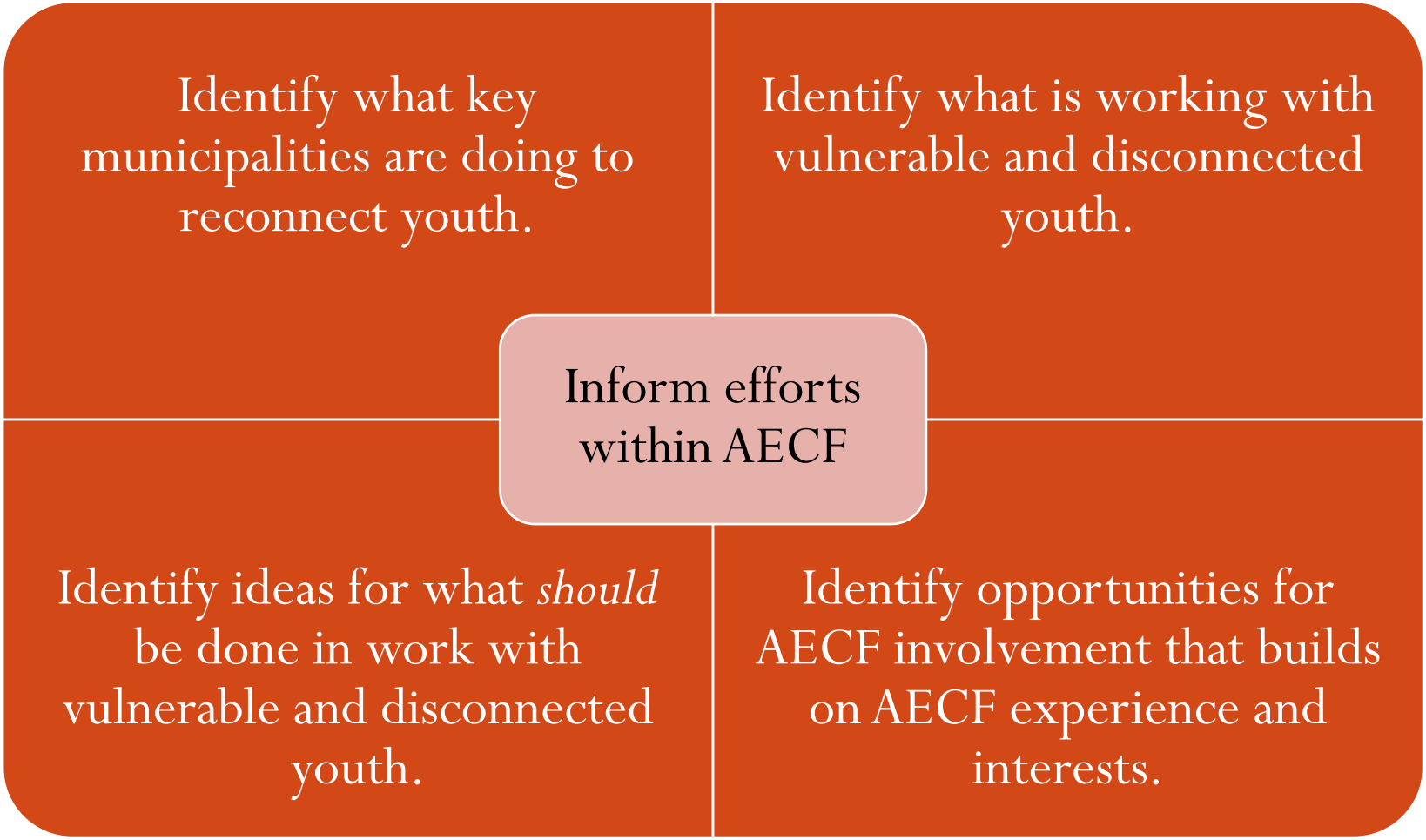
Connecting Youth through Multiple Pathways

A preliminary field scan prepared by
Dana Brinson, Bryan Hassel and Jacob Rosch, of
PUBLIC IMPACT
for
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
December 2008

Goals for Field Scan



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Connecting Youth through Multiple Pathways

Presentation Outline:

- Who Are Disconnected Youth?
- Connecting Youth in Systems
- Multiple Pathways to Graduation
- Scan of Efforts to Connect Youth
  - Identification, Prevention, Intervention, Recovery
- Preliminary Lessons Learned
- Options for Focusing AECF's Efforts
- Additional Resources

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Who Are Disconnected Youth?

Who Are Disconnected Youth?

Youth chronically alienated and distressed

Disconnected or vulnerable youth

Youth thriving and poised for successful adulthood

"On a continuum of youth outcomes running from 'thriving and poised for successful adulthood' on one end to 'chronically alienated and distressed' on another, disconnected youth and youth at risk of falling into disconnection **occupy a broad middle ground**."*

When determining approaches to engaging youth at risk of disconnection, it is important to remember that "disconnected youth" is a heterogeneous group that will require multiple options and approaches to reach each individual effectively.

*Source: MDC, Inc. (2008). *Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region: An Ominous Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*. Raleigh, NC: GlaxoSmithKline Foundation.

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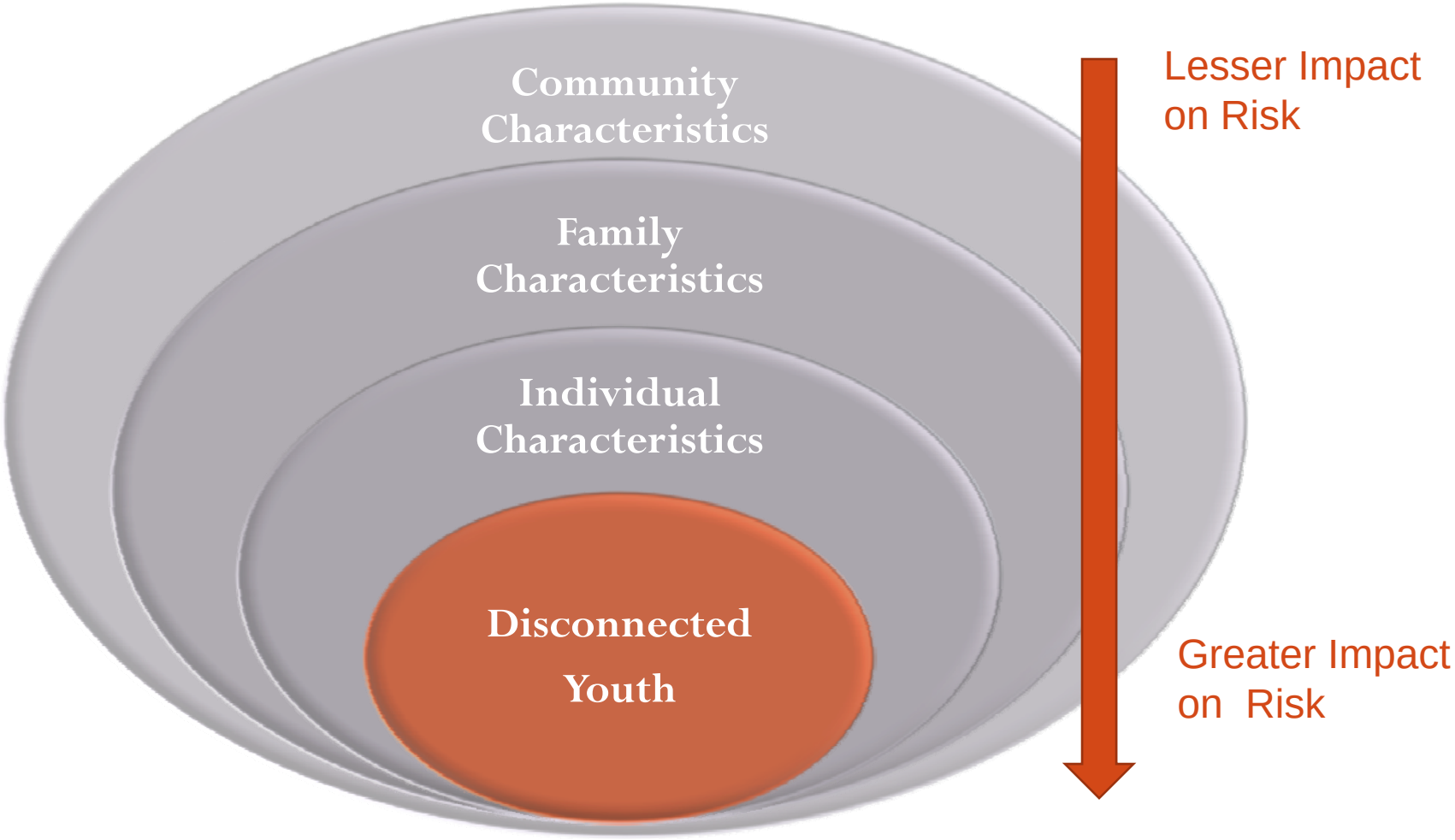
What types of characteristics are "markers" for youth at risk of becoming disconnected?



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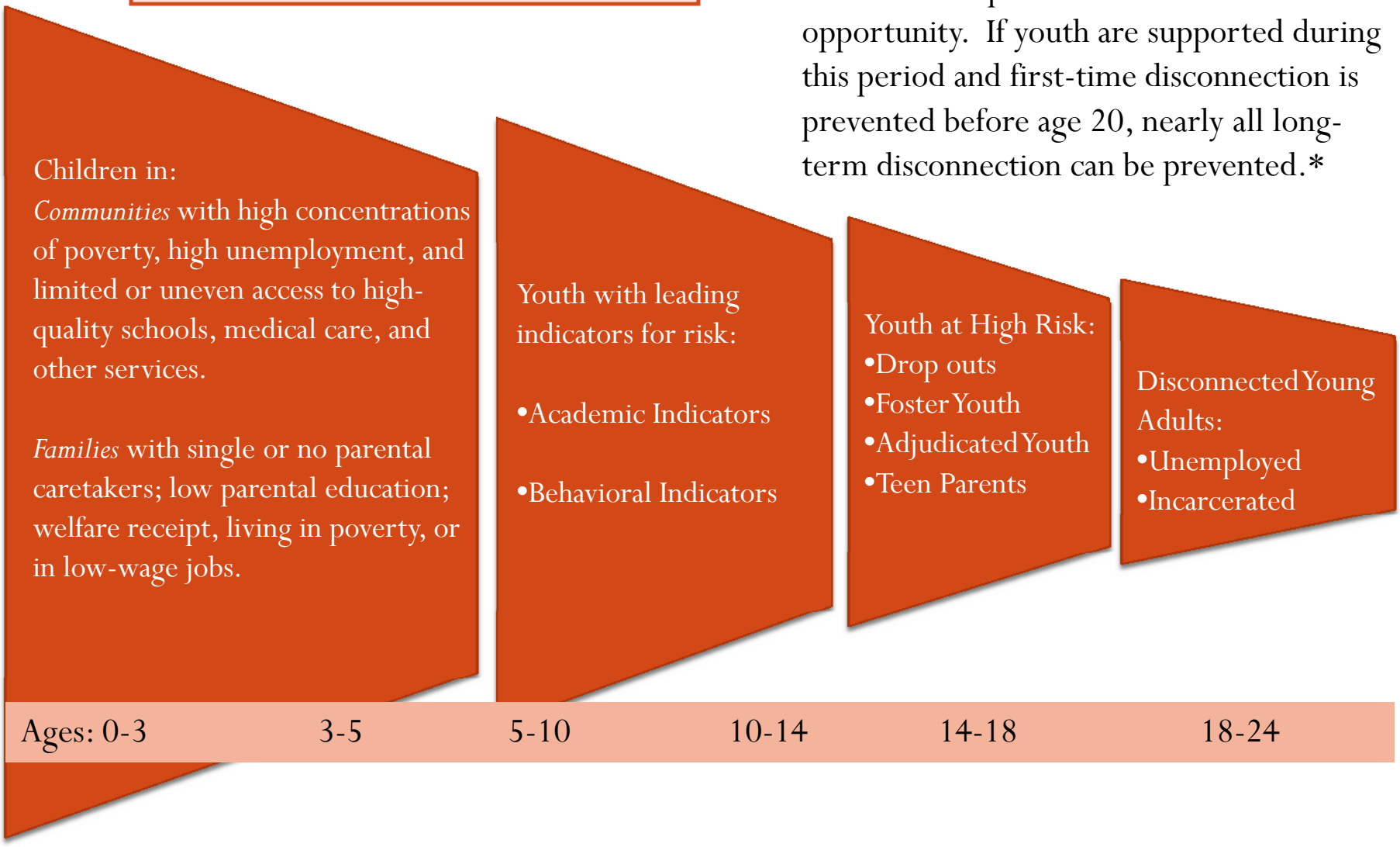
Sources: Brett Brown (1996), Wald and Martinez (2003)

Youth Populations at Risk

This funnel represents a window of opportunity. If youth are supported during this period and first-time disconnection is prevented before age 20, nearly all long-term disconnection can be prevented.*



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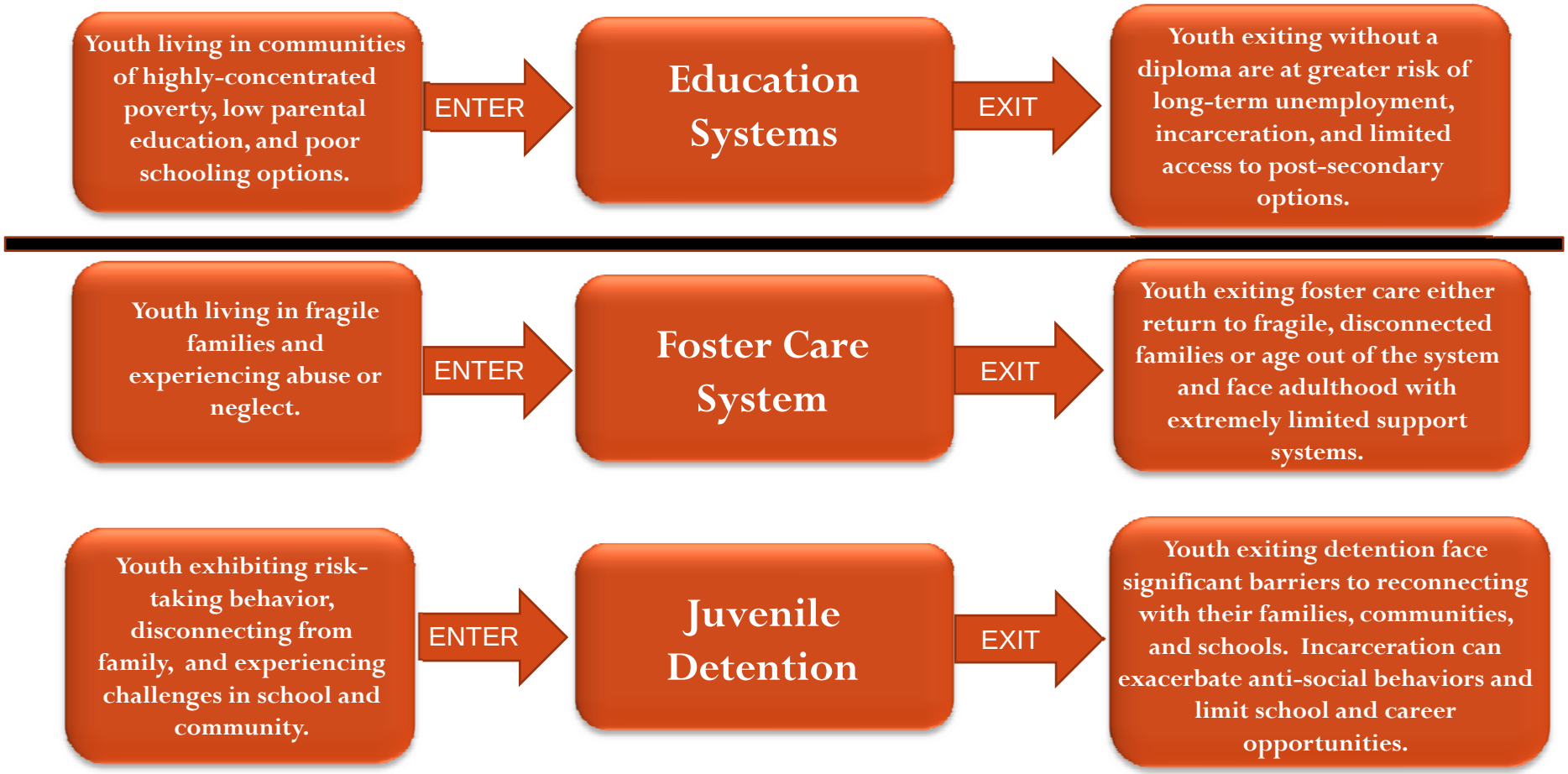
*Brett Brown. (1996). *Who are America's Disconnected Youth*?

Connecting Youth in Systems

Youth in Systems

Youth at risk who enter broken systems often exit *more* at risk for long-term disconnection.



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Youth in Systems

Identify youth and families at general risk for disconnection early to assess needs and connect them with available resources to prevent or reduce disconnection.

Within this cycle, there are multiple points of entry to work with youth at risk of becoming—or who are already—disconnected.

Continue efforts to provide connections, services, and interventions through the critical transition to adulthood to prevent further disconnection.

Youth living in communities of highly-concentrated poverty, low parental education, and poor schooling options.

Prevent entrance into broken systems through alternative programs, family outreach, or public policy changes that divert youth into more community-based efforts at youth support, engagement, and reform.

ucation
ystems

Recover youth that have fallen off track. Connect with them as they exit systems to facilitate and accelerate reengagement with families, schools, and communities. Have youth identify programs they believe will be effective for them.

