs and adult education program curricula should ensure graduates are college ready. Building pipelines to cultivate a seamless transition from high school to college is critical for all students, especially young men of color at high risk of disconnection. Participating in quality college prep programs and “bridge programs” the summer before the freshman year of college helps boost college readiness.<sup>5</sup>



Once they matriculate into college or training programs, disconnected boys and young men of color need academic and systemic supports to ensure they attain a credential. First-year college supports are critical to student success. Higher-education institutions—in partnership with policymakers, high-school staff, community-based organizations, and young men of color themselves—need to address racial and gender achievement and opportunity gaps in postsecondary education.<sup>6</sup> The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework<sup>vii</sup> developed at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education<sup>7</sup> highlights activities that boost achievement among young men of color in higher education:

- Classroom experiences in which teaching practices are engaging, and young men of color speak and participate regularly and are encouraged to be academically successful regardless of their previous level of academic preparation.
- Out-of-school engagement in which young men of color leverage campus resources and opportunities, including student leadership roles.
- Enriched educational experiences such as studying abroad, having relationships with faculty, and conducting research.
- Graduate school or career preparation in which young men of color are prepared to compete for positions in their fields, helped to navigate race dynamics in their future workplaces, and supported and prepared to pursue a graduate education.<sup>8</sup>

## VOICES

*“The counselors seek you out. They come talk to you, and they make you stay involved with the program and also they kind of assist you in helping you figure out what you want to do or if you have any problems.”*

– Gateway to College participant

*“They are just more on top of you. They give you a lot of time to do the work, but if they see you \not doing anything, because I do sometimes do that. I try to get good grades, but they will talk to me about it. Or if I am disrupting the class, if I am talking, because I talk a lot...so that’s pretty good... and the counselors are all pretty cool.”*

– Gateway to College participant

Source: Gateway to College National Network’s blog  
*Everybody will Eventually be Teacher’s Pet*

# STRATEGIES FOR TAKING ACTION

## ► FORM PARTNERSHIPS AMONG HIGH SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, AND POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS.

Members of the Gateway to College Network establish partnerships to offer high-school dropouts—and students on the verge of dropping out—a chance to earn a high-school diploma while also earning college credits. Use the [Gateway to College Network Map](#) to find a Gateway College program near you.

### Gateway to College Model: Essential Components

1. **Significant Dual Credit.** Integrated academic plans that lead to high-school diplomas and allow opportunity youth to earn college credit.
2. **Sustainable Partnerships.** Formal agreements reached by school districts, colleges, and community organizations to ensure the financial sustainability of programs.
3. **Holistic Student Supports.** Comprehensive supports that address emotional, social, and academic needs and are provided by “Resource Specialists.” All staff and faculty use “strength-based” and “solution-focused” approaches.
4. **Innovative Teaching and Learning.** Innovative, progressive strategies such as creating a community of learners.
5. **Intentional Collaboration.** Highly collaborative environments where staff and faculty work together, participate in professional development, and network with other program staff.

View the full description of the five essential elements of the [Gateway to College Model](#) and the associated commitments. Also, learn more about the core elements of the Gateway to College model and how sites across the nation are adapting it for the local context by reading MDRC’s report, [“Gateway to College: Lessons from Implementing a Rigorous Academic Program for At-risk Young People”](#)

Additionally, read the Gateway to College National Network’s [Student Success Plan](#), [“Constructing an Evidence-based Students Support System that Promotes College Completion.”](#) The brief highlights how the Student Success Plan (SSP), a comprehensive case management tool, can be used to obtain information in the areas of engagement, structured pathways, and student supports (including the connection to student outcomes and how to measure it).



► **DESIGN PATHWAYS THAT PROVIDE ENRICHED ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND BRIDGE PROGRAMMING AND POSTSECONDARY SUPPORT SPECIFICALLY FOR 16- TO 24-YEAR OLDS WHO ARE OFF-TRACK TO GRADUATE OR ARE DISCONNECTED FROM EDUCATION AND WORK.**

Jobs for the Future's [Back on Track Model](#) is designed specifically to put opportunity youth on a pathway to a postsecondary credential. The model has three program phases: enriched preparation, postsecondary bridging, and first-year support. The Back on Track Model has been adopted by the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund's 21 communities as well as affiliated national organizations, including YouthBuild, the Conservation Corps, and the National Youth Employment Coalition. Communities can use the model to design or improve programs—including alternative schools and bridge programs—that provide diplomas or diploma equivalents for opportunity youth. Leaders can also use the Back on Track Model as a framework to assess strengths and address weaknesses in partnership and pathway designs. View the report, "[Back on Track: Pathways through Postsecondary](#)," which outlines the key elements and operational features of the model.

The Jobs for the Future [Back on Track Model](#) describes important phases and critical features of a pathway design to postsecondary credentials for opportunity youth.

Enriched preparation

- College-going and career-ready culture
- College and career ready curriculum and instruction
- Intentional use of time to customize instruction and accelerate learning
- Personalized guidance and support

Postsecondary bridging

- Supported dual enrollment
- A focus on college knowledge and success strategies
- Personalized guidance and connection to best bets
- First-year support
- Support for students to earn credits predictive of completion
- Just-in-time support to ensure persistence
- Building attachment to postsecondary education

View the [Back on Track: Pathways through Postsecondary](#) for a list of operational features for each of the elements listed above.

► **DEVELOP MULTIPLE ON-RAMPS AND OFF-RAMPS WHEN STUDENTS NEED TO START OR STOP POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION.**

Beyond the common academic hurdles all students face, disconnected boys and young men of color often must deal with personal and family obligations that require flexible academic schedules and accommodations, allowing them to take time off from school and plug back in when they are ready and able. The report "[Opening the Door](#)," by Jobs for the Future, provides information about on-ramps for disconnected youth, including design examples, roles community based-organizations can play, and public funding streams that can be leveraged.

► **IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF REMEDIAL COURSEWORK AND GED PROGRAMS AND ADOPT COMPETENCY-BASED PRINCIPLES INSTEAD OF RELYING ON SEAT-TIME.**

Developmental or remedial education, as well as adult education programs and GED programs, should focus on building the skills and competencies students need to get into and through credit-bearing courses. Ways to do this well are detailed in “[Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education: A Joint Statement](#)” by the Charles A. Dana Center, Complete College America, Inc., the Education Commission of the States, and Jobs for the Future. Additionally, higher education institutions should minimize barriers between credit and noncredit-bearing education, and adopt practices and policies that improve linkages between the two. Tips and examples for doing so through strategies such as experiential learning can be found on page 12 of the report, “[Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: Creating a Competency-Based Qualifications Framework for Postsecondary Education and Training](#),” by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and the Center for Law and Social Policy. Also, Lumina Foundation’s [Degree Qualification Profile](#) provides a framework for the proficiencies students should master at various stages of postsecondary education.





# FIELD FAVORITES

## Adapting Postsecondary Bridge Strategies for Disconnected Youth

Postsecondary bridging strategies are widely used with vulnerable high-school graduates. These strategies provide students with the opportunity to experience the college campus at an early stage; foster their familiarity with campus and classroom culture; and develop skill sets, behaviors tied to academic success, and so forth. Some communities that have had early success with these strategies have begun to adapt them for use with disconnected youth—particularly older youth and those who are system-involved.

Jobs for the Future is a national nonprofit that develops innovative career pathways, educational resources, and public policies to increase college readiness and career success, and to build a more highly skilled workforce. “[Crossing the Divide: An Emerging Typology of Postsecondary Bridging for Opportunity Youth](#)” is a brief by the organization that highlights evidence-informed bridge programs designed specifically for disconnected youth who have shown early indications of success. The three types of postsecondary bridging for older, underserved youth described in the brief are:

### I. Dropout Recovery with Embedded Bridging

Until fairly recently, alternative schools and GED programs focused primarily on helping youth recover credits or pass high-school equivalency exams to obtain a credential. About five years ago, new efforts emerged to push toward college readiness as the goal for youth in these alternative schools and programs. Some programs, such as College, Career, and Technology Academy (CCTA) in Texas, began to embed postsecondary bridging in their high-school programming. The intent is multifaceted: to explicitly signal to youth that college is the goal, to give youth a head start on college, and to provide them with experience on a college campus to build their confidence and knowledge about college.

### II. Short-Term Bridging into Postsecondary Education

There have been longstanding efforts to offer bridge supports to high-school graduates to augment their academic skills. Rarely has this option been available, however, for off-track youth and recovered dropouts. LifeLink, in New York City, exemplifies this approach, which bolsters traditional academic prep with skill- and resiliency-building for more vulnerable youth. This approach can be especially useful in communities that seek to draw youth from a range of diploma- and GED-granting schools and programs into a set of summer bridge programs. It is important to note that LifeLink provides follow-up supports to youth once they complete the summer bridge phase.

### III. Re-entry with Bridging

Incarcerated youth face a host of barriers to reentry, including poor-quality schooling in juvenile facilities and a dearth of programs offering supported transitions into postsecondary education and training. As advocates and states seek to shrink the prison population, bridging programs for re-entry youth will increase in importance. Programs like the College Initiative in New York City, designed with the specific supports and opportunities needed for formerly incarcerated youth and adults, will be critical exemplars for the field.

For information on specific postsecondary bridge programs, securing resources for these types of programs, and the key features and potential indicators within each typology, view the [full brief](#).



► **BLEND EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES, COMBINE DELIVERY OF SERVICES ACROSS SYSTEMS, AND PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF SERVING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.**

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) documented how two states, Michigan and Connecticut, are using practices and policy to cultivate pathways to postsecondary institutions for opportunity youth. Three lessons at the intersection of policy and practice emerged: provide opportunity youth the chance to pursue education and job training simultaneously; deliver services in a coordinated, comprehensive manner that is easy to identify and access; and ensure staff and frontline workers are supported and trained to be caring, informed, and culturally competent. View [“Supporting Opportunity Youth on Postsecondary Pathways: Lessons from Two States”](#) for more information.

► **DEDICATE STAFF TO SUPPORT YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN NAVIGATING COLLEGE AND BALANCING PERSONAL, ACADEMIC, AND FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS.**

High-school and college counselors and staff should be trained and supported in their efforts to provide guidance that reflects students’ aspirations, and to focus on careers that have high demand and high wage projections—especially in the local community. Jobs for the Future’s guide, [“Counseling to Careers,”](#) arms college advisors with labor market information to develop more seamless postsecondary pathways. This approach helps students find their “best bet.” [Best Bet](#), a postsecondary program grounded in the student’s career interest, has strong retention and completion rates and is compressed/accelerated, leading to a credential that can be stackable or is defined by industry standards.

► **SUPPORT AND IMPROVE DUAL-ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS AND POLICIES.**

Dual enrollment allows high-school students to take college courses that count toward high-school graduation and also provides college credit—maximizing learning while minimizing the time it takes to obtain credentials. Dual enrollment provides unique opportunities for disconnected young men of color to have early college experiences and exposure while providing support services. Dual-enrollment policies vary from state to state. View Jobs for the Future’s database, [Dual Enrollment Policies that Support Early College Strategies for Low Income Youth](#), to find elements to include in dual-enrollment policies as well as state profiles that highlight exemplary policies.

► **ADOPT AN “ANTI-DEFICIT ACHIEVEMENT FRAMEWORK” WHEN WORKING WITH YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN POSTSECONDARY ENVIRONMENTS.**

Rhetoric around college attainment and achievement for young men of color often focuses on their deficits rather than their assets. Page 5 of the report, [“Black Male Student Success in Higher Education,”](#) by the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, shares a framework for shifting deficit-oriented questions to those that are “anti-deficit” across three areas on the education pipeline: precollege socialization and readiness, college achievement and postcollege success.

► **LEARN HOW HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ARE PROMOTING COLLEGE ATTAINMENT AND SUCCESS FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.**

Postsecondary institutions across the country are implementing a variety of approaches for ensuring college success for young men of color, such as creating student-led men’s groups/organizations, convening stakeholders for summits or campus initiatives, adopting culturally sensitive curricula in credit-bearing courses, and establishing permanent centers or institutes. To learn more about these strategies and the universities using them, view the report [“Men of Color: A Role for Policymakers in Improving the Status of Black Male Students in U.S. Higher Education,”](#) by the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

The report includes resources such as the [Eight Standards for Black Male Campus Initiatives](#) and policy recommendations to support college success for young men of color. Policy recommendations include: divesting funding from the criminal justice system and into the education system; investing in college preparation programs and ensuring that they are using and measuring goals; improving national data and information sharing on young men of color and postsecondary achievement; and protecting policies and practices that promote equity.

