

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



ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

Ensuring Disconnected Young Men of Color Complete Postsecondary Education and Training is one section of the “Opportunity Youth Playbook: A Guide to Reconnecting Boys and Young Men of Color to Education and Employment.”

The playbook highlights promising practices, strategies, and resources to help My Brother’s Keeper communities support boys and young men of color aged 16 to 24 years old 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. This playbook provides tips for taking action, shares relevant research, lists key organizations and resources, and spotlights effective programs and policies across the county.

The information and recommendations were compiled from a literature review, written comments submitted by national experts, and feedback provided by Opportunity Youth Network participants during an online meeting.

The full playbook 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.

Access the full playbook, along with the Playbook Companion which provides additional links to key organizations and resources, at <http://forumfyi.org/OYN-MBK-Toolkit>.

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 2020.¹ 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.”² 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.”³

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.⁴

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.⁵



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.⁶ The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework^{vii} developed at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education⁷ 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.⁸

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.”⁹ “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

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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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)

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