Youth exiting without a diploma are at greater risk of long-term
carceration, and
post-secondary
ns.

Youth living in fragile families and experiencing abuse or neglect.

ENTER

EXIT

ster care either return to fragile, disconnected families or age out of the system and face adulthood with extremely limited support systems.

Intervene by involving parents or caregivers when possible, strengthening the services systems offer *and* improving the goals, skills, and mindsets of those who work in youth-service organizations.

Youth exhibiting risk-taking behavior, disconnecting from family, and experiencing problems with school.

ENTER

Juvenile Detention

EXIT

Youth exiting detention face significant barriers to reconnecting with their families, communities, and schools. Incarceration can exacerbate anti-social behaviors and limit school and career opportunities.

Youth in Systems

- There is tremendous opportunity for thoughtful integration of systems working with youth at risk of disconnection. Too often, these systems—child and family services, mental health, juvenile justice—operate isolated from one another.
- The skills and expertise of leaders in each system remain within silos while youth move within and across systems.
  - Harry Spence's work in Massachusetts in creating interdisciplinary teams of teachers and social workers to reduce the number of youth in out-of-home placements serves as one example of system integration.

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Approaches to Connecting Youth

Any concerted effort at preventing youth disconnection must focus on a full continuum of activities designed to:

Identify	the youth in the community at risk for disconnection,
Prevent	initial disconnection through broad-based efforts,
Intervene	with youth most at risk for falling off track, and
Recover	youth who become disconnected and provide transition back into appropriate systems of support.

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Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Creating a "no wrong door" education system that provides second (or more) chances at earning a diploma can create a true social market in education. Education markets can provide youth and their families with the opportunity to choose which approaches are the best fit for them.

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The Time is Right for MPG

Nation	• Our country has recognized we have a graduation problem. Too many youth do not graduate on time, prepared for success, or at all.
Education Leaders	• Education leaders are designing programs to smooth the journey through high school and into post-secondary education.
Municipal Leaders	• Municipal leaders realize the financial costs of ignoring the problem—in lost tax revenue, increased need for public services, and increased crime and incarceration rates.
Business Leaders	• Business leaders understand that educated youth prepared for work are vital to the health of their bottom line.
Communities	• Communities are expressing growing interest, involvement, and investment in alternative approaches to the traditional schooling model.
Youth	• Youth are asking for an engaging education that is relevant to their lives and prepares them for the growth industries of the future.

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What is "Multiple Pathways to Graduation"?

- MPG is a process to:
  - Gather data about youth, schools, and services available within a district or region,
  - Identify the reasons for youth leaving school without a diploma, and
  - Act on that data to develop necessary reforms and alternative program options to meet the needs of all youth.
- MPG also strives to:
  - Involve multiple partners and stakeholders in the school district change process, and
  - Address policy issues that create barriers to systemic change.

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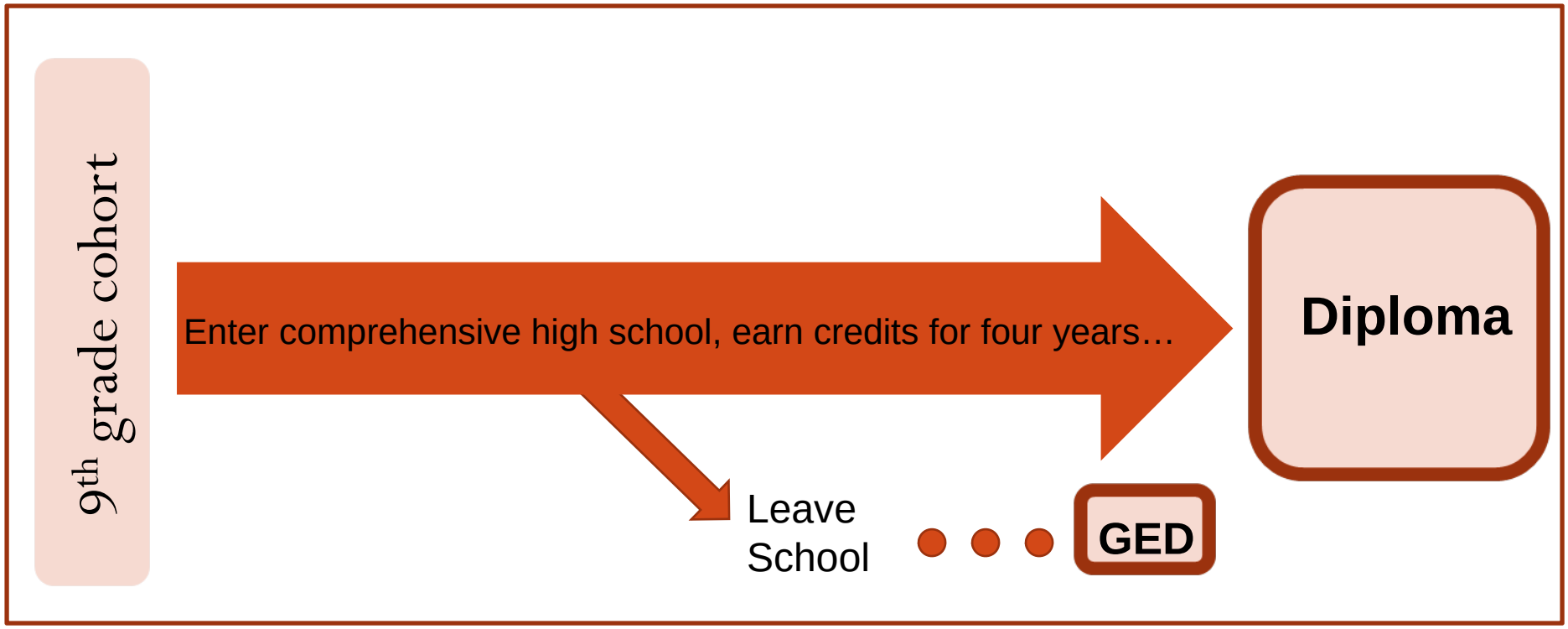
What is "Multiple Pathways to Graduation"

Traditionally, the trajectory for youth entering high school has been to EITHER enter the local, comprehensive high school, attend for four (or five) years and graduate OR leave school before graduation and perhaps eventually earn a GED.



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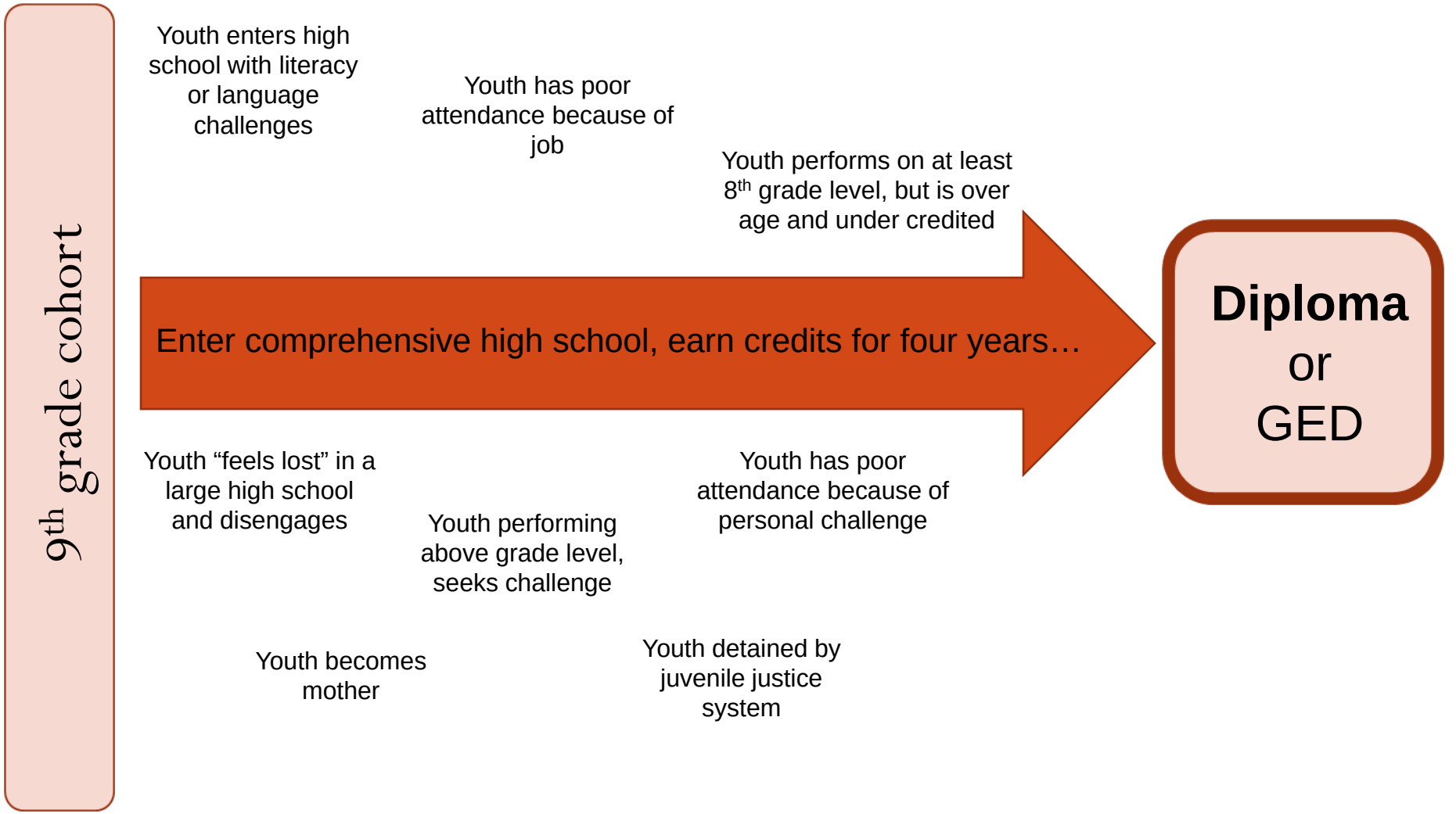
MPG recognizes that learning differences, life circumstances and other factors may prevent youth from staying on the "traditional" path to graduation.



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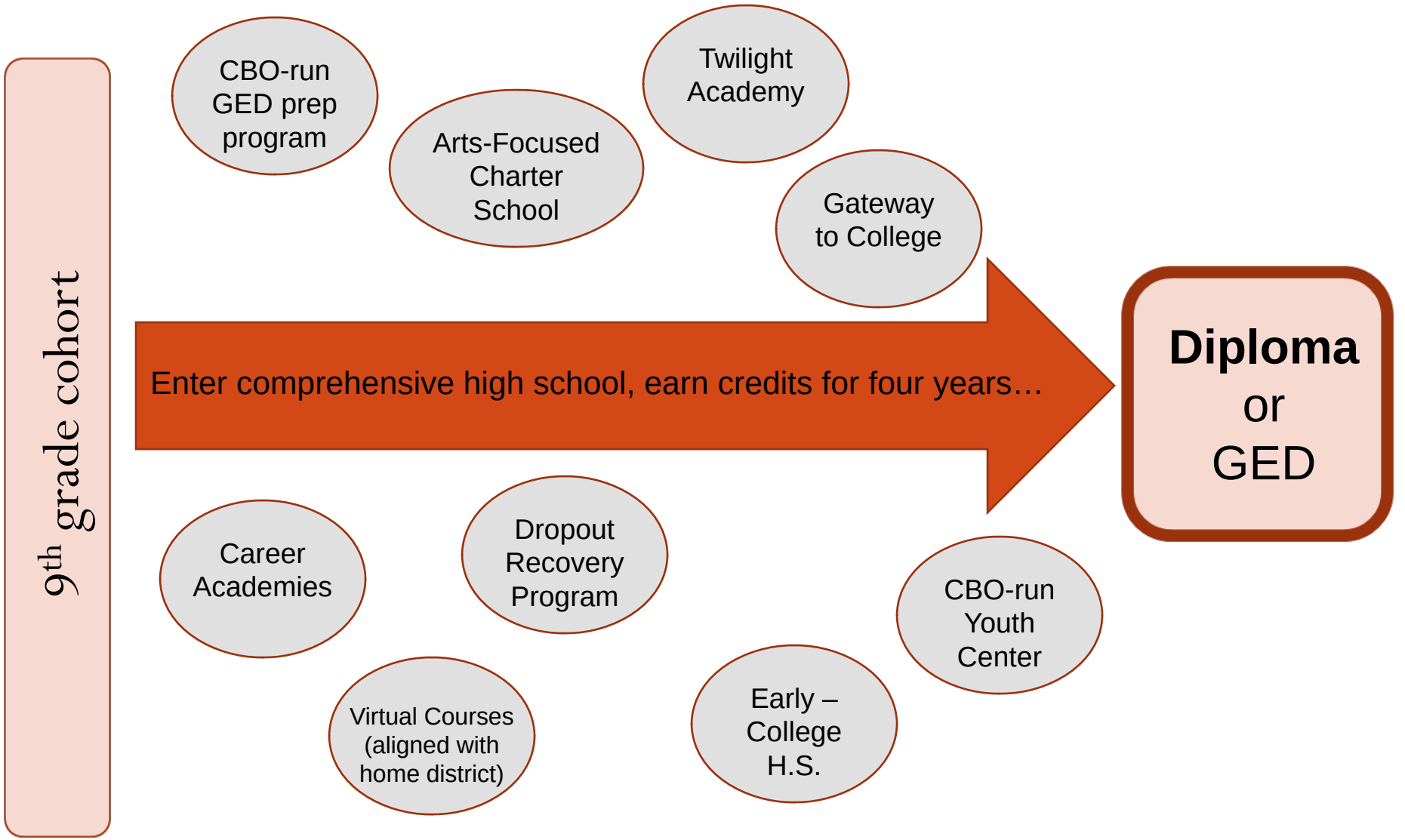
MPG, identifies the reasons local youth are leaving school and provides alternatives for them.



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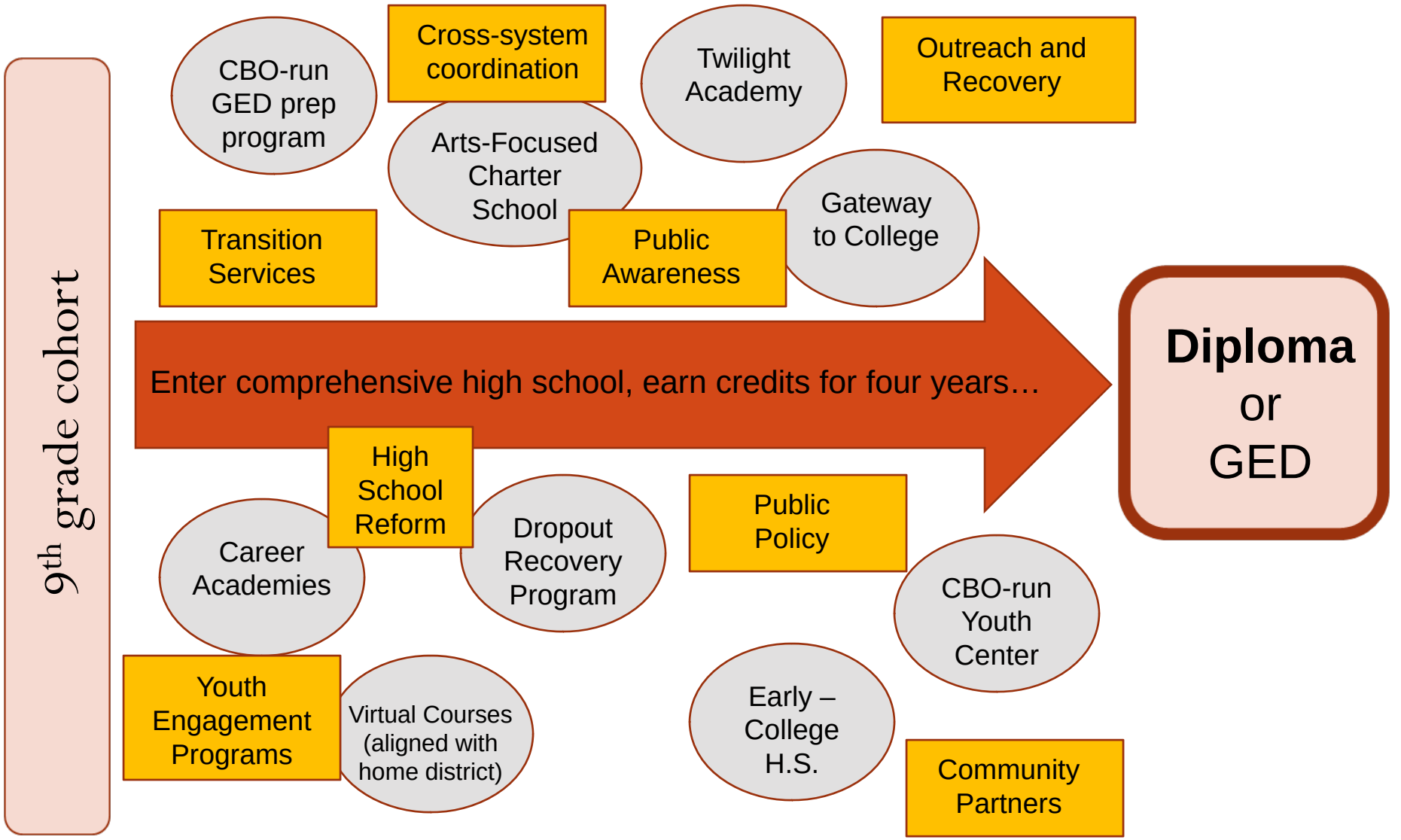
MPG, also focuses on partners, policies and programs that improve youth access to options.