### ► PROMOTE STRATEGIES THAT ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT IN POSTSECONDARY PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Researchers have found a number of important benefits brought about when students are actively engaged, both in and outside of the college classroom; the most notable is that students are “more likely than their disengaged peers to persist through graduation.”<sup>9</sup> “The [Black Male Student Success in Higher Education](#) a report by the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, outlines positive social benefits for black males who are actively engaged in college settings, such as the development of “political acumen for success in professional settings in which they are racially underrepresented,” overcoming “previous educational and socioeconomic disadvantage,” and securing “social capital and access to resources, politically wealthy persons, and exclusive networks.”

### ► IDENTIFY FORMER STUDENTS WHO LEFT COLLEGE BEFORE ATTAINING A CREDENTIAL BUT WERE NEAR COMPLETION OR ENTITLED TO AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR OTHER CERTIFICATES.

The Institute for Education Policy spearheaded Project Win-Win, in which 61 postsecondary institutions were asked to complete two tasks within two years: retroactively award degrees to students who left school without a degree despite being qualified to receive one; and re-enroll students who left school when they were close to completing their degree. “[Searching for Our Lost Associate’s Degrees: Project Win-Win at the Finish Line](#)” shares the project’s results, lessons learned, and recommendations.

### ► ENCOURAGE CORPORATIONS AND BUSINESSES TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEE EFFORTS TO COMPLETE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING.

Businesses that employ opportunity youth and young men of color should promote and invest in employees who pursue education and training. Companies like Starbucks have recognized the importance of hiring not only opportunity youth but also prioritizing education and training by investing in personal development, providing tuition reimbursements, and creating flexible work schedules. [Starbucks College Achievement Plan](#), launched in 2014, allows employees who work 20 hours or more per week to earn a bachelor’s degree through Arizona State University’s online program, with full tuition reimbursement. Other companies—such as McDonalds, Target, Walmart, and UPS—have also implemented tuition reimbursement programs for their employees.



## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

### LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

**55,000 DEGREES** | [WWW.55000DEGREES.ORG](http://WWW.55000DEGREES.ORG)

55,000 Degrees is a public-private partnership with a mission to launch Louisville into the top tier of competitor cities with the bold goal of adding 40,000 bachelor's degrees and 15,000 associate degrees by 2020. The partnership's five objectives are to:

- i. Create and support a college-going culture.
- ii. Use the business community's unique points of leverage to accelerate attainment.
- iii. Prepare students for success in college, career, citizenship and life.
- iv. Make post-secondary education accessible and affordable.
- v. Increase educational persistence, performance and progress.

55,000 Degrees has identified “leakage points” where cities and counties are losing potential college graduates, including students that:

- Don't graduate from high school or don't graduate “ready” to go on to college.
- Graduate high school, but don't enroll in college.
- Enroll in college, but don't complete their studies.

The [College Transition Action Network \(CTAN\)](#), an initiative of 55,000 Degrees, was created because many high school students that make plans to enroll in college during their senior year do not actually attend college in the fall. Somewhere in between, their plans fall through. This phenomenon is called “summer melt.” CTAN is a collaboration to improve supports for college-intending students at risk of “melting” the summer after high school graduation in order to increase enrollment in postsecondary institutions and improve persistence through the first year of college.

CTAN is working to:

1. Increase college knowledge and readiness of students to build a strengthened college-going identity;
2. Improve partnerships and seamless pathways to strengthen supports and programs for students; and
3. Better understand of why students “melt”, research effective practices to reduce melt, and evaluate CTAN's efforts leading to improved policies.

[Summer Coaching](#) is one of a couple of high impact projects being developed as part of CTAN. Summer Coaching provides graduating high school students with near peer mentors who can help support them as they graduate and start college. The coaches are typically students from colleges and universities that the students in the county typically attend.

Coaches are focused on helping students prepare financially, academically, socially, and emotionally for college.

As current college students, they know what it takes to be successful in college in spite of all the obstacles new college students often face.



# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR COMPLETE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OR TRAINING

1. *Form partnerships among high schools, employers, and postsecondary institutions.*
2. *Design pathways that provide enriched academic preparation and bridge programming, and postsecondary support geared specifically to 16- to 24-year olds who are off-track to graduate or are disconnected from education and work.*
3. *Develop multiple on- and off-ramps for use when students need to start or stop postsecondary education.*
4. *Improve the quality of remedial coursework and GED programs, and adopt competency-based principles instead of relying on seat-time.*
5. *Blend education and workforce opportunities, combine delivery of services across systems, and provide professional development for staff serving disconnected young men of color.*
6. *Dedicate staff to support men of color in navigating college and balancing personal, academic, and financial obligations.*
7. *Support and improve dual-enrollment programs and policies.*
8. *Adopt an “Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework” when working with young men of color in postsecondary environments.*
9. *Learn how higher education institutions are promoting college attainment and success for young men of color.*
10. *Promote strategies that encourage and support engagement in postsecondary programs for young men of color.*
11. *Identify former students who left college before attaining a credential but were near completion or entitled to an associate degree or other certificates.*
12. *Encourage corporations and businesses to support employee efforts to complete postsecondary education or training.*

### STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

Some of the most effective strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across the My Brother’s Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place integrated approaches can be a particularly useful place to start.

- Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.
- Use a racial and gender equity lens and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of your work.
- Gather data on your community’s disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilots site.
- Learn from networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.

## NOTES

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9. Harper, S., and Harris, F. (2012). "Men of Color: Role for Policymakers in Improving the Status of Black Male Students in U.S. Higher Education." Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.



ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN\\_MBKA\\_TOOLKIT](https://forumfyi.org/oyn_mbka_toolkit)

# SECTION E: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR SUCCESSFULLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE



# OVERVIEW

The unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 is double that of the national unemployment rate.<sup>1</sup> The numbers are even worse for young men of color who are not in school. According to Measure of America's report, "[Zeroing In on Place and Race](#)," the employment rate of people in this age group who are out of school is 71.7 percent for whites, 68.7 percent for Latinos, and 46.9 percent for blacks.<sup>2</sup> More than half of black males ages 16 to 24 who are out of school are also not employed. The high rates of youth unemployment is particularly troubling because of the critical role early work experience plays in the lives of opportunity youth and young men of color. The most immediate benefit is a paycheck—many opportunity youth must support their families financially. Long-term benefits are equally important; summer jobs, internships, apprenticeships, and other early work experiences are positively connected to later-life employment and higher wages.<sup>3</sup>

As disconnected boys and young men of color search for a job, they often struggle to demonstrate to employers that they have sufficient "employability skills" or "soft skills," job-specific skills, prior work experience, and educational credentials.

Opportunity youth face a number of barriers, among them limited access to reliable transportation; the need to balance school, work, and family obligations; and a lack of the social capital and social networks that include individuals in a position to hire or refer them. Despite these obstacles, opportunity youth remain optimistic and determined to be successful. Over 75 percent of disconnected youth believe that they are personally responsible for getting a good education and job, and 73 percent are very confident they will achieve their goals.<sup>4</sup>

These young people need supports that will place them on a pathway to employment and ensure their success after they obtain a job. To provide these supports, stakeholders across sectors must act in concert. Businesses that provide jobs for disconnected young men of color are often isolated, lack partners, and cannot provide the training and postplacement support necessary to ensure the long-term success of these young men. Alternatively, nonprofits provide training and support, but this means very little if the young person can't get a job at the end of the program. Youth employment training programs and local education agencies (LEAs) should engage employers to play a leading role as partners to inform training program curricula. Who knows better what skill sets and mind-sets young people need than potential employers?

Businesses should examine their hiring practices and human resource strategies to eliminate any unintentional barriers that prevent disconnected young men of color from making it through their recruitment pipelines. Companies are encouraged to be proactive in implementing inclusive hiring and talent practices. Challenging the perceptions and stereotypes of opportunity youth and young men of color among employers is critical. Research shows a black male needs some college credit under his belt to have a similar chance of securing a job as a white male without a high-school diploma.<sup>5</sup>

In the past several years, corporations have recognized the business and economic imperative to recruit the untapped talent of opportunity youth and young men of color. As described in My Brother's Keeper Alliance's "[Playbook for Corporations and Businesses](#)," businesses that support young men of color will build their brand, diversify their talent pool, and reap recruitment and retention benefits. For example, graduates of This Way Ahead–Gap Inc.'s paid internship program for low-income opportunity youth—have higher engagement scores than and double the retention rate of employees who did not participate in the program.<sup>6</sup>



A good first step is to provide young men of color early work experiences in supportive environments through pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, internships, and summer or first-job experiences. Disconnected boys and young men of color in particular can benefit from career pathway models, which align and connect programs and allow youth to attain stackable credentials, incorporate multiple entry and exit points, target high-growth sectors and engage employers, and receive support services.<sup>7</sup> Other strategies are: (1) supporting equitable transportation that can benefit young people in all communities, including low-income communities and those of color, and provide access to the local economy; (2) encouraging employers to “ban the box” and adopt fair-chance hiring policies that do not require questions about an applicant’s criminal convictions in the early stages of the application process; and (3) providing opportunities to leverage the assets of disconnected youth and young men of color, such as creating entrepreneurial programs.

# STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## ► ENCOURAGE YOUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO RECOGNIZE THE UNTAPPED TALENT REPRESENTED BY DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

My Brother's Keeper Alliance's "[Playbook for Corporations and Businesses](#)" is tailored to the unique needs of corporations that are improving their diversity practices, talent strategies, and corporate citizenship efforts to support boys and young men of color. The playbook includes assessment tools such as metrics to drive results and a fair evaluation and hiring checklist. Businesses can also initiate programs such as talent initiatives, mentoring, tutoring, and job shadowing.

## ► CHANGE EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTION OF DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WITH ATYPICAL RÉSUMÉS.

Ask business leaders to avail themselves of the tools and resources provided by [Grads of Life](#), a campaign seeking to change employers' views of young people with nontraditional experience. Grads of Life helps employers to fulfill their talent needs by building employment pathways for 16- to 24-year-olds who have not yet obtained a college credential. In addition to persuasive advertisements, the campaign features resources that can help employers develop sources of talent in the areas of training, mentoring, internships, and hiring initiatives. The Grads of Life tools for gaining company buy-in and conducting cost-benefit analysis can help get companies onboard.

The My Brother's Keeper Alliance's [Why Corporations and Businesses Should Support Boys and Young Men of Color: A business case for securing equal opportunities for all populations, including boys and young men of color](#) highlights the following business drivers for supporting boys and men of color.

- **Build your Brand.** Businesses that make a commitment to furthering the MBK mission will not only see the impact in the community, but also within their own corporate walls. Supporting BYMOC provides businesses the opportunity to build brand equity, diversify their talent pool, and experience recruiting and retention benefits.
- **Diversifies Your Talent Pool.** Businesses can promote a diverse employee population by aligning their talent strategy to support the mission of MBK. A diverse workforce combines employees of different backgrounds, genders, cultures, races, sexual orientations, nationalities, religions, abilities, and with varied experiences that together generate a more creative, innovative, and productive workforce.
- **Provides Recruiting and Retention Benefits.** By supporting BYMOC through talent programs and corporate citizenship initiatives, businesses position themselves as organizations that reflect the diverse reality of the country, which attracts potential employees from all backgrounds.
- **Overall Economic Benefits.** Businesses can be part of a larger solution and benefit the economy as a whole by supporting BYMOC. Continued inequality is a burden to the economy, and businesses can take active steps to address these inequalities by supporting BYMOC during their academic experience and by providing opportunities for YMOC to transition into and succeed in the workplace.

Access the business case materials and the [My Brother's Keeper Alliance Playbook for Corporations and Businesses](#) for data and information that reinforces the economic and business case for supporting boys and men of color as well as tools and resources to help companies support boys and men of color.





## FIELD FAVORITES

Gap Inc.'s "[Connecting Youth and Business: A Toolkit for Employers](#)" highlights step-by-step instructions for companies interested in supporting, training, and/or hiring disconnected youth. The toolkit highlights a road map to navigate four important stages.

### **Assess and Select | *What does my company have to offer?***

- » Assess your company's resources, culture, and readiness for engagement with opportunity youth.
- » Select one of the three lanes of engagement—Soft Skills, Work-Ready Skills, or Learn & Earn—by which companies can provide youth with skills for employment and adulthood.

### **Scope | *What are my goals and program parameters?***

- » Scope your program. This will help you understand how to apply your company resources to build a successful program.

### **Plan and Pilot | *What are the key steps to take to launch a pilot?***

- » Build your plan and create goals and metrics. Experiment by conducting a pilot study, soliciting feedback, and understanding the plan's impact and potential business value.

### **Refine and Grow | *How will the program continue to develop?***

- » Work to refine the pilot based on participant feedback, and build a program for the long term.

For more information on how to create a program for disconnected youth or revamp an existing one, as well as how to assess your company's resources and readiness, access the full [toolkit](#)



### ► ALIGN TRAINING PROGRAMS TO REFLECT EMPLOYER NEEDS.

Employment training programs should work in tandem with potential employers to identify the specific skill sets—including “employability skills”—they look for during the hiring process. For example, Year Up works with companies to determine the types of skills they desire. Year Up participants spend six months in a classroom learning those skills and the following six months interning with a partner company. Consider [becoming a Corporate Partner](#) or find out if there is a [Year Up program location](#) near you. Use the National Network of Business and Industry Association’s “[Common Employability Skills](#)” to view the types of noncognitive skills needed to be successful in today’s workplace.

### ► USE AN INTERMEDIARY TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Talent recruitment and development groups such as [LeadersUp](#) help to link opportunity youth to mid- to-large sized businesses interested in identifying and retaining untapped talent. By using tailored talent recruitment strategies, data-driven analytics, evidence-based practices, and ongoing employee support, LeadersUp has lowered interview-to-hire ratios and increased retention and progression rates. The group is leading pilot programs in Chicago; Columbus, Ohio; and Los Angeles. Additional pilots and upcoming projects created to connect opportunity youth to employment pathways include the mentorship model implemented by UPS to support young men of color transitioning to management positions, and FedEx’s national corporate alliance with the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative and developing pilots. Learn more in their [Two Year Report](#).

### ► ADOPT SECTORAL STRATEGIES BY WORKING WITH A PARTNERSHIP, IDENTIFYING SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES, AND BUILDING A PROGRAM BASED ON INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC NEEDS.

The sectoral initiative approach is a workforce development method for helping a business create industry-specific solutions and provide support to both improve workers’ skills and meet the needs of employers. This approach typically focuses on low-income individuals. JobsFirstNYC’s report, “[Optimizing Talent: The Promise and the Perils of Adapting Sectoral Strategies for Young Workers](#),” highlights five common program elements of sectoral initiatives: (1) a high degree of organizational capacity, with the ability to adapt; (2) strong links to local employers that result in an understanding of the target occupation and connections to jobs; (3) job readiness, basic skills, and hands-on technical skills training offered through the lens of a specific occupation or sector; (4) recruitment, screening, and intake processes that result in a good match among the applicant, the program, and the target occupation; and (5) individualized services to support training completion and success on the job. Read the report to learn more about the types of participants the sectoral approaches are particularly suited for, the use of youth development in sectoral initiatives, and the challenges associated with sectoral strategies.

► **ENCOURAGE LOCAL SMALL BUSINESSES TO BECOME A PART OF THE SOLUTION TO COMBAT YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT.**

The U.S. Small Business Administration and Small Business Majority launched the [Commitment to Youth Opportunity Initiative](#) in June 2014. Under the initiative, small businesses make a pledge to create meaningful opportunities for disconnected youth. In addition to outlining six actions small businesses can commit to, the initiative provides resources and tools for both small business leaders and young people interested in starting their own business.

► **TRAIN, HIRE, MENTOR, GRADUATE, AND REVIVE.**

Opportunity Nation released the report “[We Got This: A Call to For Youth Employment](#),” which provides actions employers, youth, community leaders, nonprofits, philanthropy, education institutions, and government can take to (1) [train](#) young adults through work-based learning; (2) [hire](#) youth and increase employer demand for wider pipelines of young talent; (3) [mentor](#) youth through work-based, service learning or civic engagement experiences; (4) [graduate](#) more students with post-secondary credentials and boost high school diploma rates; and (5) [revive](#) opportunity by helping young, nonviolence offenders get on paths to careers and stable productive lives youth.

► **CREATE, PRESERVE, AND EXPAND YOUTHBUILD PROGRAMS.**

Communities should follow New York City’s lead in supplementing YouthBuild grants provided by the U.S. Department of Labor to expand YouthBuild sites and to preserve any existing sites that do not have federal funding. YouthBuild is a comprehensive, yearlong program that engages disconnected youth full-time. Participants’ time is divided equally between working toward their GED or diploma and learning employment skills. They get hands-on experience building affordable housing, earn a stipend, and internalize the ethic of service and leadership. [Find a YouthBuild](#) program near you.

The [Commitment to Youth Opportunity Initiative Pledge](#) invites small business to take the following pledge.

Over the next year, my business commits to take one or more of these actions:

1. Increase the number of opportunity youth hires within my company.
2. Expand full or part-time internship or apprenticeship placements for opportunity youth within my company.
3. Adopt or expand work-based learning opportunities through a high-quality mentoring or training program for local opportunity youth.
4. Partner with state and/or local Workforce Boards to identify prospective youth for job placement within my company.
5. Partner with a local nonprofit, One-Stop Career Center, Community College, or other education system to identify opportunity youth to fill internships and/or entry-level positions in my business.
6. Work with my company’s suppliers to assess opportunities to hire, train or mentor opportunity youth.

Take the [pledge](#) and receive information and resources on your commitment.



## ► SUPPORT AND UTILIZE NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE CONSERVATION CORPS.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) manages AmeriCorps, which involves young people in service at organizations across the country. Three new AmeriCorps programs focus on opportunity youth. The [Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps](#) enrolls formerly incarcerated youth and those at risk of being incarcerated in national service projects. [ServiceWorks](#) uses AmeriCorps VISTA members to target 16- to 24-year-olds in 10 cities: Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. [Summer Opportunity AmeriCorps](#) addresses the summer opportunity gap by helping young people who serve their communities earn money for college. [The Corps Network](#) connects and supports over 130 corps comprehensive youth development programs that engage 16- to 25-year-olds in service projects, job training, and academic programming. The Corps Network has a wealth of resources, including the [Snapshot: Youth Corps and Workforce Partnerships](#), which highlights strategies to leverage funding, co-enroll young people, and co-locate services between the workforce and corps programs; the [Civic Justice Corps: Transforming Reentry Through Service](#); and the “[Civic Justice Corps Toolkit](#),” which outlines a model to support successful re-entry and diversion through service projects.

## ► LEVERAGE THE NEW WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA), AND HELP YOUR LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD (WIB) USE THIS FUNDING TO CREATE A SYSTEM OF COMPREHENSIVE CAREER PATHWAYS.

WIOA requires that a significantly higher proportion of federal workforce funds be spent on out-of-school youth than was required in the previous version of the law. Across the country, Workforce Investment Boards will shift approximately \$140 million from serving in-school youth to serving out-of-school youth. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for local WIBs to develop a system of career pathways connecting disconnected youth to jobs. To get a sense of the different roles stakeholders can play to ensure the public work force system meets the employment needs and interests of job seekers facing barriers, take a look at Heartland Alliance’s “[WIOA Implementation and Planning Toolkit](#).” Additionally, CLASP’s “[WIOA Game Plan](#)” provides a wealth of information on the new law and includes questions to consider when drafting state plans, strategies on implementing the new required measures, and ways to obtain knowledge about opportunities for action.

## ► PASS LOCAL OR STATE BUDGETS THAT SUBSIDIZE EMPLOYMENT FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH.

Summer and first jobs are vital to providing young people exposure to the workforce and experiences that support future career successes. Additionally, more efforts that provide longer-term work experience and opportunities for older disconnected are critically needed. Youth employment initiatives should provide comprehensive supports targeting older youth. For example, the [Seattle Mayor’s Youth Employment Initiative](#) has invested 2.5 million dollars and leveraged additional private-sector investment to expand youth employment opportunities for 14- to 24-year olds, first jobs for low-income youth, and internships throughout the city. Participants receive comprehensive work-readiness supports, including case management and transportation to and from internship sites. Summer youth job initiatives recruit young people primarily through schools. This means that most summer jobs go to students who enrolled in school, rather than to disconnected youth. Specialized recruitment approaches are needed to target longer-term jobs for disconnected youth who need them most.

## ► USE STATE WORKFORCE DATA.

Seven states have publicized the average earnings of education and training program graduates. Additionally, states such as Florida are using data to better align the education and training supply with actual employer demand. The Workforce Data Quality Campaign’s [State Blueprint](#) identifies key features of an aligned, inclusive, market-relevant state data system. Learn what [your state](#) is doing and find examples of how other states are using state-level workforce data strategically, such as expanding using labor market information, assessing employment outcomes, and implementing scorecards for students and workers.

## ► CONSTRUCT AND/OR STRENGTHEN YOUR STATE, REGIONAL, OR LOCAL CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM.

A career pathway system is a cohesive combination of partnerships, resources, policies, data, and shared performance measures that support the development, quality, scaling, and “dynamic sustainability” of career pathways and programs for youth and adults.<sup>8</sup> The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways has developed a [framework](#) that outlines the three core features of a career pathway, and provides recommended indicators and metrics that can be adopted by quality career pathways. For further information on constructing career pathways, reference “[Multimedia, Career Pathways Explained, Shared Vision, Strong Systems: The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework Version 1.0](#)” or “[Building Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery Systems: Examples of Effective Practice](#).”

Additionally, explore American Youth Policy Forum’s “[Top 5 Lessons from Miami: Career Pathways in Action](#).” This publication highlights the need for career pathways to involve (1) hands-on learning with high student engagement; (2) information about technical education, as well as current and projected careers; (3) supportive leaders, partners, and policies; (4) high expectations for students; and (5) students involved in work that supports their community.

## ► IMPLEMENT OR EXPAND APPRENTICESHIP AND PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS.

Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training models, which allow participants to learn while earning an income, boost lifetime wages by an average of \$300,000. Program graduates earn, on average, a starting salary of \$50,000.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Department of Labor released a toolkit titled “The Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeships,” which offers tips for a variety of stakeholders, including employers, colleges, training programs, state and local workforce systems, community-based organizations, and nonprofit intermediaries. The playbook provides guidance on how to allocate federal funds and resources to support registered apprenticeships.

A comprehensive youth employment services delivery system is a cross-system approach that provides young people in a community a wealth of options and coordinated support services. Young people can access integrated education, skills training and work experience on a pathway that leads to postsecondary or training credentials. Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) has identified five common elements of successful youth employment services delivery system.

1. A strong convening entity to amass stakeholders, shape a community vision, maximize resource sharing and hold systems accountable to that vision.
2. An effective administrative agent to work in partnership with the education system, other youth systems and community providers to assure that the vision of the convening entity is effectively implemented.
3. A well-trained case management arm which is responsible for engaging youth by identifying and meeting needs in the areas of education, employment, basic skills and wrap-around supports.
4. Strong partnerships across systems that serve youth, such as education, juvenile justice and child welfare systems, to share resources and provide additional support to very vulnerable youth.
5. High quality work experience and career exposure components which provide hands on exposure to the work place, instill appropriate work behaviors and ethics and allow for exploration of various occupations and career options.

View CLASP’s [Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery Systems: Examples of Effective Practice](#) for more information and strategies on building quality youth employment systems including profiles of communities implementing each element successfully.



## ► IDENTIFY FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES TO DEVELOP CAREER PATHWAYS.

Organizations such as public agencies, American-Indian tribes, community-based organizations, businesses, and nonprofits interested in identifying federal programs and resources that support entry-level opportunities for young people can reference the handbook “[Pathways for Youth Employment: Federal Resources for Employers](#).” This short guide provides an overview of American Job Centers, the Federal Bonding Program, AmeriCorps, and other resources.

## ► IDENTIFY PRIVATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO RE-ENGAGE DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS.