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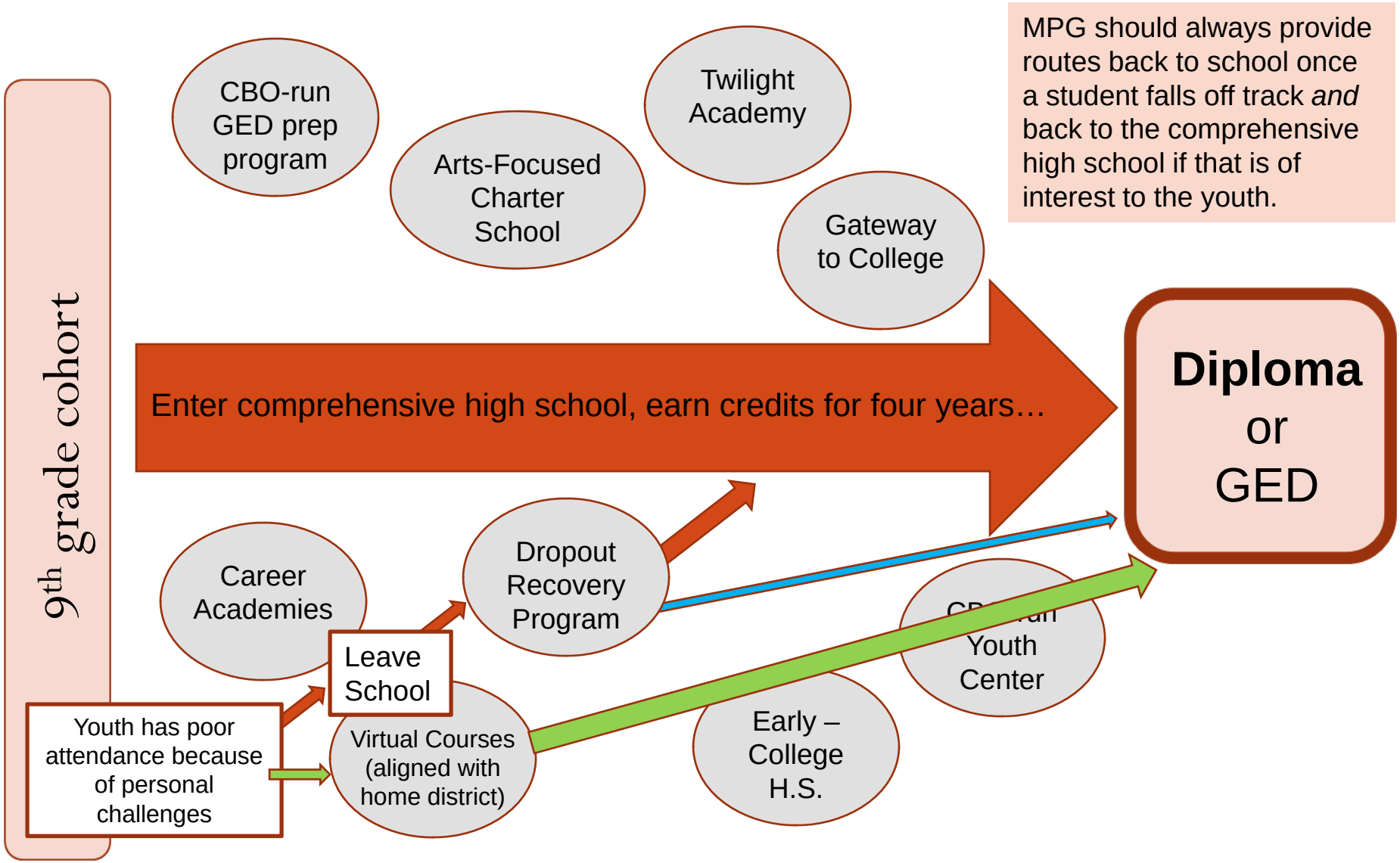
MPG example for a youth with poor attendance:



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What is "Multiple Pathways to Graduation"?

- MPG is a concept initially developed by members of the Youth Transition Funders Group.
- MPG has focused largely on *school district-level* reform.
- Initial efforts were funded by YTFG in five cities:
  - Boston
  - New York
  - Philadelphia
  - Chicago
  - Portland, Oregon
- Other municipalities have undertaken MPG-type efforts including new cities supported by the U.S. Department of Labor.

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Multiple Pathways to Graduation

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Labor built on YTFG's efforts by establishing the Multiple Education Pathway Blueprint and awarding a total of nearly $3M in grants to six cities:

- Brockton, MA
- Des Moines, IA
- Fall River, MA
- Gary, IN
- Metairie, LA
- Mobile, AL
- Pittsburgh, PA

State and federal Departments of Labor have expressed greater interest in MPG than than state or federal Departments of Education. Without support from education departments or education policy makers, MPG efforts struggle to engage local school districts in the change process.

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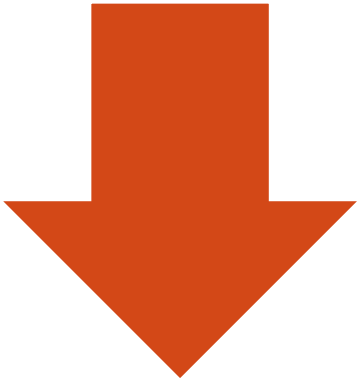
Source: Chris Sturgis. (2008). *Stemming the Tide: Accelerating the Adoption of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation Framework through Coordinated Grantmaking and Leadership.*

MPG is a Balancing Act

MPG involves undertaking simultaneous system improvement and risk-prevention programs to reduce the need for alternatives *while* developing a variety of options that serve vulnerable youth now.

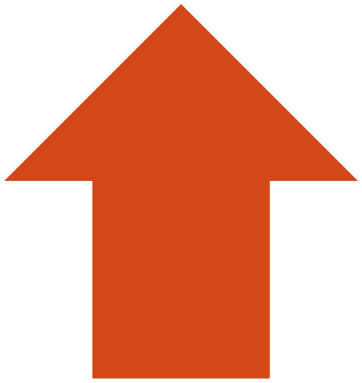
Most cities and districts have alternative program seats for *less than 10 percent* of youth in need of such services.

Even with significant prevention efforts to reduce the current need for alternative educational options, there will likely remain a need to increase the number of programs and slots available.



Strengthen larger systems and vulnerable groups

Increase alternative programs



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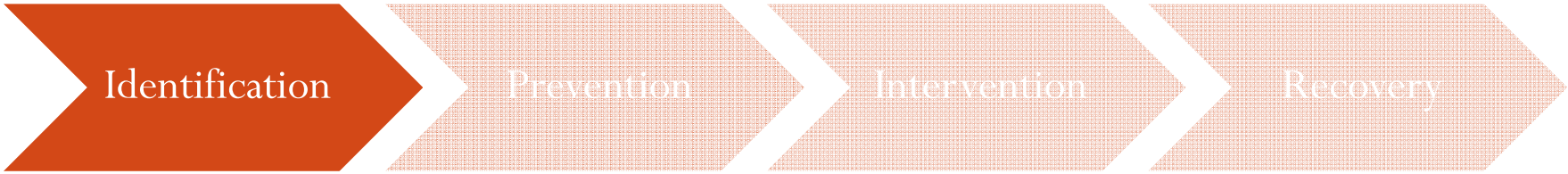
MPG: Challenge to Heed

- When creating multiple pathways through alternative programs, develop means to avoid two serious risks associated with MPG:
  - When increasing rigor in high school while also increasing the number of available alternative programs, work against high schools developing a "push-out" process that is discriminatory.
    - Identify and address the unintended consequences of creating MPG
    - Provide students with an element of choice in educational planning and placement.
  - Alternative pathways can become a second-class system and further institutionalize tracking.
    - Provide student choice
    - Ensure opportunities for reenrollment in "traditional" high school
    - Enforce quality measures to prevent separate *and* unequal programming.

Source: J.D. Hoye and Chris Sturgis. (June 2005). *The Alternative Pathways Project: A Framework for Dropout Reduction and Recovery.* Available at: http://www.ytfg.org/documents/AltPathv.7.7Julyfin_000.pdf

Scan of Efforts to Connect Youth



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Early Identification

- Early identification of youth at risk is the best weapon against disconnection. As the only system through which nearly every child passes, the K-12 education system has a unique opportunity—and responsibility—to reach children before disconnection occurs.

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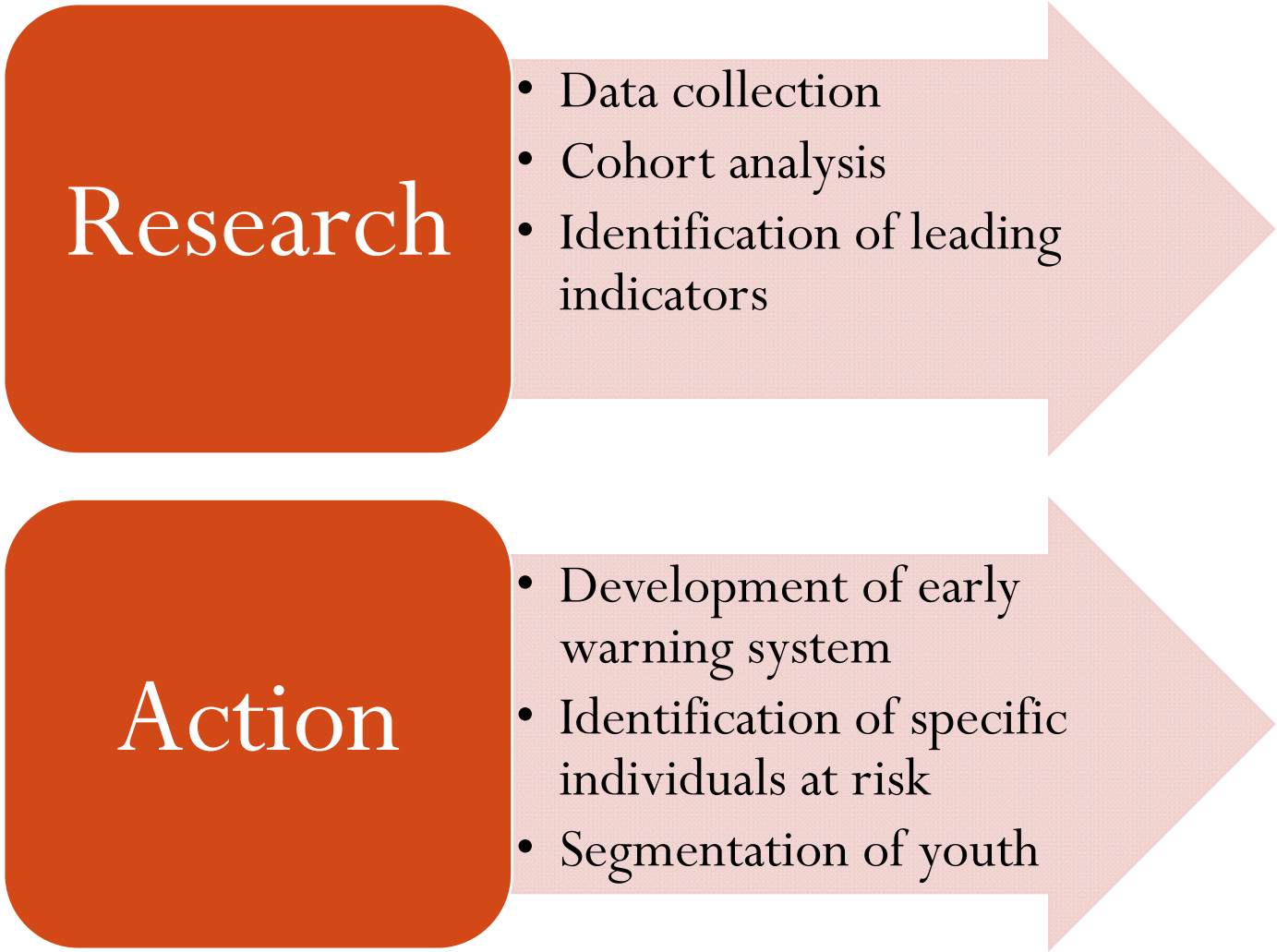
Identifying Youth at Risk

Identification of youth at risk is a two-part process—first research, then action.



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Identifying Youth at Risk: MPG Approach

Early identification of youth at risk for dropping out can help stem the tide of youth leaving school before graduation. The five cities that began the MPG effort and other research has highlighted key leading indicators for youth leaving school before graduating:

- Academic performance:
  - Accumulating few course credits
  - More than one semester F in core subject
  - Literacy challenges
  - Grade retention
- Student Behavior:
  - High absenteeism
  - Poor behavior grade in middle school (8^{th} grade)/disciplinary problems
  - Disengagement from teachers, peers, and extracurricular/out-of-school time activities

Achieve, Inc. "Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System." P. 5.

Identification Research: Data Collection

- MPG efforts have identified low literacy rates as a key indicator of decreased chances at graduation and post-secondary success.

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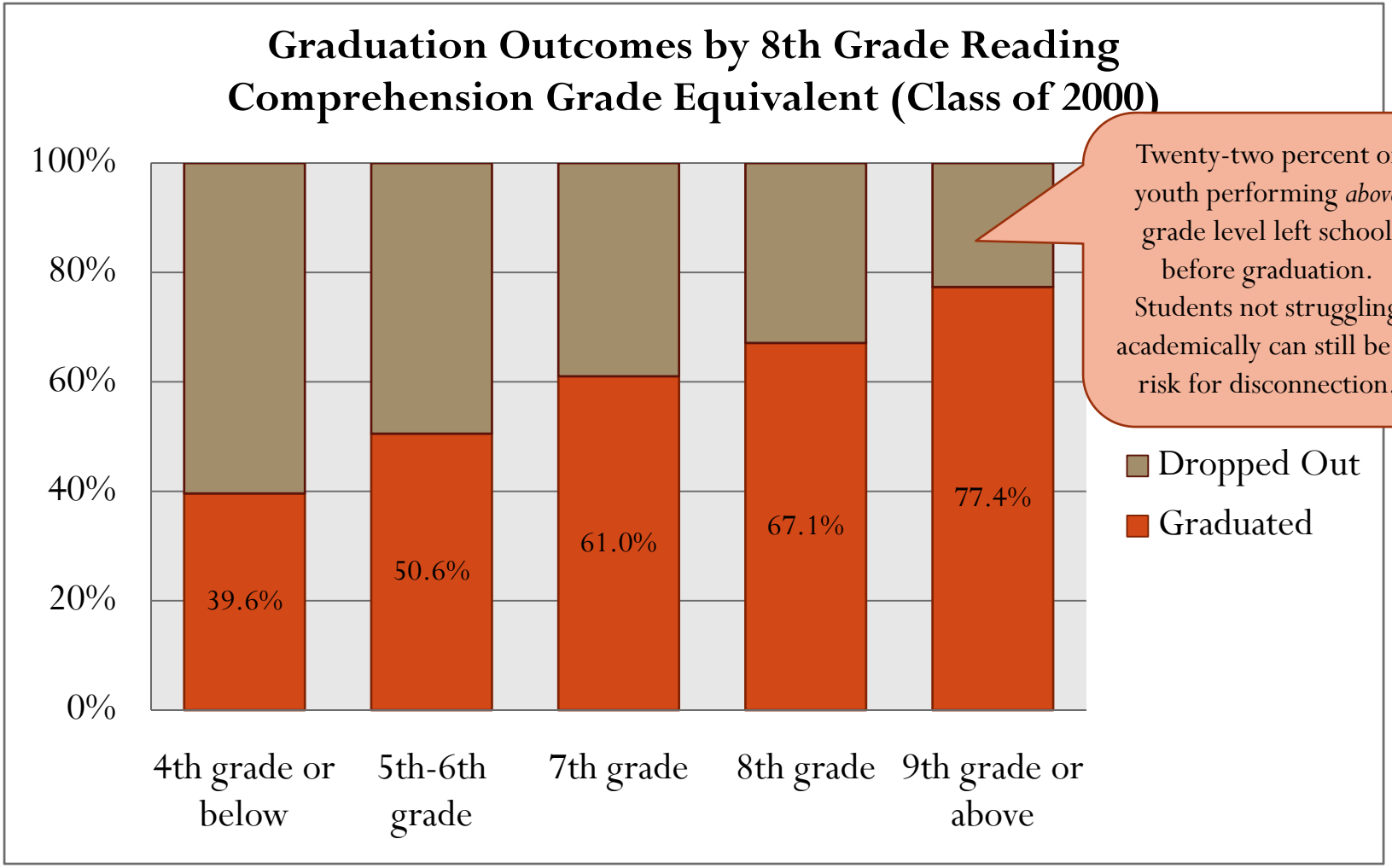
Identification Research: Data Collection

Literacy Example from Philadelphia



Source: Ruth Curran Neild. *Literacy Levels and Student Outcomes: Data from Philadelphia* Presentation given November 19, 2008.