You may be eligible to apply for a grant from the [Youth Opportunity Fund](#) if you are located in Boston; Chicago; Dallas; Los Angeles; Miami; New York City; Newark; St. Louis, MO; San Francisco; or Washington, DC. The fund, led by Citi Foundation and the America’s Promise Alliance, subsidizes innovative ways to place low-income young adults on a path toward college and career success. Another unique resource opportunity is provided by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), which combines public and private resources to create and evaluate innovative community-based solutions that have evidence of results in low-income communities. SIF awards grants to intermediaries selected through a rigorous, open competition. Resources are directed toward promising nonprofits, as well as state and local governments. Two recent SIF grant recipients focus on opportunity youth. The first, the [Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential \(LEAP\)](#) initiative, led by the Annie E. Casey Family Foundation, concentrates on interventions that help system-involved youth connect to postsecondary education and employment. The second, [Opportunity Works](#), is led by Jobs for the Future and the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions. This project is using a collective impact approach to improving outcomes for opportunity youth and young men of color in 12 communities.

## ► SUPPORT AND IMPLEMENT EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION POLICES, AND ADOPT “BAN THE BOX” AND OTHER FAIR-CHANCE HIRING POLICIES.

Almost 33 percent of working-age Americans have a criminal record.<sup>10</sup> Current hiring practices often mandate the elimination of applicants with records before they can exhibit the required competencies and explain the context of the criminal record to prospective employers. “Ban the box” initiatives encourage employers to refrain from asking applicants about prior convictions until reaching the later stages of the hiring process in an effort to remove barriers to employment for individuals with arrest records. Progress in fair-chance hiring practices is being made across the private, public, and philanthropic sectors. Corporations such as Starbucks and Facebook have banned the box. President Obama has called for the banning of the box across the federal government and has encouraged corporations to sign the [Fair Chance Business Pledge](#). The Executives’ Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color, a network of national, regional, and community foundations, is driven by a bold vision that all boys and men of color will enjoy full inclusion in all the opportunities America has to offer. Members of this group have also stepped up to “ban the box” and adopt fair-chance practices during their internal hiring practices. The Executives’ Alliance created the [Ban the Box Philanthropy Challenge](#) to encourage other foundations to do the same.

The [White House Fair Chance Business Pledge](#) highlights practices businesses can take to eliminate barriers for people with criminal histories.

### Promote Fair Chance Hiring Practices by:

- Banning the box by delaying criminal history questions until later in the hiring process.
- Training human resources staff on making fair decisions regarding applicants with criminal records.
- Ensuring internships and job training are available to individuals with criminal records.
- Using reliable background check providers to help ensure accuracy.
- Hosting a Fair Chance and Opportunity Job Fair.

View the full list and take the pledge [here](#).

Transportation plays a critical role in linking people to opportunities in education, school, and health care, and far too many communities of color lack quality transportation options that are affordable and reliable. The [Transportation Equity Caucus](#) is working to promote policies that create affordable transportation options for all people; ensure fair access to quality jobs, workforce development, and contract opportunities in the transportation industry; promote healthy, safe, and inclusive communities; and invest equitably and focus on results.

► **UTILIZE BEST PRACTICES AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES IN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS SERVING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.**

Heartland Alliance's National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity recently outlined six practices and principles for youth employment programs serving opportunity youth in "[Providing True Opportunity for Opportunity Youth: Promising Practices and Principles for Helping Youth Facing Barriers to Employment](#)." The brief shares lists of existing employment program models and strategies and a list of important elements of comprehensive employment programs.



## FIELD FAVORITES

National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity is a division of Heartland Alliance dedicated to ending chronic unemployment and poverty. Their recent brief, [\*Providing True Opportunity for Opportunity Youth: Promising Practices and Principles for Helping Youth Facing Barriers to Employment\*](#), builds on existing literature to uncover promising practices in employment programming for opportunity youth facing some of the most challenging barriers to employment, such as being involved in the justice system or homeless. The brief highlights:

### Best practices associated with youth employment programming more broadly:

- A holistic approach that provides comprehensive services.
- Competent, well-trained staff members who can build relationships with participants and connections with employers.
- Inclusion of both basic academic and employability skills training.
- Programming that is relevant to young people and responsive to their input.
- Offering retention follow-up services and financial incentives such as wages or stipends.

### Six practices, principles and innovations for youth employment programs serving opportunity youth:

- Target and reach the youth who can benefit the most.
- Design program engagement to align with the realities of serving youth.
- Address the unique developmental needs of opportunity youth.
- Offer paid employment opportunities to educate youth on workplace success basics.
- Emphasize building trusting relationships with participants in staff hiring and training.
- Educate employers on the value and techniques for successfully employing opportunity youth.

### Essential components of an employment program:

- Recruitment and engagement of participants
- Assessment for interests, strengths, experience, skills, barriers and learning needs
- Basic academic skills coursework
- Work readiness or “soft skills” training
- “Hard skills” or occupational training
- Career exploration
- Job search assistance and training
- Work experience
- Interview preparation
- Employment-focused support services
- Connections to social services when needed
- Job development and placement services
- Job retention and follow-up





## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHTS

### HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

#### HARTFORD OPPORTUNITY YOUTH COLLABORATIVE | [YOUTHRECONNECT.ORG](http://YOUTHRECONNECT.ORG)

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative is a collective impact effort– chaired by the Mayor of Hartford and made up of leaders across education, youth development and workforce development – to support disconnected youth through results-based accountability.

Learn more about their [Education-Career Pathway System](#) model which provides multiple exit points, meets young people where they are, accounts for their “readiness” level and highlights essential components and phases.

#### Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative’s Key Principles:

- Meet youth where they are (no “wrong door” with multiple entry ways).
- Offer ongoing and consistent personalized guidance and support (which includes case management).
- Provide on-ramps to on-ramps (help for youth to overcome non-education and non-employment barriers so that they are able to take advantage of programs and services that prepare them for career education and work experience).

#### Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative’s Pathway System Phases:

- **Engagement:** This phase focuses on outreach to youth and engaging them in programs and services to encircle them with supportive services. The goal of this phase is to address non-education and non-employment barriers such as basic needs (housing, health, food security) and others (child care, transportation, etc.).
- **Preparation:** This phase provides basic education and skill development as well as career awareness and readiness. The goals of this phase is to achieve a high school diploma or equivalent (if needed), development of an individual career plan, measurable skill gains including literacy and/or numeracy gains of one or more educational functioning levels (EFL) and demonstrated proficiency of career readiness skills.
- **Bridging:** This phase provides postsecondary technical, professional, and/or college-level education plus work experience. Goals are attainment of stackable credentials recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor and Connecticut Department of Labor, enrollment in an accredited post-secondary education institution and employment in a job related to training that leads to careers with sustaining wages.
- **Retention:** This phase provides supports to ensure education and employment persistence and success. Examples include just-in-time supports and peer and professional networks. The goals for this phase are continued enrollment in postsecondary education (if applicable) and retained employment.

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, in partnership with Capital Workforce Partners, is a recipient of the Opportunity Works Social Impact Fund – an effort led by Jobs for the Future and Aspen Forum for Community Solutions.

Opportunity Works Hartford will serve opportunity youth – two-thirds of whom are young men of color – through programs that are comprised of partnerships between youth-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges.

Learn more about [Opportunity Works sites](#).

### NEW YORK CITY, N.Y., NEWARK, N.J. AND KANSAS CITY, MO.

#### PROJECT RISE | [WWW.NYC.GOV/HTML/CEO/HTML/INITIATIVES/SIF\\_RISE.SHTML](http://WWW.NYC.GOV/HTML/CEO/HTML/INITIATIVES/SIF_RISE.SHTML)

**Project Rise** serves 18- to 24-year olds that do not have a high school diploma and have been out of school and out of work for six or more months. The 12 month program provides paid internships, secondary education and case management to disconnected youth. At least half of the participants enter Project Rise with a sixth to eighth grade reading level. Participants are placed into cohorts of 25-30 individuals and in order to continue participating in the paid internships, participants are required to maintain regular attendance in the education component of the program. MDRC’s evaluation of the program found that, within 12 months of enrolling in the program, 25 percent of participants earned a secondary credential and 45 percent of the participants that entered the program with at ninth grade reading level or higher received a secondary credential. Additionally, 25 percent of participants gained employment within 12

months. For the full evaluation read MDRC report [Engaging Disconnected Young People in Education and Work: Findings from the Project Rise Implementation Evaluation.](#)



## BUSINESS SPOTLIGHTS

### THIS WAY AHEAD | [WWW.BEWHATSOEVER.COM/THISWAYAHEAD](http://WWW.BEWHATSOEVER.COM/THISWAYAHEAD)

This Way Ahead, launched in 2007, is Gap Inc.'s paid internship program providing low-income teens and young adults their first job experiences. Ninety-eight percent of participants identify as minority. The program provides participants training through a local non-profit, and store employees participate in training as volunteers. Participants receive virtual training and apply for online internships. Participating stores interview and hire interns, and interns work in the store for about 12 hours a week for ten weeks. Interns received ongoing support from nonprofit job coaches and store colleagues. At the conclusion of the internship qualified interns received offers for ongoing employment. In 2016, This Way Ahead is expanding across the nation and will operate in the following U.S. cities: Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

### 100,000 OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE | [WWW.100KOPPORTUNITIES.ORG/](http://WWW.100KOPPORTUNITIES.ORG/)

#### [Employer Coalition](#)

The 100,000 Opportunities Initiative is a coalition of leading U.S.-based companies committed to training and hiring 100,000 “opportunity youth” (16-24 year olds who face systemic barriers to jobs and education) by 2018 through apprenticeships, internships, and both part-time and full-time jobs. 100,000 Opportunities has hosted Opportunity Youth hiring fairs in Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago and Phoenix.

#### [Demonstration Cities](#)

Additionally, the 100,000 Opportunities Demonstration Cities (Chicago, Seattle, Phoenix, New York and Los Angeles) will participate in a national learning community and working to implement four key strategies:

1. **Commitments and call to action from local employers** – A number of large employers with a local presence will coalesce to set a substantial goal for employing former opportunity youth. This local call to action will be amplified by the aligned voices of local elected leaders – including mayors – and by the national campaign.
2. **Systems alignment and coordination across sectors** – A highly effective local backbone organization will manage and convene a cross-city and/or county collaborative that connects multiple public systems (and public revenue streams), Community-based providers, private funders, and local employers in order to align the supply of young workers with the demand of local employers. In doing so, these “collective impact” efforts will generate greater access to employment opportunities for young adults who are too often on the wrong side of the opportunity divide, including boys and men of color, immigrant youth, and young people aging out of the child welfare system.
3. **Innovation and acceleration** – Local collaboratives will partner with best-in-class innovators – such as Leaders Up, Arizona State University (ASU), YouthBuild USA, and Remit (UK) – to design effective employer-led pathways (e.g., that integrate needed training or education with employment), and to rapidly create prototypes for replication and scale. This work will be supported by a pooled grant-making fund managed by Aspen that aggregates investments from national and local funders of the 100,000 Initiative.
4. **Codify and share lessons learned for large scale adoption and impact** – The cities involved in this demonstration effort will be connected to each other through a national learning community. As part of the learning agenda for this work, Aspen and its partners will codify effective innovations in the development of accelerated employer-led pathways and design a “playbook” for other cities and companies to use in their efforts to close the talent gap and to bridge the supply of low income opportunity youth with the demand of local labor markets.



# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR SUCCESSFULLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE

1. Engage your business community to recognize the untapped talent represented by disconnected young men of color.
2. Change employers' perception of disconnected young men of color with atypical résumés.
3. Align training programs to reflect employer needs.
4. Use an intermediary to retain and recruit disconnected young men of color.
5. Adopt sectoral strategies by working with a partnership, identifying small- and medium-sized businesses, and building a program based on industry-specific needs.
6. Encourage local small businesses to become a part of the solution to combat youth unemployment.
7. Train, hire, mentor, graduate, and revive young men of color.
8. Create, preserve, and expand YouthBuild programs.
9. Support and utilize national service and the Conservation Corps.
10. Leverage the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and help your local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) use this funding to create a system of comprehensive career pathways.
11. Pass local or state budgets that subsidize employment for disconnected youth.
12. Use state workforce data.
13. Construct and/or strengthen your state, regional, and local career pathways system.
14. Implement or expand apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.
15. Identify federal programs and resources to develop career pathways.
16. Identify private funding opportunities to expand evidence-based approaches to reengaging disconnected young men of color with employment pathways.
17. Support and implement equitable transportation policies, and adopt "ban the box" and other fair-chance hiring policies.
18. Utilize best practices and positive youth development approaches in employment programs serving opportunity youth.

### STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

Some of the most effective strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across the My Brother's Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place integrated approaches can be a particularly useful place to start.

- Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.
- Use a racial and gender equity lens and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of your work.
- Gather data on your community's disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilots site.
- Learn from networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.

## NOTES

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4. Bridgeland, J., and Milano, J. (2012). "Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth." Washington, DC: Civic Enterprise and America's Promise Alliance.
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8. Alliance for Quality Career Pathways. (2014). "Shared Vision, Strong Systems: The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework Version 1.0." Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.
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ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN\\_MBKA\\_TOOLKIT](https://forumfyi.org/OYN_MBKA_TOOLKIT)

# SECTION F: REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROVIDING A SECOND CHANCE FOR DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR



# OVERVIEW

Not only do disconnected boys and young men of color deserve a second chance, but many also never really had a first chance.

Genes, environment, and experiences work in concert to impact behavior. Recent research has revealed that important changes in brain function, especially in regard to impulse control and forward planning, occur not only in childhood but also among those in their late teens and early 20s.<sup>1</sup> Most young people are raised in supportive families living in safe neighborhoods that afford them opportunities to bounce back from the types of mistakes and “youthful indiscretions” that are a normative part of brain maturation.

But many disconnected boys and young men of color have not been so lucky. Many have grown up in families and communities that compound rather than mitigate youthful missteps. Many have already faced more challenges and traumatic experiences than a typical adult faces in his or her entire lifetime. Too often they live in communities with high levels of poverty, punitive punishment, the effects of mass incarceration, and exposure to violence.<sup>2</sup> Not only do such environments contribute to disconnection, but they also make reconnection considerably more difficult.

More than 37 percent of black children and almost 32 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty, compared to 12 percent of white children.<sup>3</sup> American-Indian/Alaskan-Natives are more likely than any other racial group to be incarcerated for school-related and status offenses (such as truancy and alcohol consumption) by state courts.<sup>4</sup>

Too often, disconnected young men of color live in communities that have been devastated by the mass incarceration of men of color, housing a large number of individuals who have returned from correctional facilities unable to access student loans to pursue an education, or public benefits like housing and gainful employment, because of their prior conviction.

## VOICES

What is the scariest thing that ever happened to you?

*“Most scariest thing that ever happened to me was staring down the barrel of a Glock 18 with a whole 30 on it asking ‘Where you from, who is you’ just ‘case I’m walking down the wrong street.’”*

*“I’ve seen a couple people get shot. Just seeing death. I mean, it wasn’t nothing to be scared of, but you shouldn’t see it. You shouldn’t see it live, in the face, until it’s you, you get what I am saying? So, those – just basic, in the flesh, in the moment, ohmigod type of scare, it just – it ain’t right.”*

Source: Zusman, A. *The Griots of Oakland: Voices from the African-American Oral History Project. Oakland: Story for All, pages 60 and 62.*

## VOICES

Where do you feel safe?

*“Well I feel safe in the hallway in my house... Because it’s dangerous outside and in my room because they shoot. And one time I heard one, like it was flying by the window, because they were shooting from very far back at somebody else that was very far back, so they have to shoot up and I live in a building that’s high. That’s why I feel safe in the hallway.”*

Source: Zusman, A. *The Griots of Oakland: Voices from the African-American Oral History Project. Oakland: Story for All, page 127*



Disconnected boys and young men of color are also more likely than their peers to be victims of homicide and other violent crimes.<sup>5</sup> Black youth are more likely than their white counterparts to witness violence—even controlling for household income.<sup>6</sup> Exposure to violence has immediate negative impacts on educational outcomes, and positive effects on deviant and aggressive behavior, depression, and anxiety.<sup>7</sup> It also has long-term impacts: both direct and indirect exposure puts young people at a high risk for health and social problems throughout their lives.<sup>8</sup>

## SECOND-CHANCE SYSTEMS

In addition to the types of risky decisions that are a normal part of adolescent development, disconnected boys and young men of color are faced with a challenging family and community environment and a series of violent and traumatic experiences. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that they end up in homeless shelters, the foster care system, and the juvenile justice systems. Too often, these systems push young people away from, rather than toward, a productive adulthood.

- Boys and young men of color are disproportionately represented in the justice system, and are more likely than white youth to be detained and given long sentences.<sup>9</sup> Those who are incarcerated are frequently exposed to overcrowded facilities, physical and sexual violence, and trauma.<sup>10</sup> More than 65 percent of young people involved with the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders—and upward of 30 percent have severe mental health disorders.<sup>11</sup> Youth returning from the justice system are much more likely than their peers to be disconnected from education and employment, which leaves them at a high risk of re-offending. Effective violence prevention efforts must be implemented, with a particular emphasis on helping disconnected youth reconnect to jobs and school.
- More than 22,000 young people age out of the child welfare system each year without a permanent connection to an adult or a family.<sup>12</sup> More than 67 percent of young people transitioning out of foster care identify as a racial minority.<sup>13</sup> Young people who age out of foster care are significantly less likely to be employed, graduate from high school, or attend or complete college. They are significantly more likely to be arrested, incarcerated, and/or experience periods of homelessness.<sup>14</sup>
- On any night, more than 46,000 youth can be found living on the streets throughout the United States. Every year, almost two million young people experience at least one night of homelessness.<sup>15</sup> Youth experiencing homelessness are often victims of abuse, neglect, trauma, sexual exploitation, and poverty.<sup>16</sup> Young people who have experienced homelessness are 87 percent more likely than their peers to stop going to school.<sup>17</sup>

Leaders should provide targeted interventions for specific vulnerable subpopulations of disconnected boys and young men of color, including those who have been involved with the juvenile justice system, are in foster care or have recently aged out, are experiencing homelessness, and identify as LGBTQ.

### VOICES

*“At eight years old, I had a good life ... till my father passed away. Then my mother became depressed... I think it impacted me a lot because he died by overdose in front of us so I think it impacted us, me and my brother a lot. Because I think sometime my mama would blame us for that. So yeah it impacted me a lot... Me and my brother went into the system. My mother got us back after like five years or so. I think right there was the deep journey where I disconnected myself, like I fell down... I don't know how to explain it. I felt lost. Like I went to eight different foster cares in all. Me and my brother separated.... The whole time, I think I was just struggling with my mother the whole time. I mean by the time she got me out of foster care, my ma just practically told me I ain't need her. You know my mother was struggling so I couldn't really focus at school. You know there was so much in my head going on that I fell down...”*

Source: The Center for Promise at America's Promise Alliance. (2015). *Don't Quit on Me: What Young People Who Left School Say About the Power of Relationships*. Boston: Center for Promise at Tufts University.

# STRATEGIES FOR TAKING ACTION

## REDUCING AND MITIGATING EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

### ► TACKLE YOUTH VIOLENCE THROUGH CROSS-AGENCY AND CROSS-SECTOR APPROACHES.

As discussed in this report, in the section “Strategies That Span the Milestones,” it is important to align efforts across government agencies and across sectors for disconnected boys and young men of color. Local leaders should align efforts to build up their communities’ protective factors (such as increasing access to counseling) and minimize risk factors (such as high unemployment rates). For a chart of risk and protective factors across multiple forms of violence, see pp. 8–9 of the report, “[Connecting the Dots](#),” by the CDC. Such alignment often works best when it is tackled as a subtopic within a broader child, youth, and community development planning group, if such a group is already in place. The same is true for eliminating community violence.

In recognition of this, the U.S. Department of Justice launched the [National Forum on Preventing Youth Violence](#), a network of 15 communities and federal agencies—including justice, housing, education, labor, health, and the CDC—collaborating to build the capacity of communities to prevent and reduce youth violence. The National Forum on Preventing Youth Violence advances three principles: multidisciplinary partnerships are key to tackling this complex issue; communities must balance and coordinate their prevention, intervention, enforcement, and re-entry strategies; and data and evidence-driven strategies must inform efforts to reduce youth violence. Access two of the forum’s reports—“[Involving the Philanthropic & Corporate Community in Violence Prevention Planning and Action Guide](#)” and the “[Strategic Planning Toolkit](#)”—to (1) develop a comprehensive plan to address problems that cannot be solved by one agency alone; (2) identify funds and time that can be better spent; (3) build partnerships and data capacity; and (4) develop sustainability strategies.

Likewise, Cities United is helping mayors across the nation to identify solutions to end the cycle of violent deaths of African-American males. Cities United provides technical assistance and resources on “[What Works \(And Doesn’t\) In Violence Prevention](#).” Also, review the recordings of a three-part webinar series on the [Intersection of Structural Racism and Structural Violence: Understanding Implications for Structural Change in Cities](#).

Additionally, it can be helpful to learn from and connect to networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth. One example is the [Opportunity Works Sites](#), a Social Innovation Fund project spearheaded by Jobs for the Future and The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions. This project seeks to build evidence for effective strategies that reconnect opportunity youth—specifically, boys and young men of color—to education and employment in seven communities.

### ► PROMOTE COMMUNITY POLICING IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES.

Advocate for community policing by supporting: limited police use of force, engagement of communities as partners, demilitarized local police departments, and sustained and institutionalized best practices and strategies.

In addition to the four briefs mentioned above, you can find the “[Mapping Police Violence](#)” tool, “[Building Momentum from the Ground Up: A Toolkit for Promoting Justice in Policing](#),” and a [sample Mayoral Pledge to End Police Violence](#) on PolicyLink’s webpage. Communities should adopt the 59 recommendations and actions outlined in the “[President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policy Final Report](#).” The report outlines steps to foster trust and legitimacy, policy and oversight, technology and social media, community policing and crime reduction, training and education, and officer wellness and safety.





## FIELD FAVORITES

Cities United is a national movement focused on eliminating the violence in American cities related to African-American men and boys. Cities United highlighted **15 Things Cities Can Do to Stop the Violence**:

1. Build political will to change.
2. Convene a local leadership team.
3. Connect city leaders in a national network.
4. Engage African-American men and boys from the most affected neighborhoods in community conversations to develop sustainable solutions.
5. Create broad, citywide work groups.
6. Be systematic about targeting resources where they are most needed.
7. Construct and implement a data-driven, multi-year plan of action.
8. Develop an integrated response strategy.
9. Ensure a quality education for every child.
10. Incorporate workforce readiness into all strategies.
11. Provide community-wide mental health services.
12. Engage and support parents and families.
13. Strengthen the skills needed to stop the cycle of violence.
14. Support juvenile- and criminal-justice reforms.
15. Keep the lights on.

**Violence Victimization Trends, Patterns and Consequence for Black Males** is part one of a three part series of reports from Cities United. The report highlights violence trends and patterns, the associated economic costs and the role violence plays in aggression, education, mental and behavior health, and cyclic disadvantage among black males.

Violence trends uplifted in the report include:

- Rates of fatal offending and victimization show stark disparities for young black males, although gaps have narrowed since rates peaked in the early 1990s.
- Black males are significantly more likely than other males to be non-fatally violence victimized and the likelihood is most pronounced for young black males.
- Rates of fatal and nonfatal violent victimization are far higher for young black males living in neighborhoods of high disadvantage.
- When violently victimized black males are substantially more likely to be assaulted with a firearm or other weapon.
- Black youth are substantially more likely to witness serious violence compared to their white counterparts, and household income does not appear to buffer against the risk of exposure.
- Risk of violent victimization among black males is concentrated and transmitted through social networks.

Be on the lookout for Cities United's upcoming release of part two and three of the report series:

- Part Two: Explaining and Predicting Violence Perpetration Among Young Black Males in America
- Part Three: Interventions for Reducing Violence and its Consequences for Young Black Males in America



## ► PROMOTE EQUITY IN DISCIPLINE AND DISMANTLE THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE.

The inequitable administration and enforcement of school-related exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions and expulsion, experienced by students of color—especially those with disabilities and that identify as LGBTQ—is not only unjust but ineffective. Exclusionary discipline policies do not address the root cause of misbehaviors and do more harm than good. Students who are suspended and expelled are more likely to fail a grade, disconnect from school, and become involved in the juvenile justice system.<sup>18</sup> The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Justices and the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's School-Justice Partnership Project focus on improving collaboration among mental health specialists, law enforcement, and juvenile justice officials to keep students in school and out of the justice system. The [School-Justice Partnership National Resource Center](#) provides models, research, tools, and webinars for (1) schools and educators; (2) law enforcement and school resource officers—law enforcement assigned to a long-term placement and trained to provide security and crime prevention services in school settings; (3) juvenile justice practitioners; (4) mental and behavioral health providers; and (5) school-justice partnerships.<sup>19</sup>

View the U.S. Department of Education's "[Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#)" for action steps to: develop a positive school environment and focus on prevention; develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement. For more information on federal initiatives aimed at discipline equity and improving the school-justice climate (including the [National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline](#) and the U.S. Department of Education [School Climate and Discipline webpage](#)), visit the School-Justice Partnership Federal Initiatives page of the resource guide.