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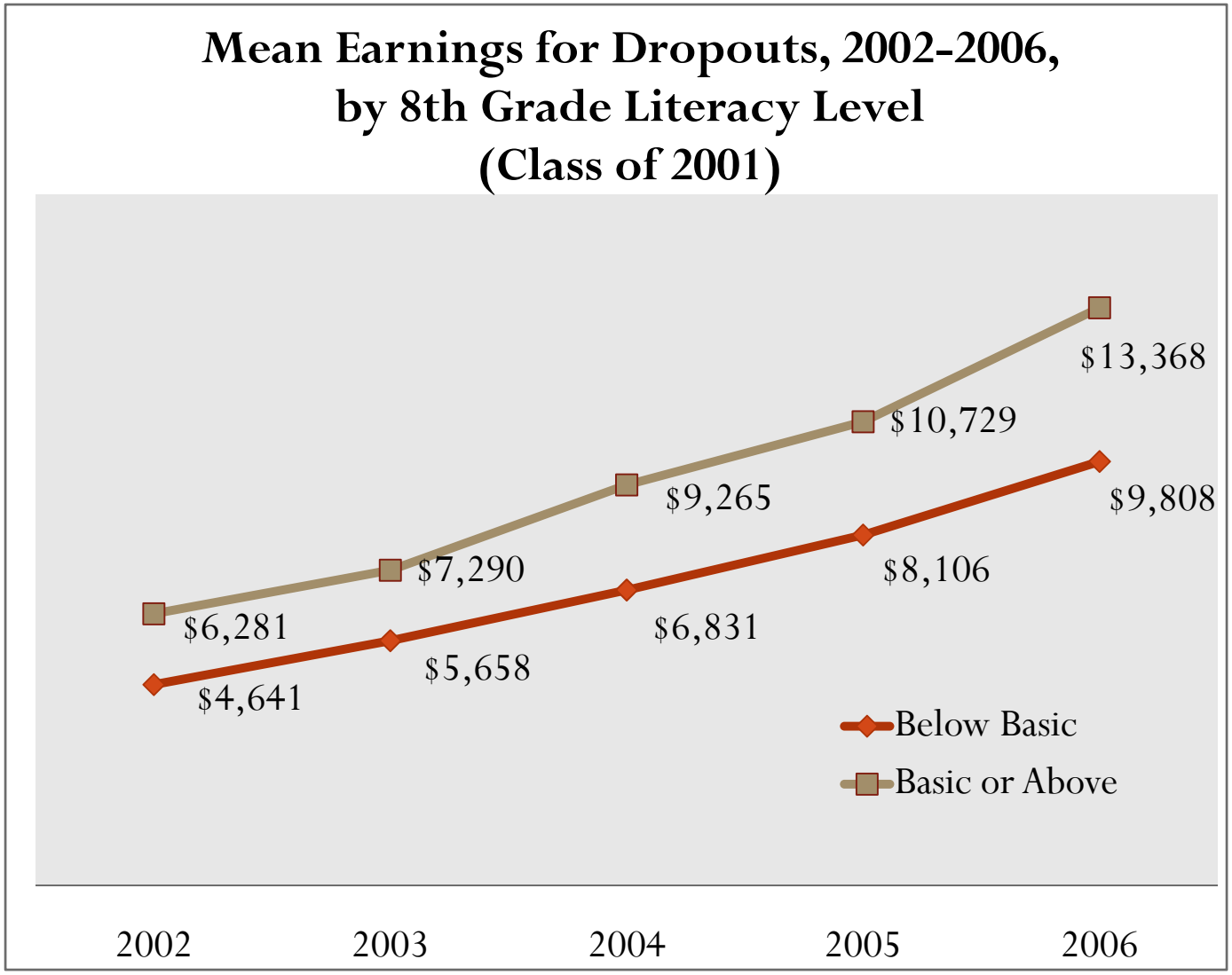
Higher literacy rates may have a positive impact on earning potential, regardless of ultimate educational attainment.

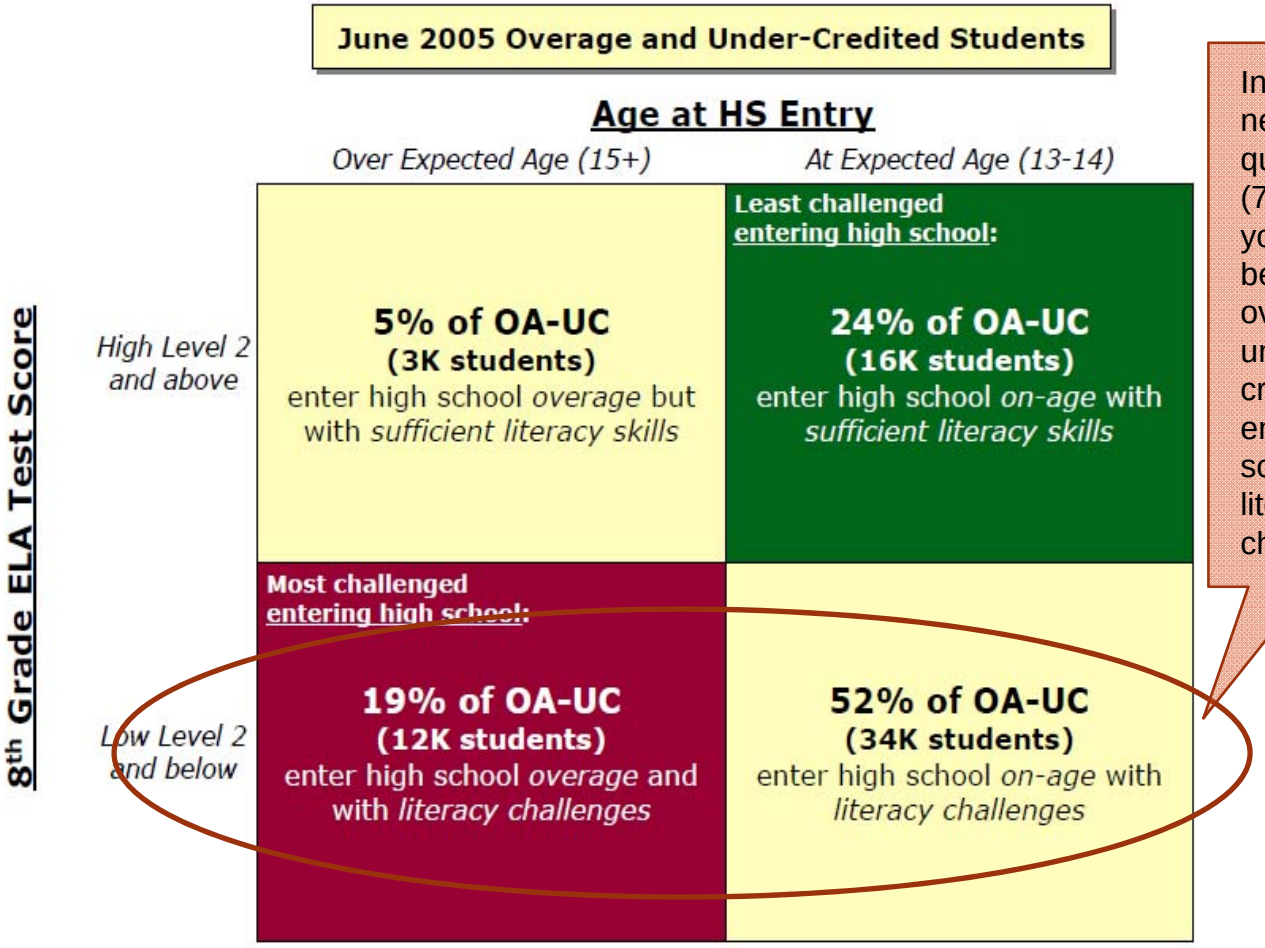


Source: Ruth Curran Neild. *Literacy Levels and Student Outcomes: Data from Philadelphia* Presentation given November 19, 2008.

Identification Research: Cohort Analysis

Literacy Example from New York City

Ninety percent of NYC youth who leave school before graduating become over age and under-credited during their high school career. Only 13 percent of graduates do so.



In NYC, nearly three quarters (71%) of youth who become overage and under-credited enter high school with literacy challenges

Source: *Multiple Pathways Research and Development: Summary Findings and Strategic Solutions for Overage, Under-Credited Youth*. Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation, New York City Department of Education. p. 17

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Identification Research: Leading Indicators

Chicago Example

Chicago—with the support of the Consortium on Chicago School Research—collected cohort data and developed an "on-track indicator" for youth at end of their freshman year.

"On-track" meant:

- Having at least five full-year credits at the end of freshman year
- Having no more than one semester F in a core course

Students "on-track" at the end of their freshman year were **four times more likely to graduate** than those "off-track" by the above measures.

Elaine M. Allensworth and John Q. Easton. (2007) What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. Available at: http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf

Identification Research: Leading Indicators

Chicago Example

Recognizing the need for available and actionable data *before* the end of freshman year, Chicago identified leading indicators that were equally predictive of graduation and that would allow for earlier intervention.

TABLE 1

Predictive Ability of Indicators of Freshman-Year Performance

Freshman Performance Indicator	Overall Correct Prediction	Specificity *Predicting Nongraduates*	Sensitivity *Predicting Graduates*
GPA	80%	73%	85%
On-Track vs. Off-Track	80%	72%	85%
Semester Course Failures	80%	66%	89%
Fall-semester failures	*76%*	*55%*	*91%*
Absences	77%	59%	90%
Fall-semester absences	*74%*	*53%*	*89%*

Source: Elaine M. Allensworth and John Q. Easton. (2007) What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. Available at: http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf . P. 6.

Identification Research: Leading Indicators

Chicago Example

FIGURE 4

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman On-Track Status

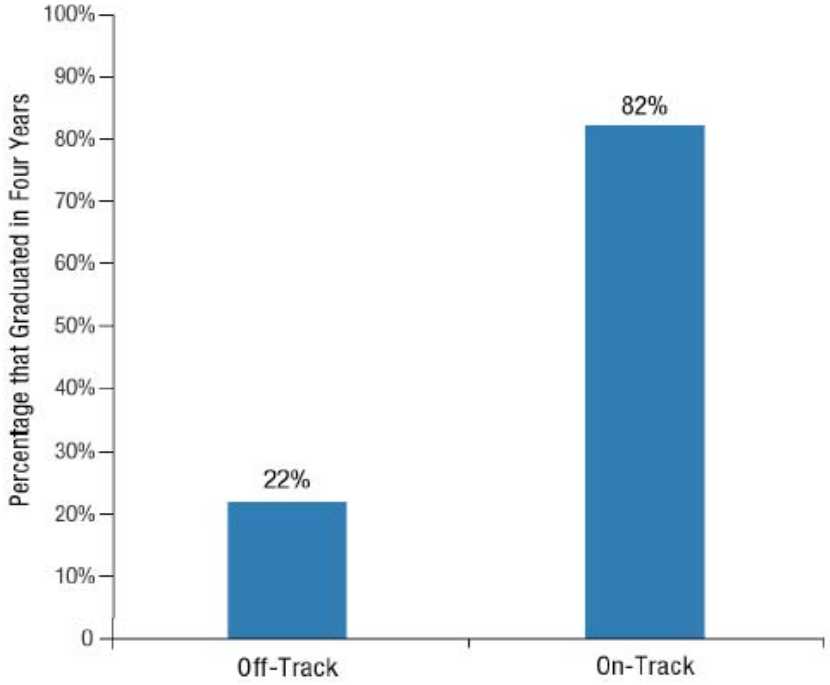
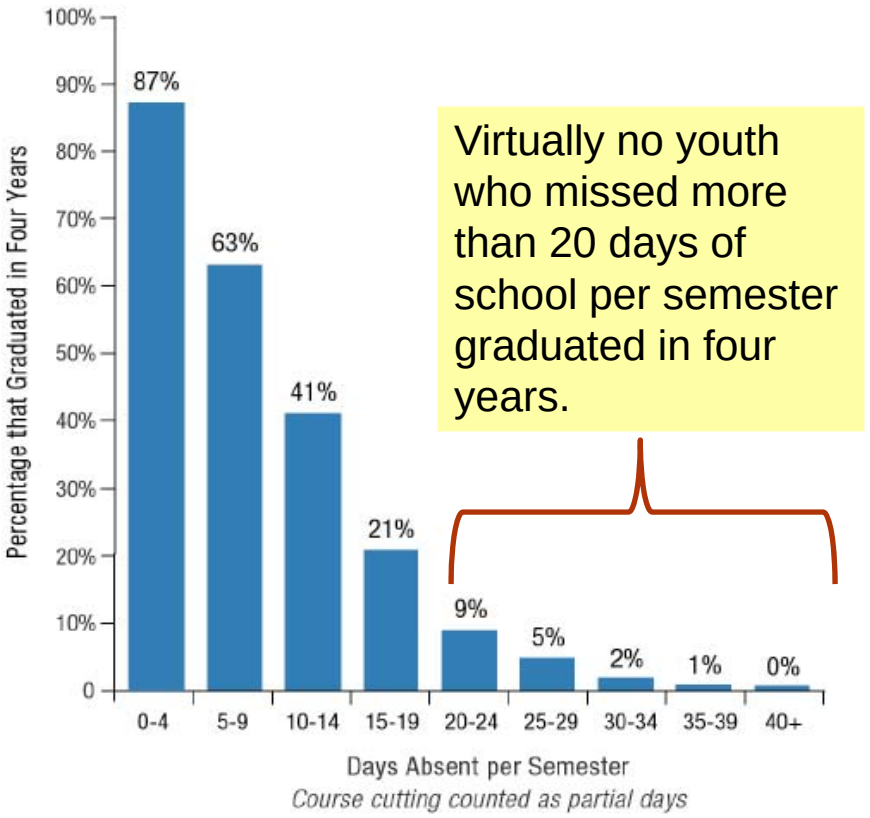


FIGURE 5

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Absence Rates



Virtually no youth who missed more than 20 days of school per semester graduated in four years.

Source: Elaine M. Allensworth and John Q. Easton. (2007) What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. Available at: http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf . P. 7.

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Identification Research: Leading Indicators

Chicago Example

FIGURE 6

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman GPA

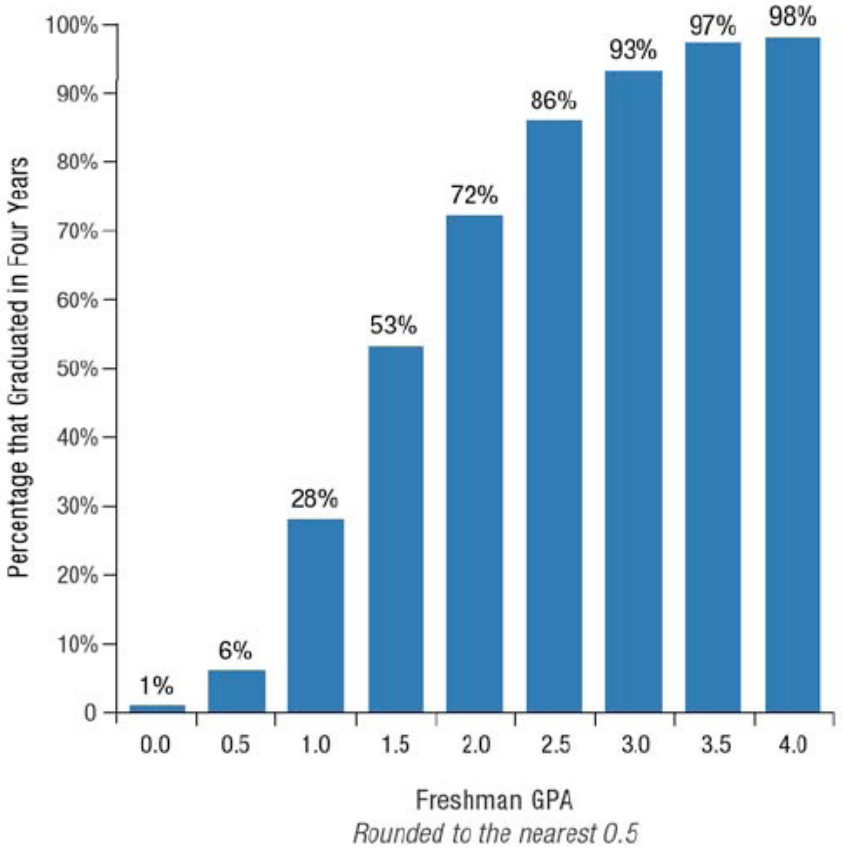
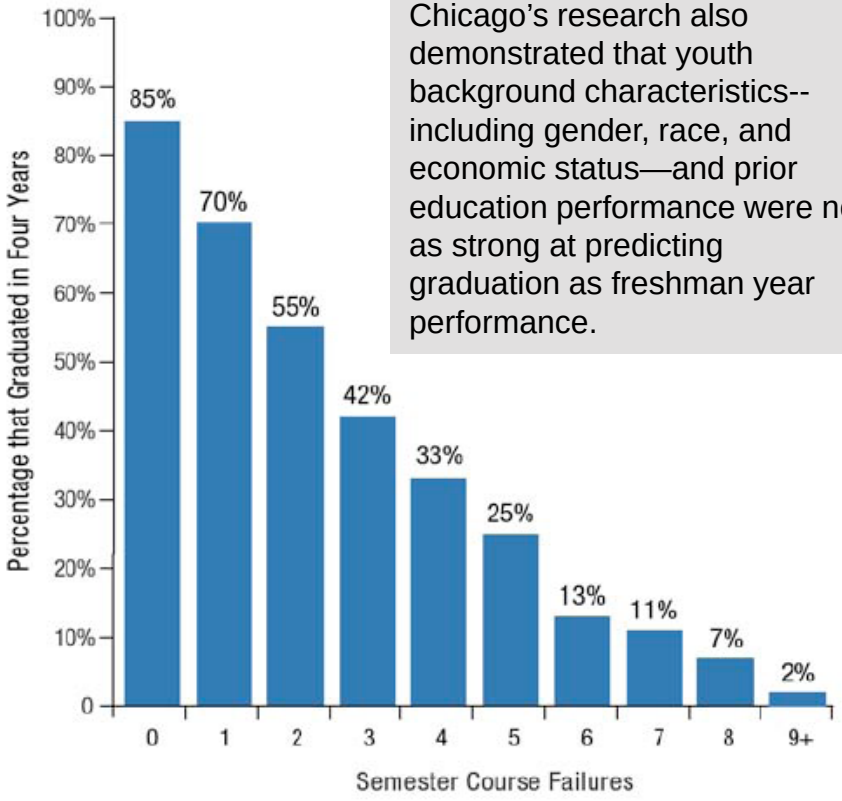


FIGURE 7

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Course Failures



Chicago's research also demonstrated that youth background characteristics--including gender, race, and economic status—and prior education performance were not as strong at predicting graduation as freshman year performance.