## ► IDENTIFY EVIDENCE-INFORMED AND EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES TO ADDRESS CRIME, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, PREVENTION, AND CHILD SAFETY.

A good starting place to learn about key issues, reform trends, and resources and to access a glossary related to evidence-based practices in the juvenile justice field is the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange's "[Resource Hub: Evidence-Based Practices](#)." You can also explore the [CrimeSolutions.gov](#) database for effective justice-related programs and practices. Additionally, the [What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse](#) database rates the effectiveness of a wide range of re-entry programs and practices.

## ► PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS AND ADDRESS EXPOSURE TO TOXIC STRESS USING TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE.

When young people experience regular and/or strong adverse experiences—such as exposure to violence, the death of loved ones, abuse, neglect, economic hardship, and homelessness—without protective relationships, a toxic stress response occurs in their body.<sup>20</sup> These adverse experiences disrupt brain and organ development and function, with the potential for lifelong ramifications including developmental delays,

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes a trauma-informed approach as:

A program, organization, or system that:

- Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

A trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of service setting or organization and is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or treatments that are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing.

For key principles of a trauma-informed approach and different types of trauma-specific intervention models visit [SAMHSA's National Center for Trauma-Informed Care and Alternatives to Seclusion and Restraint \(NCTIC\)](#).

heart disease, substance abuse, depression, and diabetes. The good news is that science has found that positive environments and supportive and consistent relationships with caring adults can both prevent and reverse the negative effects of prolonged exposure to stress.<sup>21</sup>

Since the education system touches every child at one point or another, schools can be a particularly effective place to ensure young people have the types of supports and consistent relationships that buffer toxic stress and prevent disconnection. [Turnaround for Children](#) works with high-poverty schools to build student support teams (made up of teachers, administrators, and social workers) that build individualized plans for students and track behavioral, emotional, and academic progress. The organization provides teacher and staff training in strategies that create safe, nurturing, engaging classrooms and teach students development skills such as self-regulation.

When disconnected boys and young men of color come into contact with other public systems, since they are not in school, it is critical that they interface with staff who provide trauma-informed care and can direct them to the mental health supports they need. The National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth created a free online training course on [Trauma-Informed Care](#). The four modules are geared to help families and youth workers recognize trauma and address traumatic stress through customized supports. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Center for Trauma-Informed Care and Alternatives to Seclusion and Restraint highlights various [trauma-specific interventions](#) designed for criminal justice, mental health, substance abuse, shelters, and residential treatment settings.

[“Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Policy Recommendations to Ensure Children Thrive in Supportive Communities Free from Violence and Trauma,”](#) a report by Futures Without Violence, highlights seven goals associated with preventing and addressing childhood exposure to violence and trauma. Another report, [“Investing in Boys and Young Men of Color: The Promise and Opportunity,”](#) by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), provides recommendations and action steps to increase the cultural competency of health professionals and educators, and to change the philosophy and culture of how youth systems provide services to youth experiencing violence and trauma. Additionally, another CLASP brief, [“Investing in Young Men of Color as Community Assets,”](#) describes policy levers that leaders can advocate for and adopt to improve the well-being of boys and men of color.

The report [“Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Policy Recommendations to Ensure Children Thrive in Supportive Communities Free from Violence and Trauma,”](#) by Futures without Violence,” highlights seven goals associated with preventing and addressing childhood exposure to violence and trauma. Read the full report to view the following policy recommendations.

1. Invest early in parents and young children.
2. Help schools promote positive school climates, be trauma-sensitive, and raise achievement.
3. Train educators, health care workers, and other child-serving professionals about preventing and responding to youth violence and trauma.
4. Prevent violence and trauma.
5. Improve intra- and intergovernmental coordination and alignment.
6. Increase the availability of trauma-informed service for children and families.
7. Increase public awareness and knowledge of childhood violence and trauma



## FIELD FAVORITES

The Center for Law and Social Policy's brief, "[Investing in Young Men of Color as Community Assets](#)," highlights strategies and policy recommendations that local, state, and federal officials can follow to meet basic needs, expand behavioral and mental health supports, and improve well-being among boys and men of color.

**Take full advantage of Affordable Care Act (ACA) implementation at the federal and state levels to improve health equity and access, and to expand mental and behavioral services to young men of color.**

**Ensure access to health and behavioral health services through Medicaid.**

- Every state should enact the ACA Medicaid expansion.
- In expansion states, policymakers and advocates should address the most crucial needs for youth of color and their communities, including behavioral health services, and break down barriers to delivering high-quality services.
- Youth development, workforce, education, child welfare, and Medicaid staff, and relevant community partners should be trained in Medicaid enrollment and outreach strategies for young men of color, and should teach them how to use—not just enroll in— their new health care coverage.
- States should ensure that current foster youth remain enrolled in Medicaid through automated systems as they age out of the system without having to take action or provide verification. Proactive outreach strategies should be implemented to identify youth under 26 who have aged out.
- States should take the option to enroll youth who aged out of foster care in another state.
- States should tailor the benefits package to the needs of vulnerable youth, including those aging out of foster care.
- States should adopt 12-month continuous eligibility for Medicaid for children, youth, and adults.

**Embed trauma-informed practices into all youth-serving systems to improve health outcomes among young men of color.**

- Utilize preventive health care approaches that recognize the impact of neighborhood environmental factors on the physical and mental health of males of color, including how those environments can prevent access to health services.
- Use behavioral health screening and assessment tools to identify where and how to intervene with children and youth as soon as trauma occurs.
- Engage training and employment programs infused with trauma-informed supportive services as part of preparing young men for meaningful employment.
- Use rehabilitative options within the juvenile justice system that focus on addressing trauma to divert youth from detention and incarceration.

**Promote economic security for youth and young adults.**

- At the state level, ensure job training and opportunities to make use of Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known the Food Stamp Program).

View the "[Investing in Young Men of Color as Community Assets](#)" brief for more information on the recommendations listed above and for additional strategies and policies to address: Education Equity; Improving College and Career Readiness and Supporting Dropout Prevention and Recovery; Workforce Development and Training; Investing in Summer and Year-Round Employment; and Public Investment in Young People: Raising the Bar at All Levels of Government.



# SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN SECOND-CHANCE SYSTEMS

When things go wrong, disconnected boys and young men of color need and deserve a second chance—to make better decisions, to have supportive parents and to have a roof over their heads. Yet far too often, the systems designed to provide these second chances repeatedly fail. These young men are frequently mistreated by the justice system. Appallingly high numbers age out of the foster care system each year with no plan for what comes next, and many are forced to live on the streets.

## SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR INVOLVED IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

### ► ADVOCATE FOR FEDERAL POLICY REFORM, INCLUDING THE RE-AUTHORIZATION OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION ACT (JJDPa).

The federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPa) outlines [four core protections](#) and minimum standards for the safety of youth coming into contact with the justice system. The core protections ensure that disconnected young men of color: are not held in adult jails when they are not charged as adults; have “sight and sound” separation from adult prisoners when charged as adults; are placed in community-based alternatives and not held in confinement when charged as adults; and do not disproportionately come in contact with the justice system. Act 4 Juvenile Justice (Act 4JJ) is a campaign launched by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (JJDPc) to share [policy recommendations for further](#) strengthening the JJDPa.

### ► COLLECT AND TRACK DATA DISAGGREGATED BY GENDER, RACE, ETHNICITY, AND OFFENSE, AND IMPLEMENT PLANS TO MINIMIZE DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT ACROSS DIFFERENT POINTS OF INTERACTION IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

The JJDPa requires states to address disproportionate minority contact (DMC) at nine decision points within the juvenile justice system. Currently, the legislation does very little to provide specificity or guidance on how states should track and reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Data collection is inconsistent across the country, especially for Latinos who are often counted as white or black. This underscores the need to collect data on ethnicity as well as race.

Act 4JJ’s [Fact Sheet: Disproportionate Minority Contact](#) outlines six steps to develop data-driven strategies and inclusive collaboratives. The fact sheet highlights five counties that have begun to reduce DMC, including Baltimore County. This county reduced “by fifty percent the secure detention of African-American youth resulting from bench warrants due to failing to appear in court by instituting a reminder call program.” Santa Cruz County, California, reduced “disproportionate admissions to detention of Latino youth by focusing on reducing admissions for youth who were initially detained by Probation but released by the Judge at first appearance.”<sup>22</sup>

### ► ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT STATUS OFFENSE SYSTEM REFORM AND PROMOTE THE USE OF COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION.

The American Youth Policy Forum’s brief, [Connecticut Post-Secondary Pathways for Opportunity Youth](#), is a case study that describes lessons learned and promising practices, and provides infographics on how the state is addressing opportunity youth. The profile does a deep dive on justice-involved youth on p. 9, in the section Juvenile Reentry: A Critical Point on the Pathway to Postsecondary Opportunities. The profile highlights reforms the state has taken to minimize the interactions of opportunity youth with the justice system, including reducing out-of-home placement for juveniles; addressing school-based arrests; and providing counseling, behavioral therapy, and substance abuse treatment.

The [Status Offense Reform Center’s toolkit](#) provides step-by-step guidance on how leaders can improve the treatment of young people charged with status offenses. The toolkit’s four sections are: [Structuring System Change](#).

[Using Local Information to Guide System Change](#), [Planning and Implementing System Change](#), and [Monitoring and Sustaining System Change](#). Community-based alternatives or diversion programs reduce young people's interaction with the justice system. For more information on key issues, resources, and best practices, visit the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange's "[Resource Hub: Community-Based Alternatives](#)." Additionally, take a look at the "[National Standards for the Care of Youth Charged with Status Offenses](#)" and "[Improving Responses to Youth Charged with Status Offenses: A Training Curriculum](#)," by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

## ► ENSURE PRACTICES AND POLICIES IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED.

[Models for Changing Juvenile Justice in a Development Framework: A 2015 Status Report](#) provides developmentally appropriate best practices in nine juvenile justice policy areas: status offense rules, age limits for juvenile court jurisdiction, transfer to adult court, access to counsel, competency to stand trial, courtroom shackling, solitary confinement, juvenile records, and sex offender registration. The report also highlights states that have been taken to incorporate best practices into legislation. The [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Model Program Guide](#) is a U.S. Department of Justice database of evidence-based programs highlighting what works and what does not, as well as promising programs. Also, view the National Children Traumatic Stress Network's "[Essential Elements of a Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice System](#)," which provides guidelines, tools, and information to implement elements of a trauma-informed juvenile justice system.

## ► SHIFT TO A BALANCED AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACH.

A Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) approach requires offenders to make amends, develop competencies, and work collaboratively with victims and the community to ensure safety and protection. View the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's "[Guide for Implementing the Balanced and Restorative Justice \(BARJ\) Model](#)." The guide, put out by the Department of Justice, highlights key competencies, challenges associated with the model, promising examples, stakeholder roles, and more.

## ► PROVIDE PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORTS TO DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.

Disconnected boys and young men of color in the justice system need educational supports, mentoring, counseling, and career training.<sup>23</sup> Comprehensive programming should cultivate positive development and create an easier transition to reentry programs—and ultimately self-sufficiency—once the young person leaves a facility.<sup>24</sup> Access the Departments of Education and Justice's "[Guiding Principles of Providing High-Quality Education Juvenile Justice Secure Care Settings](#)" for core activities agencies can adopt to promote education outcomes for young people in the justice system.

YouthBuild USA led a nine-site pilot, Start Making a Real Transformation (SMART), which targeted exclusively court-involved opportunity youth before they were released. Pilot participants had an extraordinarily low recidivism rate of 1 percent. SMART is based on the nine core elements of the YouthBuild model: caring staff, leadership development, community service, counseling, postsecondary education and vocational training, post-program placement and graduate support, individualized service delivery, retention incentives, and customized re-entry planning. SMART built on these elements to create best practices to reduce recidivism. [Life after Lockup](#) shares results of the pilot and key features such as leadership councils, flexible programming, relationships with correctional facilities, trauma training, and mental health services.