Source: Elaine M. Allensworth and John Q. Easton. (2007) What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. Available at: http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf . P. 7.

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Identification: Action

Once leading indicators are identified for local youth, districts will be able to:

- Develop an early warning system to identify specific individuals at risk
- Segment the vulnerable populations to identify need and demand for specific programs and services, and
- Match—efficiently and effectively—youth to services.

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Identification Action: Resources for Developing an Early Warning System

- National High School Center. *Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts.*
  - http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/IssueBrief_EarlyWarningSystemsGuide_081408.pdf
- Consortium on Chicago School Research. *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools.*
  - http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf
- Ruth Curran Neild, Robert Balfanz, and Liza Herzog. *An Early Warning System.*
  - http://www.jhsph.edu/preventyouthviolence/Test/An%20early%20warning%20system.pdf
- Achieve, Inc. *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System.*
  - http://www.achieve.org/files/FINAL-dropouts_0.pdf

★Idea: Data Fellowships

One promising idea is to develop or seed a program to provide Data Fellows to specific cities/counties/regions interested in developing multiple pathways. The Data Fellow could access local administrative data and conduct analyses that will:

- Determine local capacity of CBOs, district, and other youth services,
- Identify the local youth most in need of concentrated and highly focused intervention,
- Facilitate cross-organization involvement to reduce overlap of services,
- Highlight gaps in or limits to capacity relevant to local need, and
- Provide various data sets necessary to build a comprehensive plan

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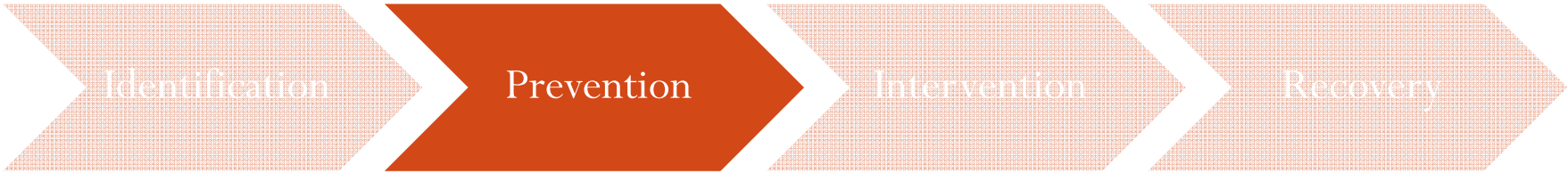
Note: Idea promoted by Tia Martinez during phone interview.

Approaches to Connecting Youth



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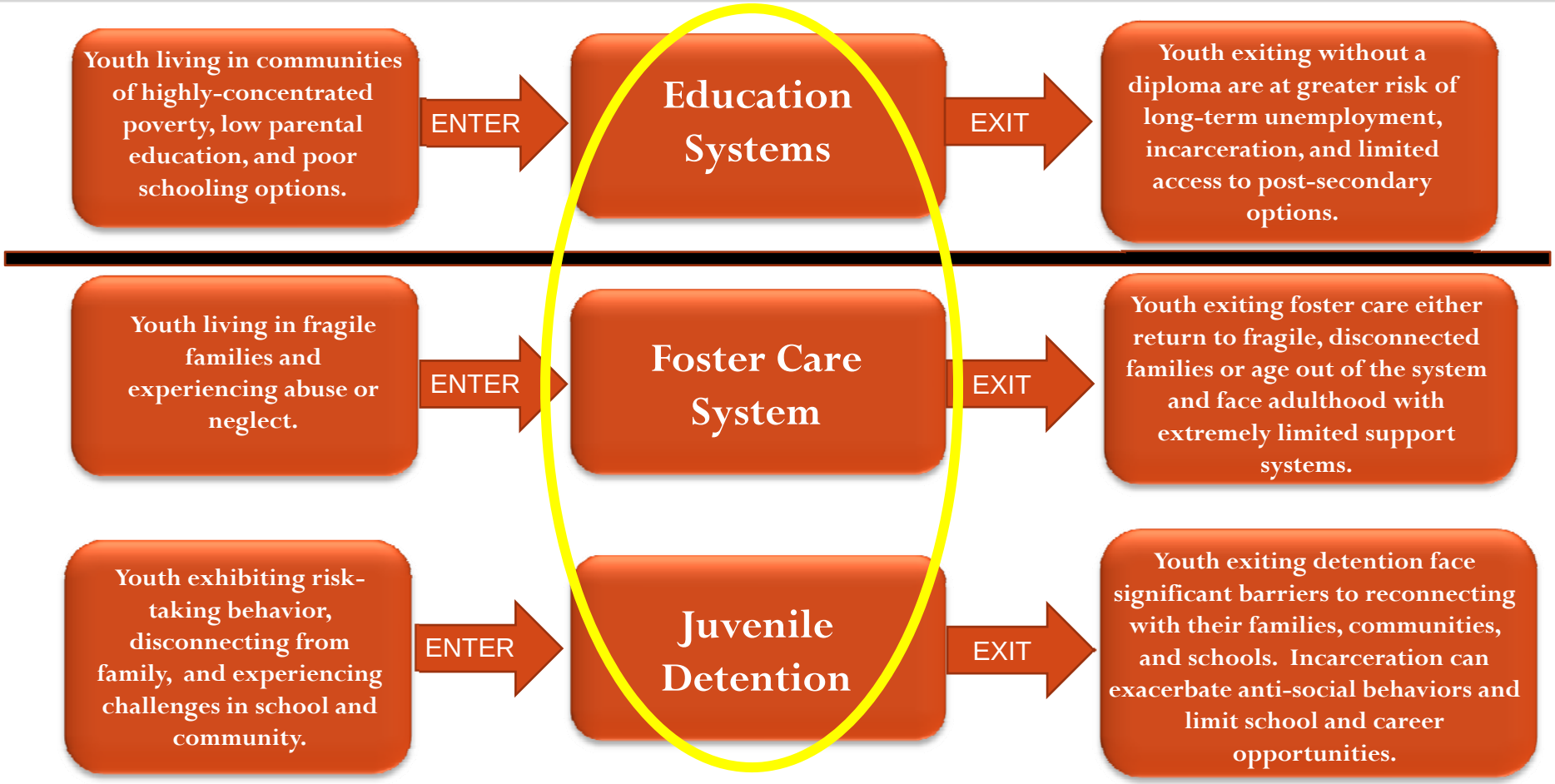
Youth in Systems

Prevention efforts can be targeted within any of these systems. This interim report focuses on examples related to education.



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Prevention for Youth at Risk: Education

The following slides will provide examples of each of these areas of prevention.

Early Efforts

- Early Prevention Options
- Youth Engagement
- Literacy

Multiple Pathways to Graduation

- Entering High School
- Completing High School
- Transitioning to Post-secondary options

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Prevention: Early Efforts

Long before high school, early prevention efforts can help keep kids on track to graduation through:

- Early childhood supports
  - Nurse-family partnerships (especially for teen parents)
  - Universal pre-Kindergarten services
- Attendance focus early in school career
- Development of literacy skills
- Youth engagement programs
- Integration of social and health services into schools

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Prevention: Early Efforts

Youth Engagement Example

Early and continued involvement in youth engagement activities—like youth service, civic engagement, youth media, and youth involvement in research—can have a significant impact on reducing youth risk factors.

"Students who are disengaged from school are at risk for poor academic achievement, skipping classes, sexual activity, substance abuse, and ultimately dropping out of school."

--Janine Zweig

In 2002, only 39% of girls and 20% of boys were reported by their parents to be engaged in school.*

Janine M. Zweig. (2003). *Vulnerable Youth: Identifying their Need for Alternative Education Settings.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

*Laura Lippman and Andrew Rivers. *Assessing School Engagement: A Guide for Out-of-School Time Program Practitioners.*

Prevention: Early Efforts

Literacy Development Example

Improving youth literacy *before* adolescents enter high school can have a substantial impact on their ability to complete school and even their chances of obtaining or keeping jobs.

If early prevention through literacy support is not effective, improvement in adolescent and young adult literacy *is still* possible. For example, The Literacy Center in Philadelphia has found that its program produces an average increase of 1.6 grade levels per 25 hours of instruction.

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Prevention: MPG

Once data are available to identify vulnerable youth, prevention efforts can help many youth avoid disconnection.

MPG efforts include the development of alternative pathways designed to prevent youth disconnection and dropping out, including:

- Programs easing transition into high school,
- Programs supporting completion of high school, and
- Programs easing transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment.

On the following slides, we provide single examples of each of these efforts.

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Prevention: Easing Transition into High School

Portland Example

Recognizing that the summer between 8th and 9th grade is a pivotal period for youth at risk of leaving school before graduation, Portland's "Ninth Grade Counts" program provides transition services—beginning during the summer—for incoming freshman, including:

- Summer school,
- Tutoring,
- Mentoring,
- Internships, and
- Community connection activities.

ninth grade counts

Sources: *Ninth Grade Counts: 12 weeks of summer, a future of success.* Available at: http://cms9.pps.k12.or.us/.docs/pg/12510. See also: connectedby25.org.

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Prevention: Supporting High School Completion

NAC Example

NAF reports a record of success with 90% graduation rates and more than 80% of these graduates going on to college.

The National Academy Foundation (NAF) is a national network of high school career academies with rigorous, career-themed curricula. Each year, NAF serves more than 50,000 students in over 500 Academies in 40 states and the District of Columbia through:

- Academy of Finance
- Academy of Engineering
- Academy of Hospitality & Tourism, and
- Academy of Information Technology.

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Source: www.naf.org

Prevention: Easing Transition into Postsecondary Education

ECHSI Example

The Early College High School Initiative

"Since 2002, the partner organizations of the Early College High School Initiative have started or redesigned almost 160 schools in 24 states and the District of Columbia.

The schools are designed so that low-income youth, first-generation college goers, English language learners, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in higher education can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an Associate's degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor's degree—tuition free."

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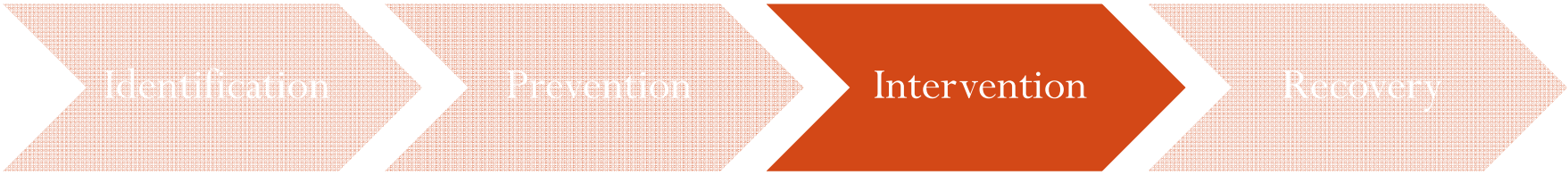
Source: www.earlycolleges.org

Approaches to Connecting Youth



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Intervention with Youth at Risk

Intervention with youth at risk can take many forms across systems and subsections of youth—including mentorships, out-of-school-time programs, and comprehensive, wrap-around services delivered by a case worker.

With MPG, intervention generally occurs in two areas:

- Traditional high school settings and
- Stand-alone alternative placements.

In this interim presentation, we provide examples of MPG interventions provided in both types of settings.

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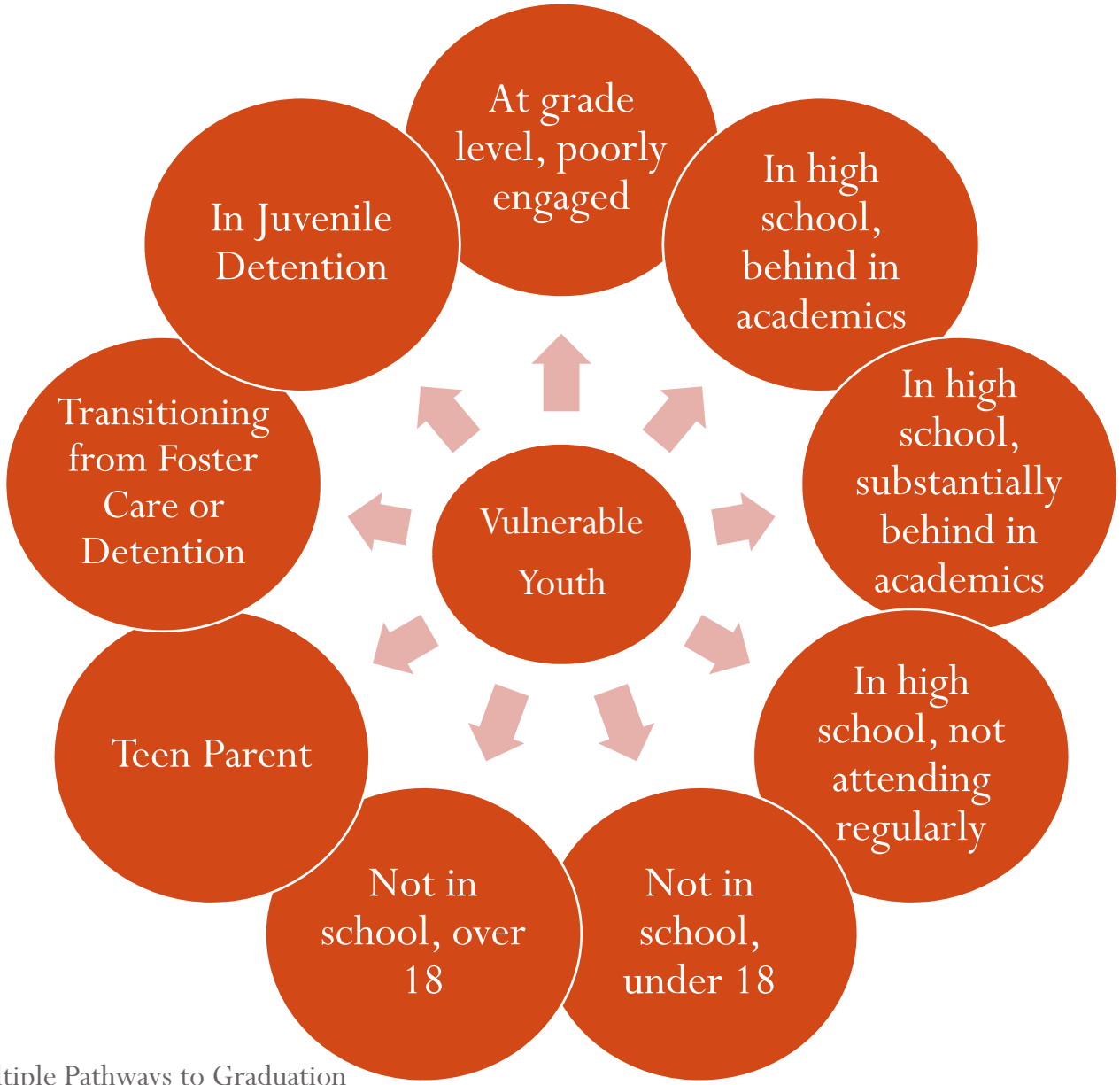
Vulnerable Youth: A Heterogeneous Group



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	Not in school-over 18	Not in school-under 18	In transition from foster care or juvenile detention	In juvenile detention	Teen mother	At grade level-poorly engaged	In school, behind academically	In school-substantially behind academically	In school, poor atten-dance
Early & Middle College H. S.					x	x			
College Gateway	x	x							x
Career Academies	x	x			x	x	x		x
Diploma Plus		x			x	x			
Virtual Schools			x	x	x		x		x
Twilight Academies	x	x	x		x				x
CBO-run youth centers	x	x	x		x		x	x	
Employment-based programs	x	x	x		x			x	x
Small school reforms						x	x	x	x

	Not in school-over 18	Not in school-under 18	In transition from foster care or juvenile detention	In juvenile detention	Teen mother	At grade level-poorly engaged	In school, behind academically	In school-substantially behind academically	In school, poor atten-dance
Early & Middle College H. S.					x	x			
College Gateway	x	x							x
Career Academies	x	x							x
Diploma Plus		x							
Virtual Schools			x	x					x
Twilight Academies	x	x	x						x
CBO-run youth centers	x	x	x						
Employment-based programs	x	x	x		x			x	x
Small school reforms						x	x	x	x

No single program can meet the needs of all youth at risk of, or in the process of, disconnecting.

Creating multiple pathways to graduation and providing programs tailored to the specific needs of local youth are necessary to intervene with disconnected youth and improve chances for adult success.

Intervention through Multiple Pathways

A number of national alternative education programs exist:

- Job Corps
- YouthBuild
- Center for Employment and Training
- Youth Service and Conservation Corps

The U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse reviewed available research on dropout prevention. Although several showed promise in keeping youth in school and progressing academically, the Job Corps program was the only program with rigorous enough research to suggest it had a potentially positive effect on youth *completing* school.

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Source: Aron, L.Y. (2006). *An Overview of Alternative Education*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Intervention through MPG

Diploma Plus Example

Key features of the Diploma Plus model include:

- A performance-based route to a high school diploma.
- An emphasis on contextual learning and portfolio development.
- A final stage (Plus Phase) that provides an opportunity for youth to try—and fail—in a supportive environment.
  - Students must successfully complete several major projects, a structured internship, and one or more credit-level college course in order to earn their high school diploma.