YouthBuild's SMART pilot key features included in [Life after Lockup](#) are:

- caring staff
- leadership development
- community service
- counseling
- postsecondary education and vocational training
- postprogram placement and graduate support
- individualized service delivery
- retention incentives
- customized re-entry planning



Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice’s [“Roadmap to Reentry”](#) highlights five evidence-based principles to guide correctional facilities’ efforts to provide a smooth transition to life after incarceration. The principles are: (1) upon incarceration, provide every inmate with an individualized re-entry plan tailored to his or her risk of recidivism and programmatic needs; (2) while incarcerated, ensure that every inmate participates in programs targeting education, employment training, life skills, substance abuse, and mental health, as well as other programs that target their criminogenic needs and maximize their likelihood of success upon release; (3) while incarcerated, supply each inmate with the resources and opportunity to build and maintain family relationships and strengthen the support system available to them upon release; (4) during transition back to the community, ensure that halfway houses and supervised release programs provide individualized continuity of care for returning citizens; and (5) before leaving custody, furnish every inmate with comprehensive re-entry-related information and access to resources necessary to succeed in the community.

## ► FORM CROSS-SYSTEM COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND OTHER AGENCIES INCLUDING WORKFORCE, MENTAL HEALTH, PUBLIC HOUSING, ARTS AND CULTURE, AND HIGHER EDUCATION TO MEET THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS OF DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

As discussed in the “Strategies that Span the Milestones” section of this report, it is important to align efforts across government agencies and sectors. Such alignment often works best when tackled as a subtopic within a broader development planning group targeting children, youth, and the community, if such a group is already in place. It is important for such collaborations to include the justice system. An example of an innovative partnership with a correctional facility is the [MontgomeryWorks Correctional Facility-Based One-Stop Career Center](#) in Montgomery County, Maryland. A part of their Reentry for All initiative, the program is a partnership between the local Workforce Investment Board and Department of Correction and Rehabilitation. Similar to other One-Stop Centers, individuals can access employment-related services like mock interviews, workshops on job readiness and job search skills, and other comprehensive supports inside the facility. Another example is the collaboration between the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and the county probation department to offer programming in the arts and to engage ex-offenders in the creative workforce.

Case managers, probation officers, counselors, and other stakeholders should foster relationships and develop partnerships to create a seamless transition to external supports. Learn more about cross-system models that serve justice-involved or at-risk young people. Some of these are discussed in the paper, [“Trauma-Informed Collaborations among Juvenile Justice and Other Child-Serving Systems: An Update,”](#) by the Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice. The models are the [Georgetown University Crossover Youth Practice Model \(CYPM\)](#), [Trauma Systems Therapy \(TST\)](#), the Positive Student Engagement Model for School Policing, the [Child Development Community Policing \(CDCP\) Program](#), and the [Stark County Traumatized Child Task Force](#).

Public housing agencies play a critical role in re-entry. Communities such as King County, Washington; Burlington, Vermont; and New York City have created re-entry programs that have strong partnerships with nonprofits, local elected officials, correctional facilities, parole/probation and police departments, and other stakeholders. Learn about the core elements of public housing re-entry programs, three applicable models, and the key steps to designing a successful re-entry program in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development toolkit, [“It Starts with Housing: Public Housing Agencies Are Making Second Chances Real.”](#)

## ► REDUCE RECIDIVISM BY ADOPTING REHABILITATIVE MODELS AND BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS TO HELP RECONNECT YOUNG MEN OF COLOR RELEASED FROM THE JUSTICE SYSTEM TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS.

Youth returning from the justice system are much more likely than their peers to be disconnected from education and employment. This, in turn, leaves them at high risk of reoffending. This vicious cycle should be addressed head on by helping to reconnect young offenders back to school and jobs. Adopt strategies from [“Making the Right Turn: A Guide about Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Correction Systems.”](#) Chapter 4 of the guide highlights promising practices for youth involved in the justice system—including strategies for employment

and training, behavioral interventions, and rehabilitative models. The Juvenile Justice Information Exchange's [Resource Hub: Re-entry](#) provides a wealth of resources on core principles of reentry, employment and education, mental health, substance abuse, and reconnecting with families.

Encourage higher education institutions and employers to make a commitment to remove barriers to college and employment access, and to provide a second chance to young people who are justice-involved by taking the [Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge](#) and the [Fair Chance Business Pledge](#).

#### ► SUPPORT AND UTILIZE NATIONAL SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) manages AmeriCorps, which engages young people in service at organizations across the county. The newly formed [Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps](#) enrolls formerly incarcerated youth and those at-risk of being incarcerated in national service projects. Additionally, [The Corps Network](#) leads and supports over 130 corps (comprehensive youth development programs that engage 16- to 25-year-olds in service projects, job training, and academic programming). The Corps Network offers a wealth of resources, including the guide, "[Civic Justice Corps: Transforming Reentry Through Service](#)" and the "[Civic Justice Corps Toolkit](#)," which outlines a model to support successful re-entry and diversion through service projects.

## SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN, OR RECENTLY AGED OUT FROM, THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

#### ► PREVENT YOUTH FROM BECOMING DISCONNECTED WHEN THEY AGE OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM BY LEVERAGING RESEARCH ON BRAIN DEVELOPMENT, YOUTH PERMANENCE, AND EXTENDED FOSTER CARE.

The Success by 18 Campaign leverages [expertise in and research](#) on adolescent brain development, older youth permanence, extended foster care, and the Opportunity Passport initiative. The campaign highlights commonsense solutions that have the potential to reduce the number of foster youth who become disconnected, increasing their personal and financial assets. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is a national and state-based effort to ensure every young person leaving foster care has the family connections, opportunities, and support needed for a successful transition to adulthood. Use the "[Site Implementation Toolkit](#)" to adopt the initiative's core strategies in your community.

#### ► ADOPT CROSS-SYSTEM APPROACHES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF FOSTER CARE.

As discussed in the "Strategies that Span the Milestones" section of this report, it is important to align efforts across government agencies and sectors for disconnected boys and young men of color. Such alignment often works best when it is tackled as a subtopic within a broader community development planning group that focuses on children, youth, and the community, if such a group is already in place. The child welfare system must be a strong partner in such efforts. State agencies like education, welfare, justice, and labor should work together to identify gaps in support for multisystem youth and coordinate efforts to eliminate them. A National Governors Association's report, "[The Transition to Adulthood: How States Can Support Older Youth in Foster Care](#)," outlines five strategies and recommendations for state governments: promote educational attainment; connect youth with employment and



career training; enhance access to safe and affordable housing; help youth access and manage health care; and aid youth in building stable, lifelong relationships. Learn more about the Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform's Crossover Youth Practice Model, which targets young people engaged with both the child welfare and justice systems. These youths are often referred to as "dual-involved" or "cross-over." The goals of this model include reducing: the number of young people placed in out-of-home care, the number of young people crossing over from the welfare system into the justice system, and the disproportionate representation of young people of color in congregate care (group homes or group living institutions). Guidance for practitioners to improve collaboration between the child welfare and justice systems can be found in Models for Change's "[Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Children Welfare Systems Coordinating and Integration](#)," as well as "[From Conversation to Collaboration: How Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Agencies Can Work Together to Improve Outcomes for Dual Status Youth](#)."

## ► INVEST IN THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF OLDER YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE.

"[Well-Being of Older Youth in Foster Care](#)" provides a framework whose six domains are: intellectual potential, social development, mental wellness, physical health, safety and permanency, and economic success. One of five investment strategies outlined in the guide is Invest in Improving, Expanding, and Sustaining Innovative and Evidence-Informed Practices. This approach concentrates on functional assessment tools, effective practice models, children of immigrant families, and vulnerable populations (LGBTQ, Native-American, justice-involved, disabled, parenting, and pregnant youth), as well as professional development and implementation.



## FIELD FAVORITES

**Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in the Social, Emotional and Physical Well-Being of Older Youth in Foster Care** stresses the importance of Investing in Improving, Expanding, and Sustaining Innovative and Evidence-Informed Practices (page 22). The excerpt below highlights how effective practice models (defined in the report as “values, principles, relationships, approaches and techniques used at the system and casework practitioner level to enable children and families to achieve the goals of safety, stability, permanency and well-being”) and professional development can help ensure that practices in the foster care system promote social, emotional and physical well-being of opportunity youth.

Practice models need to ensure well-being in a broad sense, including reflecting the critical interconnection between social, emotional and physical well-being and permanency and safety. New investments are needed to enhance the focus on well-being within existing practice models while also creatively designing and testing innovative new models of case management, supervision and administration. Such models would:

- Value youth engagement and increase opportunities for youth to develop and practice (and to safely fail) self-advocacy, problem-solving and other skills needed for lifelong social, emotional and physical well-being.
- Strongly emphasize lifelong family connections and the role of family in supporting the well-being of older youth and young adults through the development of practice approaches to engage birth families in their children's lives; to effectively support kinship involvement in academic, health, mental health, social and other settings; to strengthen sibling connections and provide for intensive family-search and family-finding efforts to ensure better linkages between the permanency and well-being outcomes for youth.
- Understand and employ developmentally appropriate strategies that recognize the changing strengths, characteristics and needs of adolescents and young adults.
- Utilize a team-planning and decision-making process with the inclusion of cross-discipline team members with expertise in areas of social, emotional and physical well-being.

Investments that support enhanced and ongoing professional development of those working with older youth and young adults are urgently needed. Priority investments include:

- Developing competency-based training for workers, supervisors and care givers.
- Ongoing coaching and mentoring to develop expertise among the child welfare workforce and caregivers.
- Support for effective management practices, including setting reasonable caseloads.
- Evidence-supported approaches such as reflective supervision.
- Recognition and addressing of secondary trauma in the workforce and among caregivers.

Youth Transition Funder's Group (YTFG) is a network of grantmakers whose mission is to help all youth make a successful transition to adulthood by age 25. YTFG's Foster Care Work Group (FCWG) works to ensure youth in foster care have lifelong family, personal and community connections and the opportunities and tools to succeed throughout adulthood. For more information, including their latest report **Investing to Improve the Well-Being of Vulnerable Youth and Young Adults: Recommendations for Policy and Practices** visit the **FCWG webpage**.



## ► USE A RACE AND GENDER LENS.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP's) [Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare](#) offers a wealth of resources. Among them is the brief, "[Strategies to Reduce Racially Disparate Outcomes in Child Welfare](#)," which includes examples from across the country of agencies changing operational structures to advance racial equity and foster formal partnerships with tribal governments. Other CSSP reports are "[Understanding the Intersection of Race, Housing and Child Welfare](#)" webinar, a "[Racial Equity Child Welfare Data Analysis Tool](#)," and "[Improving Outcomes for African-American Males Involved with Child Welfare Systems](#)." The last report provides information on the current status of African-Americans in the child welfare system. It outlines effective approaches to improve outcomes: (1) establish an overarching organizational commitment to race equity embedded in the agency's vision, mission, values, and operations; (2) understand and respond to the complex ways in which structural racism shapes the experiences and well-being of young men of color, including both implicit bias and explicit forms of racism; (3) create ways for the voices, aspirations, and input of young men of color to be visible and influential in all aspects of programming and accountability; and (4) reinforce and sustain the work by making permanent structural and systemic changes using a results focus in service delivery, data collection and accountability, administrative infrastructure, and human resource development.

# SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

## ► CREATE AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.

Places like Connecticut and King County in Washington State have created action plans to address youth homelessness. Take a look at the "[Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in King County by 2020](#)" and "[Opening Doors for Youth: An Action Plan to Provide all Connecticut Youth and Young Adults with Safe, Stable Homes and Opportunity](#)" to get a sense of what could be included in your community's action plan. Also, view the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness' "[Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#)," which includes strategies for collecting better data and building capacity to improve service delivery.

Ensure that the plan is informed by the voices of young men of color who are currently homeless and/or have been in the past. For example, in 2011 the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DCAYA) conducted a survey of youth experiencing homelessness in Washington, DC. The results and an analysis can be found in the report "[From the Streets to Stability: A Study of Youth Homelessness in the District of Columbia](#)." Likewise, the [National Network for Youth](#) (NN4Y) established the [National Youth Advisory Council](#) (NYAC) to connect young people who have run away, been expelled from home, or become disconnected from family with the lawmakers, service providers, and community officials responsible for crafting policy solutions.

## ► ENSURE YOUR COMMUNITY IS EMPLOYING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO RECONNECT HOMELESS BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR, INCLUDING RUNAWAY AND TRAFFICKED YOUTH.

Approaches should be appropriate, specific, and targeted at subpopulations. Minors, transition-aged youth, and trafficked youth and adults experiencing homelessness each require the use of different interventions. The National Network for Youth (NN4Y) identifies steps cities can take to prevent and reconnect runaway and homeless youth in the brief, "[What Works to End Youth Homelessness](#)." Communities should implement effective strategies in prevention and outreach to (1) connect youth to services; (2) create drop-in centers to engage youth and link them to community resources; (3) provide shelter to enable youth to take an important first step in getting off the street; (4) consider family engagement and interventions when safe and appropriate; (5) provide youth-appropriate housing programs to build independent living skills; (6) deliver case management to improve wellness and decision-making; (7) connect youth to education to increase future income-earning capability; (8) link youth to workforce development to enable them to compete in the job market; (9) provide culturally competent services; and (10) offer services that respond to survivors of human trafficking. View the National Network for Youth (NN4Y)'s [state and local resources](#) for additional information.



## ► HELP HOMELESS BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR STAY IN SCHOOL.

Schools can provide stability, continuity, and opportunities for young men of color experiencing homelessness. High-school staff, the McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth Assistance Act, and homeless liaisons play a critical role in ensuring the educational success of unaccompanied youth (young people not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian). The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth created the “Unaccompanied Youth Toolkit for High School Counselors and McKinney-Vento Liaisons,” which provides a wealth of information. Included is an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) program, a checklist of how counselors can help identify students experiencing homelessness, tips on how schools and service providers can work together, talking points for positive conversations with young people, information to access services, and training materials.

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth’s (NAECHY) primer on [Using What We Know: Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#) outlines seven important principles and strategies for implementation to address barriers to education for young people experience homelessness:

1. Young people’s basic needs must be met if they are to achieve their educational goals.
2. If young people feel that school is a safe and supportive place for them, they will be much more likely to enroll, attend and succeed.
3. More consistent implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, through increased personnel and uniform procedures, will facilitate the educational attendance and success of youth on their own.
4. When schools adopt flexible policies and programs to accommodate the demands of homelessness and independence, they offer unaccompanied youth an environment where they can be more engaged and successful.
5. Many unaccompanied youth have become disengaged from school and must be drawn back in by caring, persistent adults.
6. Improvements in child welfare policies and practices to reduce the number of youth in the child welfare system who are homeless, and to make supportive services accessible to unaccompanied youth, are essential for youth to achieve their educational goals.
7. Any effort to support unaccompanied youth’s educational success will be more effective if all youth-serving agencies coordinate their efforts, accept joint responsibility for outcomes, and involve young people as active partners.

## ► SUPPORT LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH.

As [What Works to End Youth Homelessness](#) notes:

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are overrepresented in the homeless population. According to a growing body of research and study, a conservative estimate is that one out of every five homeless youth (20 percent) is LGBT-identified. ... Most LGBT youth become homeless because of family abuse, neglect, or conflict over their identity. Many homeless LGBT youth were kicked out of their homes, while others ran from foster and group homes because they were mistreated or harassed. LGBT youth are not only overrepresented in homeless youth populations, but reports indicate that while living on the streets, LGBT youth are at great risk of physical and sexual exploitation—at the hands of adults, police, and other youth. For example, one study concluded that LGBT homeless youth experience an average of 7.4 more acts of sexual violence than their heterosexual peers. Transgender youth in particular are often harassed, assaulted, and arrested by police because of their gender presentation. Another study found that LGBT youth may have twice the rate of sexual victimization on the streets as non-LGBT homeless youth, and LGBT youth report double the rates of sexual abuse before age 12.3. In addition, LGBT homeless youth are more likely to report being asked by someone on the streets to exchange sex for money, food, drugs, shelter, and clothing than heterosexual homeless youth. Unfortunately, many LGBT homeless youth resort to trading sex to meet their basic needs.”<sup>25</sup>

Getting “kicked out [of their home] when they come out [of the closet]” remains a stubbornly persistent phenomenon. Organizations serving vulnerable boys and young men of color should make sure services and supports are welcoming, affirming, and culturally responsive. “[At the Intersections: A Collaborative Resource on LGBTQ Youth Homelessness](#),” developed by the [National LGBTQ Task Force](#) and the [True Colors Fund](#), notes that “Youth experiencing homelessness live at the intersections of various marginalized identities, which may include their race, gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, ability, and more. The systems meant to serve them—juvenile justice, homelessness, child welfare, health care, immigration, and education—often don’t take into account their specific circumstances, which can result in their needs not being met.”<sup>26</sup>

For example, the brief, “What Works to End Youth Homelessness,” suggests assuming that some of the young people they serve are LGBTQ—even when none of the young people have self-identified or revealed publicly their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Consider the additional barriers faced by young men of color that identify as LGBTQ. The Advocates for Youth brief, “[The Impact of Homophobia and Racism on LGBTQ Youth of Color](#),” shares facts associated with family and societal homophobic environments, homelessness, harassment, and cultural competency needs in education, programs, and health care. View the “[National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth](#)” for recommendations on: treating LGBTQ youth respectfully and ensuring their safety; appropriately addressing LGBTQ identity during the intake process; supporting access to education, medical care, and mental health care; supporting transgender and gender-nonconforming youth participants; and informing LGBTQ youth participants about local LGBTQ programs and services. The [report](#) also includes recommendations on how leadership can improve organizational culture to implement competent services to LGBTQ youth, as listed below.

**Recommendations on how leadership can improve organizational culture to implement competent services to LGBTQ youth. [National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth](#)**

1. Programmatic Culture: Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment
2. Adopt and Implement Written Nondiscrimination Policies
3. Adopt Confidentiality Policies
4. Provide LGBTQ Competency Training to All Agency Employees and Volunteers
5. Establish Sound Recruitment and Hiring Practices
6. Develop Agency Connections to LGBTQ Organizations and the LGBTQ Community
7. Collect and Evaluate Data

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

### YOUTH VILLAGES' YVLIFESET

[Youth Villages' YVLifeSet](#) is an intensive and comprehensive program that works with young people aging out of the foster care system – including those with involvement with the justice system and other vulnerable youth ages 17 to 22 – to successfully transition into adulthood.

Core components of the program include:

- **Intensity.** Small caseloads of eight to 10 young adults per specialist with a minimum of one face-to-face session per week as well as other communication throughout the week.
- **Comprehensive services.** Specialists help youth achieve their goals with education, employment, housing, permanency and basic independent living skills.
- **Youth-driven.** Young adults have input into their service plans, goal development and group activities.
- **Training and supervision.** Staff receive extensive on-the-job training as well as weekly group supervision and consultation with quarterly boosters and other training as needed.
- **Formalized program model.** The program uses evidence-based interventions as clinically necessary.
- **Program evaluation.** Youth Villages checks in with young people six, 12 and 24 months after they've completed the YVLifeSet program.
- **Philosophy.** Youth Villages does whatever it takes. Specialists are expected to achieve success with a high percentage of the young adults; the case outcomes are the specialists' responsibility.
- **Collaboration.** The YVLifeSet program works closely with other support systems to help ensure consistent and effective services are provided.

The program was recently evaluated by MDRC in a randomized controlled study. The study found positive impacts in outcomes around employment and earnings, housing stability, economic well-being and health and safety. View the report, [Youth Villages Transitional Living Program Evaluation](#), for details related to the study results. Also, view this [infographic](#) for a diagram of the key services offered and the results of the study.

### LARKIN STREET YOUTH SERVICES SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

[Larkin Street](#) provides youth between the ages of 12 and 24 comprehensive services, including housing, education, employment and health services, to get homeless and at-risk youth off the streets. Larkin Street serves more than 3,000 youth each year, giving them a place where they can feel safe; rebuild their sense of self-respect, trust, and hope; learn school, life and job skills; and find the confidence to build a future.

More than 30 percent of the young people Larkin Street serves are African-American, 16 percent are Latino and 10 percent identify as multiracial. 63 percent are male. Approximately one-third identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Larkin Street's [Youth Homelessness in San Francisco: 2014 Report on Incidence and Needs](#) describes paths into homelessness, demographics of youth homelessness, service needs as described by the young people themselves and more.



## ROCA

### CHELSEA, REVERE, EAST BOSTON, MALDEN, EVERETT AND SPRINGFIELD, MA

[Roca's](#) mission is to disrupt the cycle of incarceration and poverty by helping young people transform their lives. A history of relentless outreach on the streets of the most dangerous urban communities has led Roca to develop and operate an evidence-based Intervention Model for High-Risk Young People ages 17 to 24. Providing two years of intensive services with two years of follow-up, the Intervention Model creates sustained behavior change in high-risk young people for whom other programming has failed, helping them break the destructive patterns that leave them continually impoverished, involved in violence, and incarcerated.

[Roca's Intervention Model](#) is designed for very high-risk young men aged 17-24 who are:

- aging out of the juvenile justice or juvenile probation systems with a strong propensity for reincarceration as an adult;
- connected with the adult justice system; or
- are high-risk members of the community being served who have a strong propensity for incarceration as an adult.

Their [Intervention Model for High-Risk Young People](#) has four core components:

1. **Relentless Outreach and Follow-Up** – youthworkers relentlessly reconnect with a young person who periodically rejects them and refuses to engage in programming.
2. **Transformational Relationships (TRs)** are the basis of Roca's intensive case management.
3. **Stage-Based Programming** engages young people where they are in the stages of change cognitively and behaviorally.
4. **Engaged Institutions** strategy promotes transformational relationships between organizations and systems.

Learn more about Roca's [positive outcomes](#) and their recent selection to participating in [Pay for Success/Social Impact Bond](#) effort. Also, for further information read the Heartland Alliance's [Opportunity Youth Employment Program Case Study: Roca](#).

# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

## REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROVIDING A SECOND CHANCE FOR DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

### REDUCING AND MITIGATING EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

1. *Tackle youth violence through cross-agency and cross-sector approaches.*
2. *Promote community policing in communities of color and low-income communities.*
3. *Promote equity in discipline and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.*
4. *Identify evidence-informed and evidence-based programs and practices to address crime, juvenile delinquency, prevention, and child safety.*
5. *Provide mental health supports and address exposure to toxic stress using trauma-informed care.*

## SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN SECOND-CHANCE SYSTEMS

### SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR INVOLVED IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

6. *Advocate for federal policy reform, including the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP).*
7. *Collect and track data disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and offense, and implement plans to minimize disproportionate minority contact across different points of interaction in the justice system.*
8. *Advocate and support status offense system reform, and promote the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration.*
9. *Ensure practices and policies in the juvenile justice system are developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed.*
10. *Shift to a Balanced and Restorative Justice approach.*
11. *Provide programming and supports to disconnected boys and young men of color in correctional facilities.*
12. *Form cross-system collaborations and partnerships between the justice system and other agencies, including workforce, mental health, arts and culture, and higher education, to meet the comprehensive needs of disconnected young men of color.*
13. *Reduce recidivism by adopting rehabilitative models and behavioral interventions to help reconnect young men of color released from the justice system to education and employment pathways.*
14. *Support and utilize national service and the Conservation Corps.*

### SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN, OR RECENTLY AGED OUT OF, THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

15. *Prevent youth from becoming disconnected when they age out of the foster care system by leveraging research on brain development, youth permanence, and extended foster care.*
16. *Adopt cross-system approaches to address the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care.*
17. *Invest in the social, emotional, and physical well-being of older youth in foster care.*
18. *Use a race and gender lens.*

### SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

19. *Create and implement a comprehensive community plan to end youth homelessness.*
20. *Ensure your community is employing effective strategies to reconnect homeless boys and young men of color, including runaway and trafficked youth.*
21. *Help homeless boys and young men of color stay in school.*
22. *Support LGBTQ homeless youth.*



## STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

Some of the most effective strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across the My Brother's Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place integrated approaches can be a particularly useful place to start.

- Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.
- Use a racial and gender equity lens and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of your work.
- Gather data on your community's disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.
- Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilots site.
- Learn from networks and national place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.

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ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN\\_MBKA\\_TOOLKIT](http://FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN_MBKA_TOOLKIT)





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