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Intervention through MPG

Philadelphia E^{3}Power Center Example

E^{3}Power (youth education, employment and empowerment) Centers:

- Act as a "one-stop-shop" for vulnerable youth who faced significant challenges in completing a diploma in a traditional high school setting.
- Serve a variety of vulnerable youth including dropouts, adjudicated youth, parenting teens, and foster youth.
- Provide:
  - GED preparation and educational services
  - Job skills training, job experience, and job placement services
  - Life skills development
  - Counseling and other social support services

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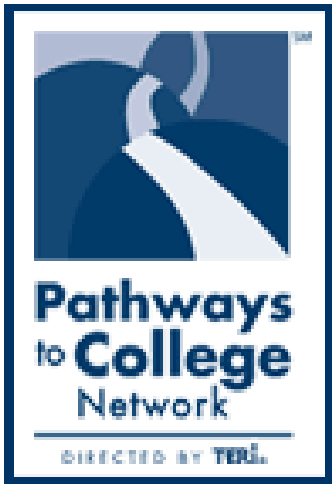
Intervention through MPG

- Obtaining a high school diploma or GED is not enough to ensure a successful transition to young adulthood.
- Programs that provide continued guidance for youth interested in entering college and other post-secondary opportunities may increase chances of success.
- Program example:
  - Pathways to College

Source: Aron, L.Y. (2006). *An Overview of Alternative Education*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.



Launched in 2001, the Pathways to College Network is an alliance of 38 national organizations and funders committed to advancing college access and success for underserved students, including first generation college students, low-income students, underrepresented minorities, and students with disabilities.

In 2004, Pathways published *A Shared Agenda: A Leadership Challenge to Improve College Access and Success*, summarizing research-based effective policies and practices drawn from over 650 studies. As the Network has expanded strategically to include new partners, funders, and collaborators, the six guiding principles articulated in *A Shared Agenda* remain at the center of its ongoing work.

Guiding Principles from *A Shared Agenda*

Expect that all underserved students are capable of being prepared to enroll and succeed in college.

Provide a range of high-quality college-preparatory tools for underserved students and their families.

Embrace social, cultural, and learning-style differences in developing learning environments and activities for underserved students.

Involve leaders at all levels in establishing policies, programs, and practices that facilitate student transitions towards postsecondary attainment.

Maintain sufficient financial and human resources to enable underserved students to prepare for, enroll, and succeed in college.

Assess policy, program, practice, and institutional effectiveness regularly.

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Source: www.pathwaystocollege.net

Intervention through MPG

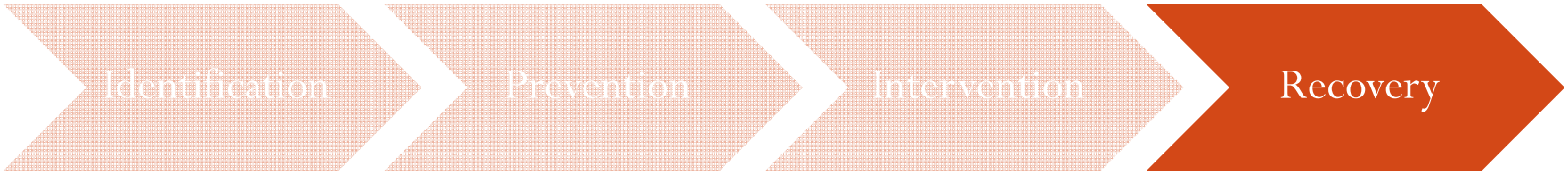
Effective MPG efforts consider not only alternative school models, but other initiatives that will keep kids in school. For example:

- Technological innovations that engage youth and impart useful skills,
- Initiatives that create safe, rigorous, and student-focused environments in the larger schools that will serve most youth, and
- Youth engagement activities that keep youth connected.

> "*Young people who participate in youth engagement activities feel empowered, connected, and valued by adults and their communities.*" – Gray and Hayes

Aracelis Gray and Cheryl D. Hayes. (2008). *Understanding the State of Knowledge of Youth Engagement . Financing and Sustainability.* Washington, D.C., The Finance Project.

Approaches to Connecting Youth



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Recovery

- For youth who do fall off track, recovery systems can support re-entry into educational and career-development pathways.

- There are numerous school, CBO, and public agency-run recovery programs. In the next few slides we focus on programs designed to recover students back into the education system.

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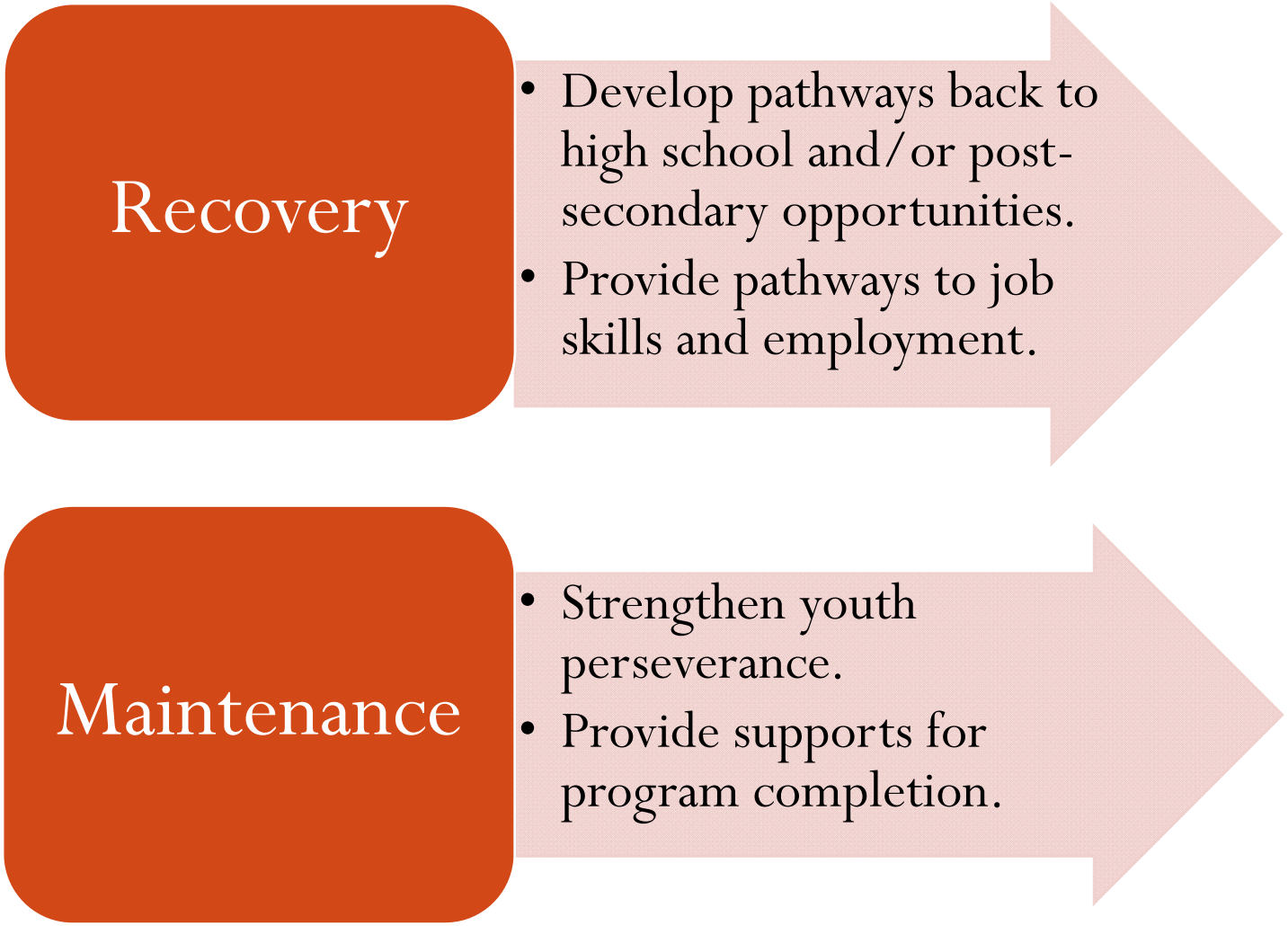
Recovery of Disconnected Youth



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GATEWAY to COLLEGE

Gateway to College was developed at Portland Community College in Oregon and is now operating in more than a dozen colleges nationwide. Five additional colleges began students in the fall of 2008.

"The Gateway to College program is the best program out there to get dropouts back in school and on track for a high school diploma."

Joel Rosch, Center for Child and Family Policy, Duke University

Part of the Early College High School Initiative, Gateway to College serves at-risk youth, 16 to 20 years old, **who have dropped out of school**. The program gives students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while earning college credits and achieving college success.

The program is open to students achieving at a minimum of the 8th grade level.

The community college campus location appeals to overage and under credited youth who often leave school before obtaining a diploma.

Sources: www.gatewaytocollege.org, interview with Joel Rosch, October 18, 2008.

- Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS) operates three charter schools in Dayton, OH that provide:
  - Core academic coursework and competency-based credits toward a diploma,
  - Job training and industry-recognized credentials in local high-growth fields of construction, manufacturing, health sciences, and computer technology,
  - On-site counseling and social support services,
  - Life skills development,
  - Job-search support, and
  - Community college connections.

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★Idea: Transition Services

Youth in transition—between middle school and high school, after graduation, or leaving public systems like foster care—are most vulnerable. Youth at high risk need even more support in navigating the transition process successfully.

Recover youth exiting systems or moving between systems by providing intensive transition services.

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Idea: Transition Services

- For youth most at risk for disconnection, case workers can provide centralized support services and connect the myriad, often disjointed support services available in a community.
- National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition provides a transition toolkit at:
  http://www.nasetalliance.org/toolkit/index.htm
- Sample models for intensive transition services:
  - Western Michigan University Foster Youth and Higher Education Initiative.
  - Prison Entrepreneurship Program (www.pep.org) provides intensive transition services to their participants leaving prison.

Focusing Beyond School

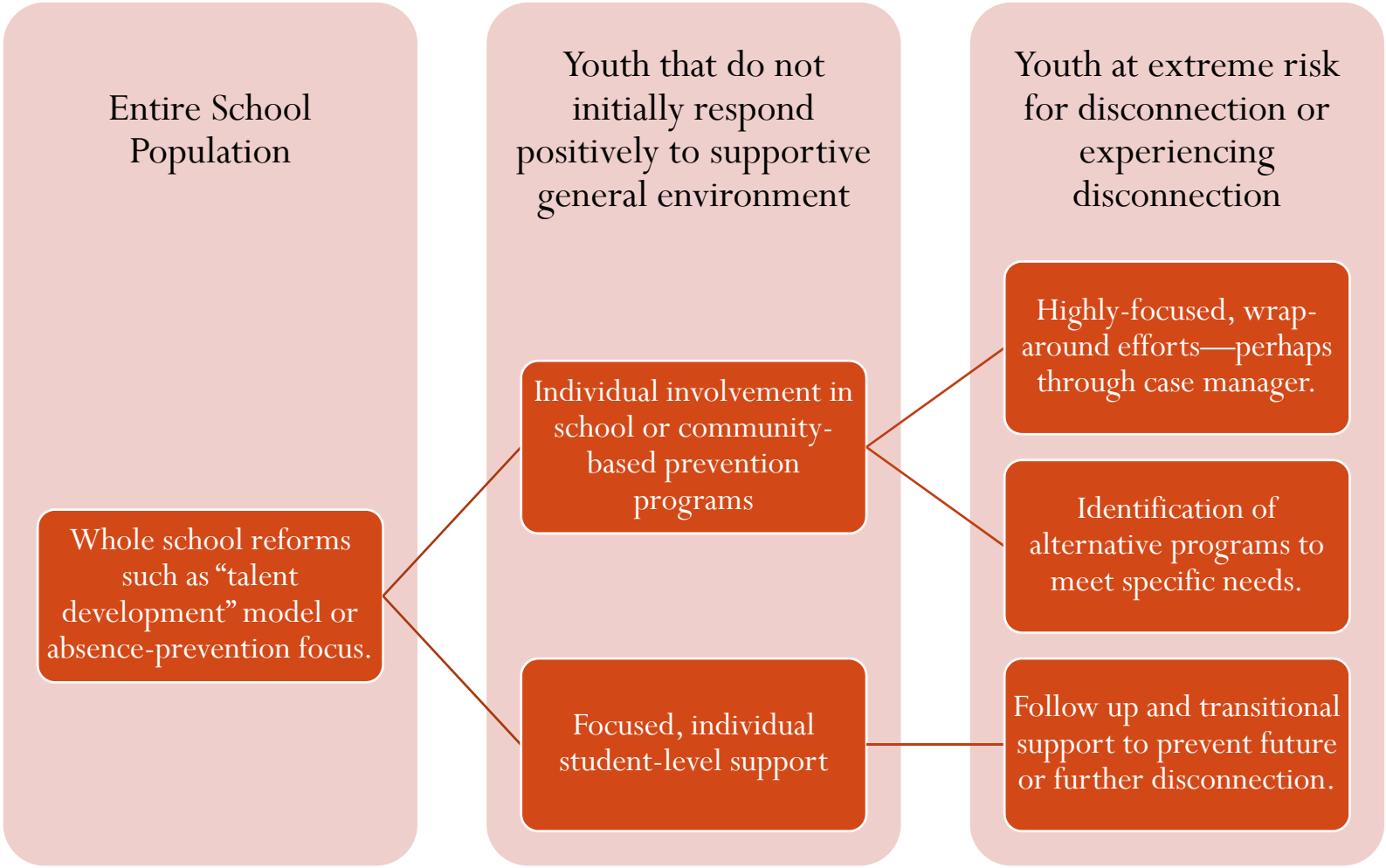
- Efforts to reengage disconnected youth can focus on academic success while building important social supports to prevent future disconnection. Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is a proven treatment approach for youth exhibiting anti-social behavior or with a history of involvement with the juvenile justice system who need intervention on multiple fronts—family, school, employment, and community—to successfully reconnect.
- MST focuses on:
  - Altering social networks to decrease anti-social influences and increase connections with pro-social influences including school, peers, and community resources.
  - Strengthening school or vocational performance,
  - Providing services in homes, schools and communities, and with family members, to decrease barriers to access, and
  - Maintaining a family-driven treatment approach to increase odds of success.

Sources: http://www.minddisorders.com/Kau-Nu/Multisystemic-therapy.html
http://www.evidencebasedprograms.org/Default.aspx?tabid=29

Preliminary Lessons Learned

Tiered Approach to Prevention, Intervention and Recovery

In an environment with limited resources, a tiered approach is necessary to ensure that lower-intensity services are provided before providing higher-intensity (and more costly) services to youth.



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Goals for Connecting Vulnerable and Disconnected Youth

- **Intervene early.** Prevention is always less costly, in both human and financial terms, than later attempts to reverse bad outcomes.
- **Don't give up on older youth**. Second chances are also essential.
- **View youth as resources**. A narrow focus on disconnected youth merely as problems to be fixed may deepen their sense of alienation and overlook their potential.
- **Create multiple pathways to success**. No single program or approach will work for every disconnected young person.
- **Commit to comprehensive approaches beyond education and work initiatives**. Issues such as mental health, housing, substance, etc. may impede progress.
- **Insist upon accountability.** Build interventions on the premise that young people will be held accountable for their actions and the systems leading these efforts will be held accountable for outcomes as well.

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National League of Cities (2005). *Reengaging Disconnected Youth*. Available at: http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/CE428587A160496AA8CB66188E6E72DE/IYEF_Action_Kit_DY_Youth.pdf

Characteristics of Success

Kleinbard (2008) identified the following characteristics of successful programs serving vulnerable and disconnected youth:

- Employ research-based youth development principles
- Provide rigorous instruction designed for young adults
- Deliver highly-structured student counseling and social supports
- Ensure high-quality implementation through:
  - Well-trained staff
  - Strong data systems
  - Effective execution of the program plan

Sources: Peter Klienbard (October 2008) *Let's Apply What Works for Disconnected Youth.* Available at: http://www.youthtoday.org/publication/article.cfm?article_id=2362.

Characteristics of Success

Aron (2006) identified the following characteristics of successful alternative education programs serving vulnerable and disconnected youth:

- Focus on academic learning with high standards
- Employ engaged instructional staff who use positive discipline techniques
- Provide ongoing professional development for staff
- Create classrooms with low student/teacher ratios
- Maintain clean, orderly facilities
- Build a sense of community and belonging for youth
- Allow for administrative and bureaucratic autonomy for program
- Provide flexible, individualized programming for youth guided by youth.

Source: Aron, L. Y. (2006) An Overview of Alternative Education. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. p. 12.

Connecting Youth: Key Elements

Whether within or outside of existing systems or programs, efforts to connect youth at high risk for long-term disconnection should work toward these common elements of success:

- Population segmentation and data-driven interventions,
- Youth-centered approaches (rather than system-centered),
- Youth-informed services,
- Cross-coordination of public systems, and
- Meaningful partnerships with families, community-based organizations, business leaders, and other key stakeholders.

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Closing Thoughts

The single most important factor in vulnerable youths' lives is the presence and support of adults who can encourage them.

Youth need places to go that are safe, nurturing, and relevant to their own hopes for the future.

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Options for Focusing AECF's Efforts

Options for Focusing Foundation Effort

Comprehensive Approach

- Limited geography
- Supporting full range of approaches in one city or region

Specializing

- Specific points on continuum (e.g. prevention)
- Specific populations of youth (e.g. foster youth)
- Specific programs (e.g. literacy program)
- Specific policies (value-added growth metrics)

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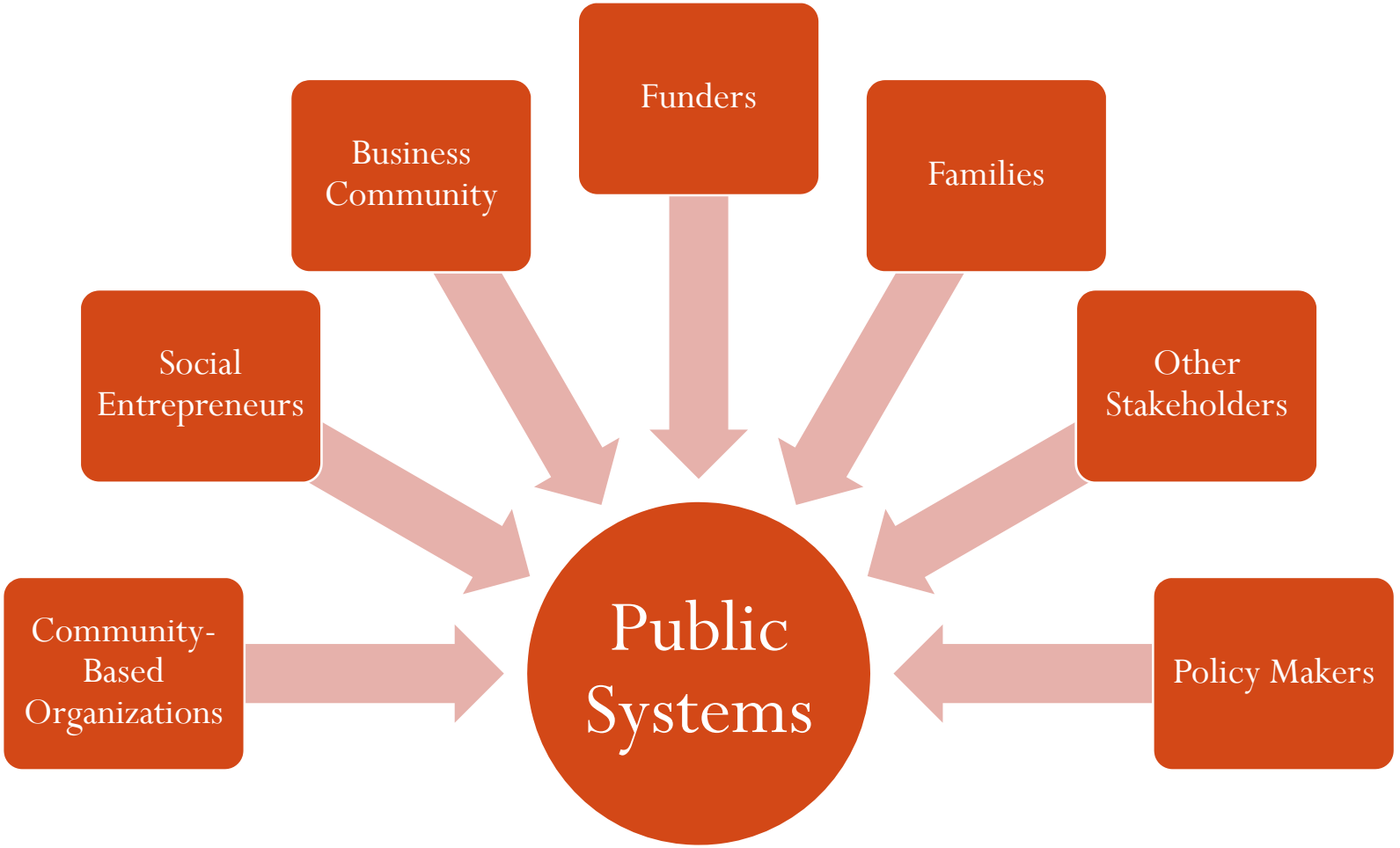
Leverage Points for the Foundation



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Influences on Public Systems

Funders	• Funders can serve as both a source of financial support as well as a visible, vocal proponent of specific change efforts.
Business Community	• The business community can be an integral partner in engaging, mentoring. training, and employing youth at risk of disconnection.
Social Entrepreneurs	• Social entrepreneurs can develop youth-centered programs, services, or approaches that operate outside or within existing systems.
Community-Based Organizations	• CBOs may supplement, augment, or replace public services to meet specific youth needs, but are often disconnected from one other and public systems.
Families and other Stakeholders	• Families and other stakeholders can be a rich resource of talent, support, and information to guide and undertake efforts to work with youth in their communities.
Policy Makers	• Policy makers can build a policy environment conducive to (or a hindrance to) efforts to engage and support vulnerable youth.

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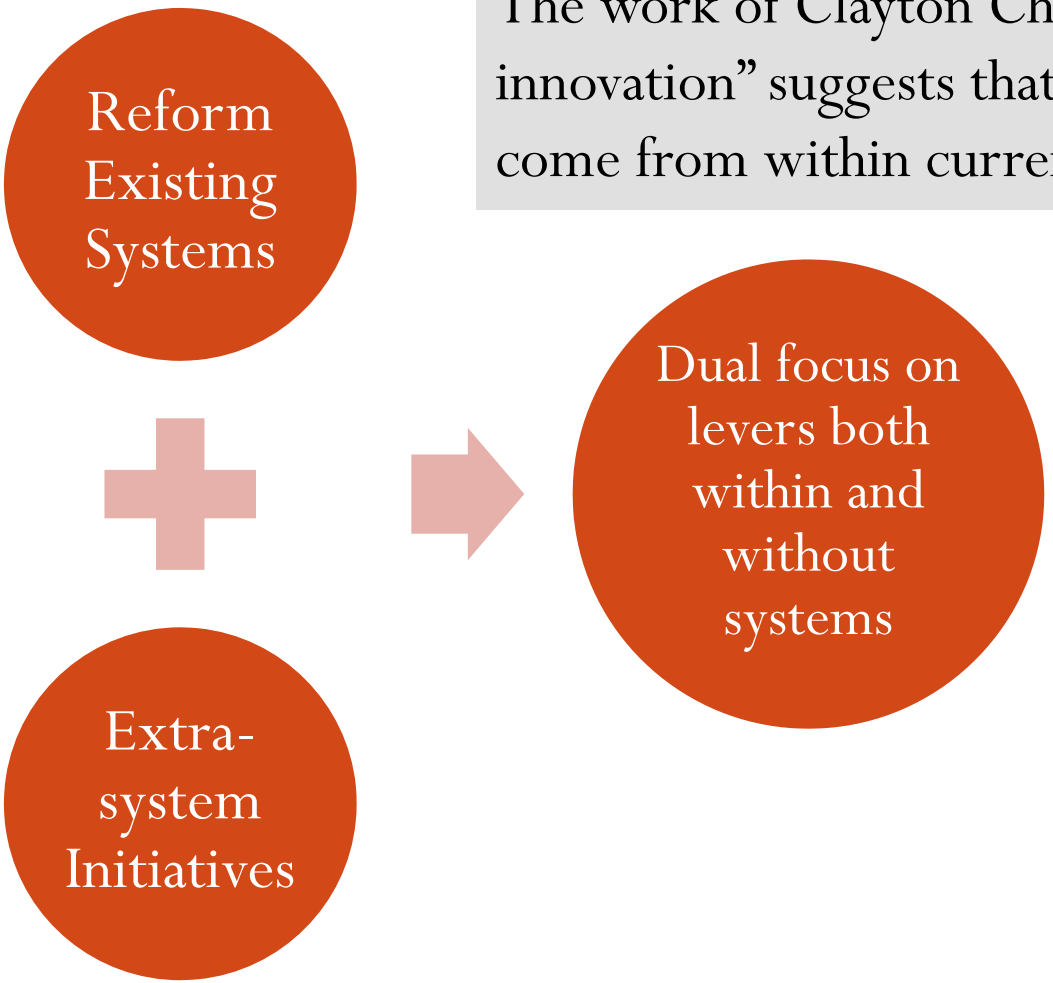
Systems Approach vs. Social Entrepreneurism

The work of Clayton Christensen on "disruptive innovation" suggests that true change may not come from within current systems.



Extra-system initiatives—as potential locales for disruptive innovation—can include credit-recovery programs, community based organizations, and community colleges that work outside the general K-12 education system to provide alternatives to the traditional path to a diploma.

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Within-system reforms

- Several important reforms within the existing K-12 system can create an environment that encourages the system to focus on youth at high risk for disconnection. Two examples include:
  - Measuring (and rewarding improvements in) four, five and even six-year graduation rates to strengthen system efforts to keep students who are over aged and under credited in school.
  - Creating a value-added growth model sensitive enough to measure the academic growth of students at every academic level may encourage system focus on students very far behind academically in addition to the "bubble students" who are closer to proficiency.

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Social Entrepreneurship

- Disconnected youth, and those working to prevent disconnection, would benefit from greater involvement by social entrepreneurs. As innovative, energetic entrepreneurs tackle teacher shortages and inadequate schooling in underserved communities, the tough work of serving society's most vulnerable youth remains.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation and other funders could promote social entrepreneurship in the areas of disconnected youth and multiple pathways to graduation through strategic grantmaking and by drawing attention to this important issue.

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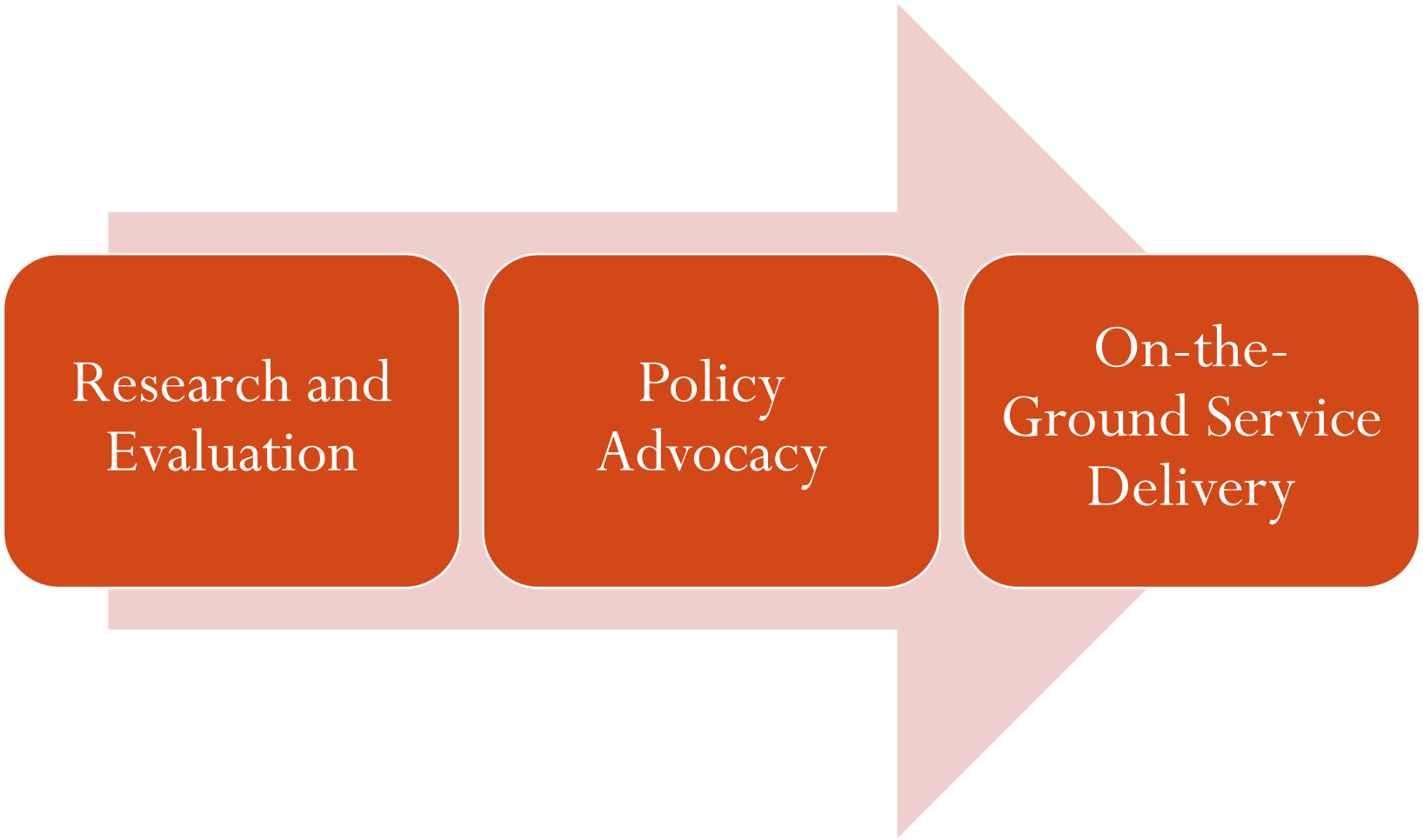
A Blended Approach



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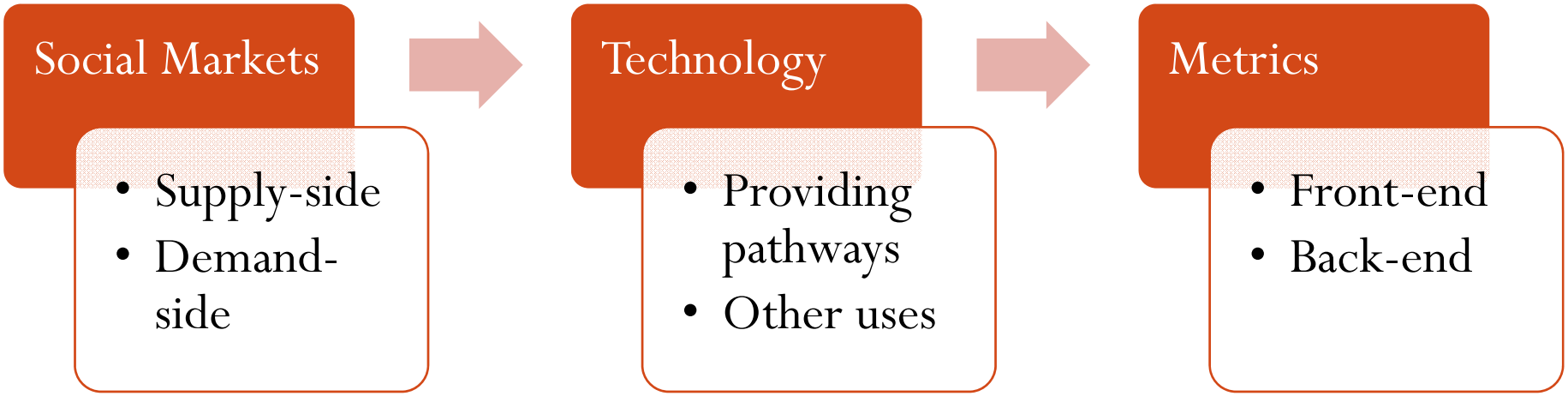
Areas for Further Exploration



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Stopping the Cycle

- Much of this presentation focused on identifying youth already at high risk of disconnection and providing intervention and recovery services.
- The intergenerational cycle of disconnection can be slowed or stopped through programs targeting children of young, disconnected parents. Programs such as nurse-family partnerships and early-childhood education can strengthen fragile families and establish early academic, health, and social support for children at risk of following their parents' path to disconnection.

Additional Resources

Resources: Measuring Program Efficacy

Though much research is still necessary, there are some resources that have evaluated or compiled evaluations of prevention, intervention, and recovery programs designed for vulnerable youth and families:

- Promising Practices Network
  - www.promising practices.net
- What Works Clearinghouse: Dropout Prevention
  - http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
- Social Programs that Work
  - www.evidencebasedprograms.org
- Child Trends "What Works" Database
  - www.childtrends.org
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy
  - www.wsipp.wa.gov

Resources: Measuring Program Efficacy

Guides for developing research to evaluate the efficacy of various interventions:

- Michael Bangser. 2008. Evaluating the Impact of Interventions That Promote Successful Transitions from High School. Available at: http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/ResearchBrief_ImpactofInterventions_073108.pdf
- Jessica B. Heppen and Susan Bowles Theirriault. 2008. *Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts.* Available at: http://www.betterhighschools.com/pubs/ews_guide.pdf

Resources

- Common Sources of Technical Assistance and Research on MPG and Youth Engagement
  - Parthenon Group—www.parthenon.com
  - Jobs for the Future—www.jff.org
  - The Finance Project—www.financeproject.org
  - Local universities—partnerships with universities can be a vital part of a coordinated MPG data collection and interpretation effort.
- Adolescent Literacy
  - Center for Literacy *Toolkit for Serving Out-of-School Youth with Low Literacy Levels*. www.centerforliteracy.org

Assessing the Local Environment

Determining whether a specific location is ready to implement a Multiple Pathways to Graduation Framework

Assessing the Local Environment for MPG

- Before implementing an MPG effort, evaluate local characteristics that will help (or hinder) MPG efforts. This characteristics may include:
  - Mindset of district, municipal, and other leadership
  - Willingness and resources to invest in the necessary human capital
  - Local sources of researchers to collect and analyze data
  - Availability of CBOs and other supports
  - Conducive public policies
  - Local, regional, and national foundation interest

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Assessing the Local Environment for MPG

	Foundations	Districts	Community-based Organizations	Government Agencies	University-based Programs	Policy Makers
Drop outs						
Teen moms						
Adjudicated Youth						
Youth in Foster Care						
Immigrant/ELL Youth						
Youth in Transition						

Identify the local actors—including district leaders, government agencies, CBOs, etc.—and the specific youth populations they serve.

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Elements of a Conducive Environment for MPG
Portland Example

- State legislation allows a portion of state per-pupil funding to follow students to alternative settings
- State policy allows graduation credit to be awarded based on proficiency
- Portland Public Schools views its community-based alternative programs as part of its continuum of educational offerings and views the providers as partners in their mission to educate all children.
- Alternatives vary in approach, size and geographic location.
- Portland offers supportive programs for homeless youth, teen parents, recent immigrants, and English language learners.

Source: Aron, L. Y. (2006) An Overview of Alternative Education. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. p. 17.

Ten Questions to Ask About Disconnected Youth

The National League of Cities encourages municipal leaders to ask the following questions about youth in their communities to better understand their local strengths and challenges.

- How many youth in your community are between the ages of 16 and 24?
- What proportion of (a) middle students never make the transition to high school; (b) students who enter the 9th grade graduate from high school four years later; and (c) high school graduates go on to some form of post-secondary education?
- How many young people in your city age out of the foster care system every year?
- How many teenagers and young adults return to the community each year from juvenile and adult correctional facilities?
- Are most of your city's dropouts, court-involved youth, and foster care youth concentrated in specific neighborhoods or high schools?
- What opportunities exist in your community for disconnected youth to reconnect to school, work, and caring adults? Are there enough options to meet the current need?
- Do agencies working with disconnected youth in your community regularly share information and coordinate their efforts?
- What federal, state, or local funding sources can be used to support initiatives that respond to the needs of disconnected youth?
- To what extent have key community stakeholders come together to develop a shared vision and plan for helping disconnected youth in your community?
- What roles are disconnected youth playing in informing and shaping city policies and practices that seek to address their needs?

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Assessing the Local Environment

MDC's Research Triangle, North Carolina Example

- MDC—an group focused on helping organizations and communities think strategically about serving vulnerable youth in the American South—has conducted a recent scan of the Research Triangle region of North Carolina that includes Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill.
- The scan was conducted for the GlaxoSmithKline Foundation and provides detail on local youth challenges, available resources, and actions the foundation could take to help disconnected youth connect with the opportunities in their region. The results are available here:
  - http://www.mdcinc.org/docs/disconnected-youth.pdf

Source: MDC, Inc. (2008). *Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region: An Ominous Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*. Raleigh, NC: GlaxoSmithKline Foundation. Available at: http://www.mdcinc.org/docs/disconnected-youth.pdf

Assessing the Local Environment

MDC's Research Triangle, North Carolina Example

MDC incorporated the National League of Cities' framework for engaging disconnected youth to guide their recommendations. The National League identified four goals

Goal 1: Promote Educational Attainment

Strategies: combat truancy, provide alternative learning options, develop community strategies for high school completion, support college access, persistence, and retention for non-traditional students

Goal 2: Develop Workforce Connections

Strategies: Provide work opportunities for in-school youth, provide transitional jobs for out-of-school youth, expand access to entry-level jobs and career ladders, change workforce policies

Goal 3: Support Youth in Transition

Strategies: provide alternatives to prosecution, reconnect youth with criminal records, conduct necessary policy reform.

Goal Four: Develop City/Region-Wide Systems

National League of Cities (2005). *Reengaging Disconnected Youth*. Available at: http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/CE428587A160496AA8CB66188E6E72DE/IYEF_Action_Kit_DY_Youth.pdf

Ideas and Opportunities

Additional ideas for action

Idea: Access Existing Networks

Plug into projects that have built-in networks. Organizations that have demonstrated interest in disconnected youth could serve as conduits into municipalities across the country for tools, resources, and information on disconnected youth developed through Casey investments.

Several national groups of state and local leaders can serve as willing conduits for dissemination efforts.

- National Governors Association
- National League of Cities
- American Association of School Administrators, Urban Superintendent's Association of America

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National League of Cities

National League of Cities is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal governments throughout the United States. Its mission is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance.

The National League of Cities' **Municipal Network on Disconnected Youth** (MNDY) is a nationwide peer learning community that focuses on young adults ages 16-24 who are out of work, out of school, and lack connections to the community or caring adults.

The Network recognizes that cities cannot make sustained progress in the area of disconnected youth without **strong cross-system relationships** with school district, nonprofit organizations, and state and county agencies that also interact with these youth on a daily basis.

MNDY is a resource that municipal officials, and those who work with such officials, may use to create and continuously improve partnerships, policies, and programs that re-engage older youth with school, work, and their fellow citizens.

National League of Cities resources and tools on disconnected youth are available at: http://www.nlc.org/IYEF/youthdevelopment/disconnected_youth/resources.aspx.

Idea: A Focus on the South

Experts recognize that the South has a disproportionate number of dropouts, teen mothers, and impoverished youth. Yet philanthropic efforts, federal demonstration projects, and the single funder source focused on disconnected youth—Youth Transition Funders Group—have focused more generally in the Northeast and West regions of the U.S.

Both the urban and rural South face significant challenges. While MPG efforts in large, urban areas in the South could fill an existing gap, developing alternatives for rural youth—alternatives which could include technological innovations and portable programs—may also be a program investment opportunity.

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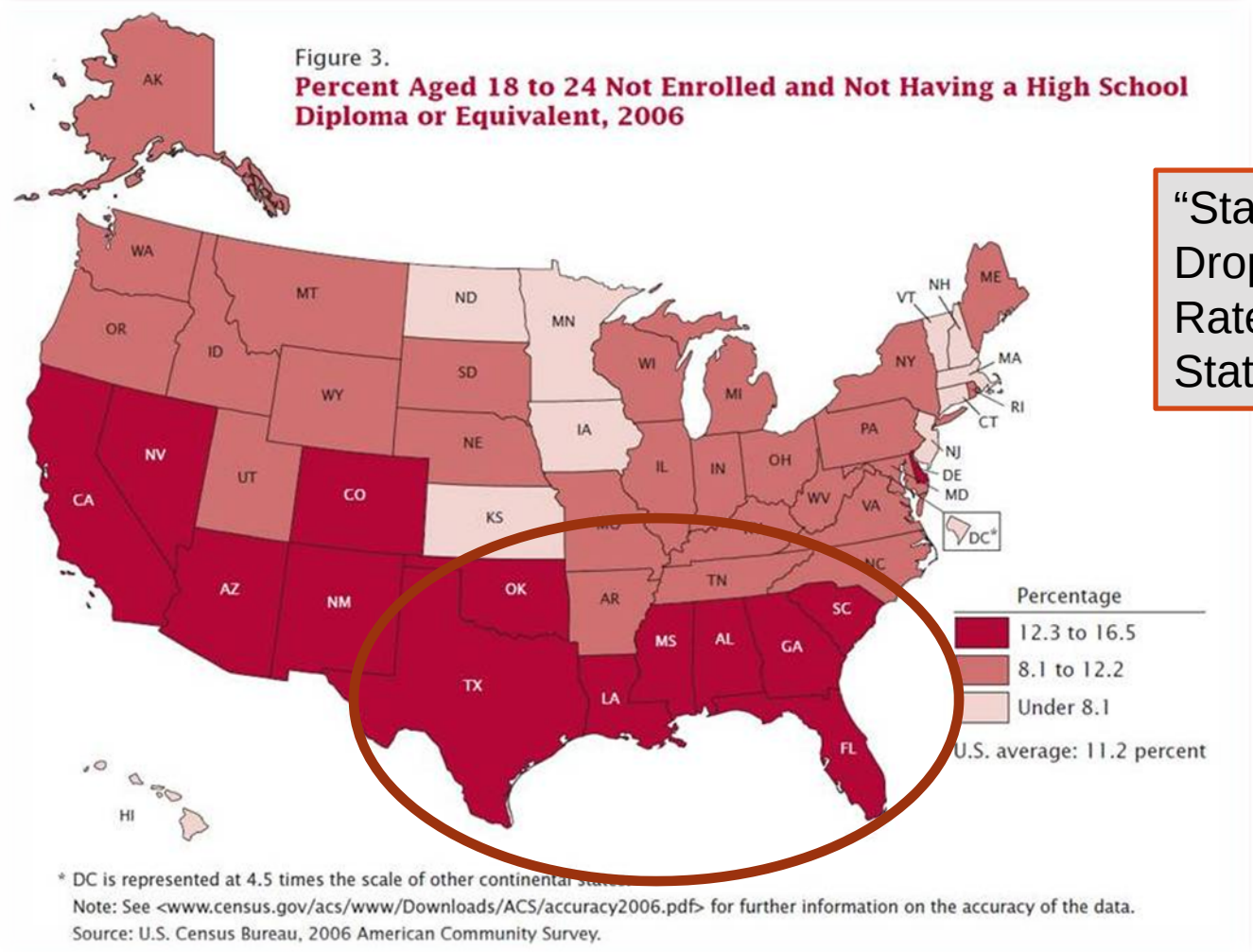
Area of Opportunity: The South

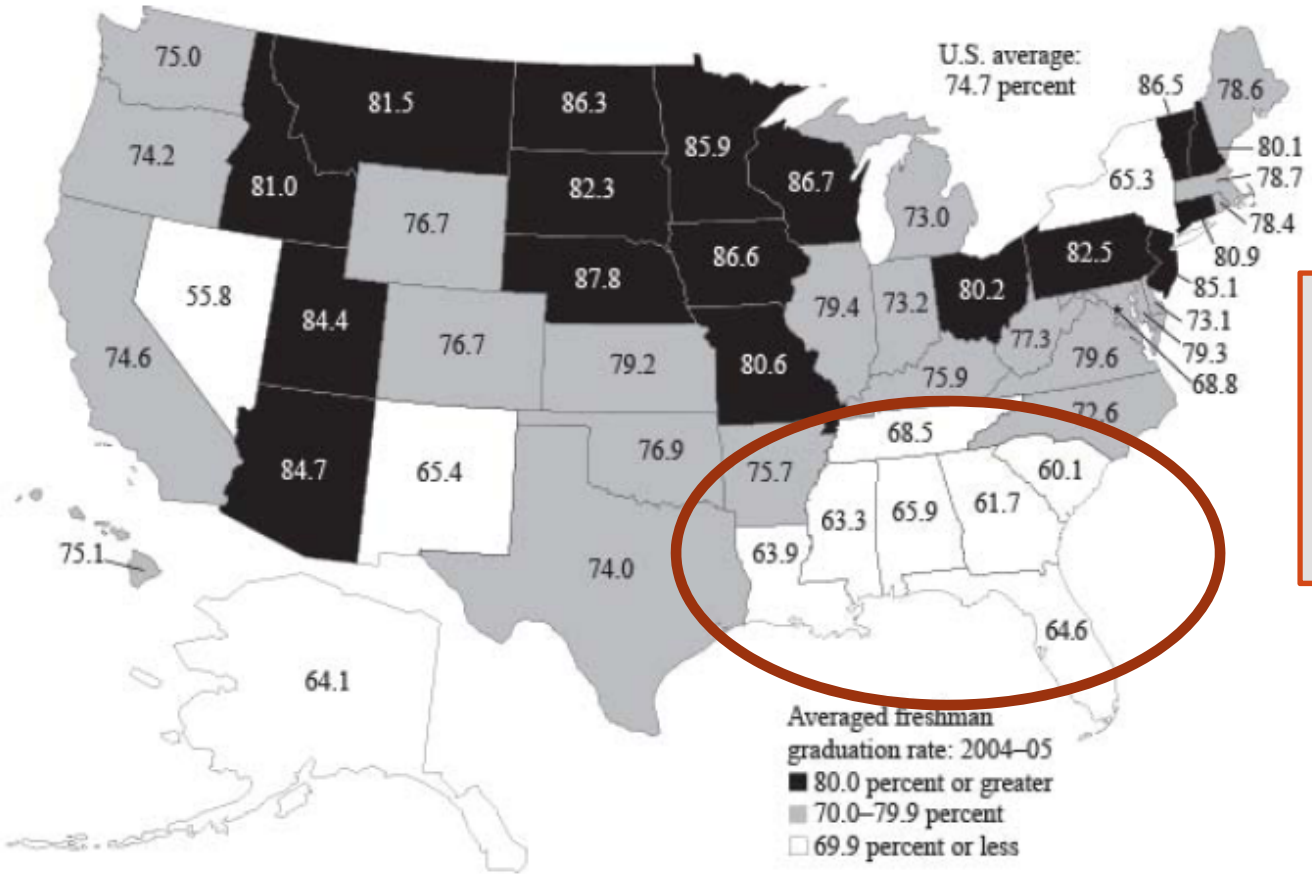


"Status Dropout" Rates by State

Source: Davis, Jessica W. and Bauman, Kurt, J. (2008). *School Enrollment in the United States: 2006.* Available at: http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p20-559.pdf

Area of Opportunity: The South

Figure 4. Averaged freshman graduation rates of public high school students, by state: School year 2004–05



"Averaged Freshman Graduation" Rates by State

Source: Laird et al. (September 2008). *Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2006 Compendium Report.* Available at: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008053.pdf

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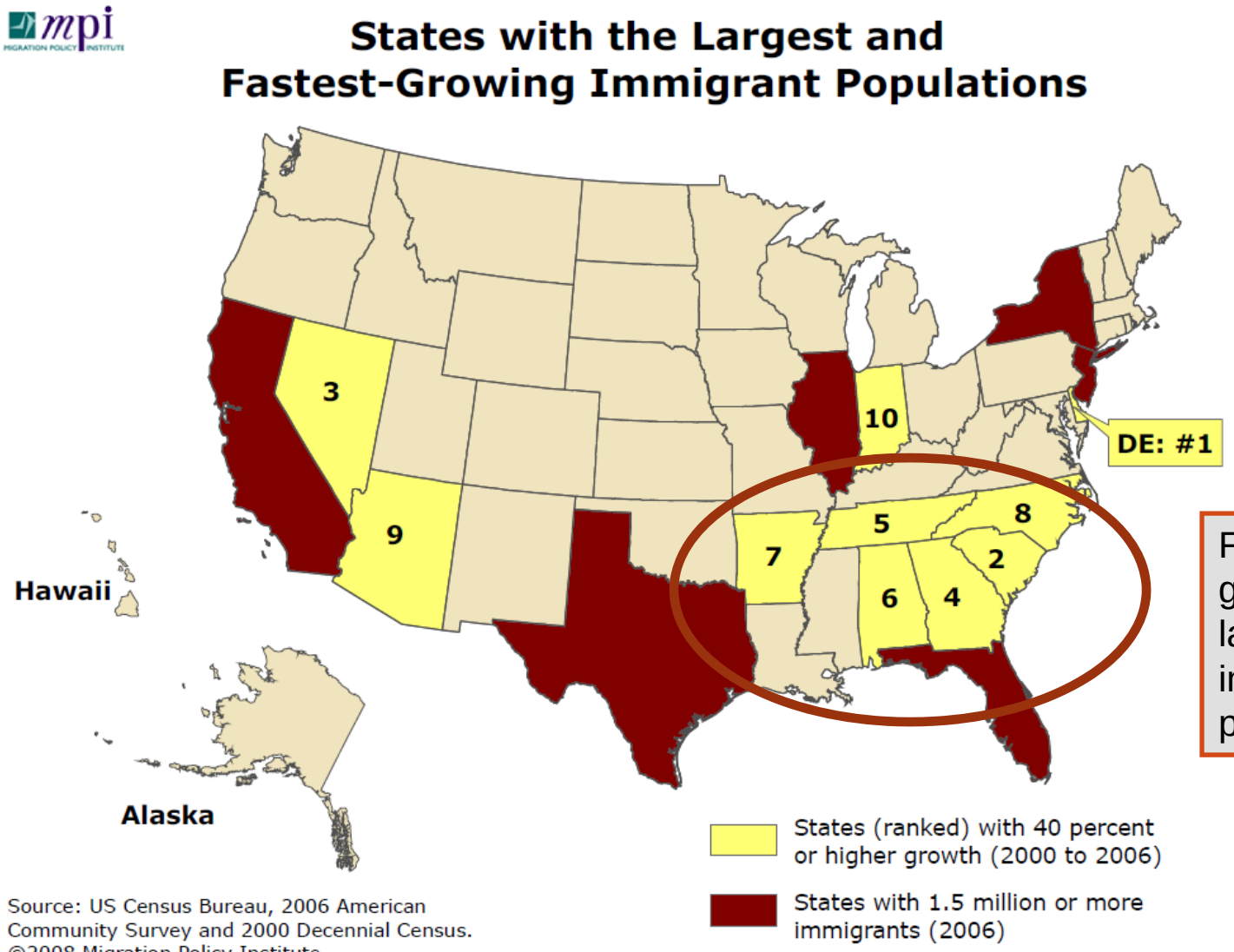
Area of Opportunity: The South



Source: US Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey and 2000 Decennial Census.
©2008 Migration Policy Institute.

Fastest-growing and largest immigrant populations.

Source of map: Migration Policy Institute. Map available at: http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/FB_maps/StateRankingsACS2006.pdf

Vulnerable Youth and Education

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The Diversity of Alternative Education

This table highlights student populations, their educational needs and objectives, and the services and funding streams necessary and available to support them.

Note: the shaded boxes highlight the U.S. Department of Labor's targeted focus.

Target Population	Educational Needs	Educational Objectives	Other Services	Funding Streams
In high school, behind academically > 4th grade < 8th grade	▪ Standards-based remediation ▪ Special Education ▪ ELL	▪ Diploma	▪ College & Career Counseling	▪ IDEA ▪ Title I ▪ Striving Readers ▪ ADA ▪ Perkins
In high school, substantially behind academically < 4th grade	▪ Special Education ▪ ELL	▪ Diploma ▪ Alternative Diploma	▪ OJT	▪ Title I ▪ IDEA ▪ Voc Rehab ▪ ADA ▪ Perkins
In high school, not attending	▪ Dropout recovery ▪ Special Education	▪ Diploma ▪ GED	▪ Counseling ▪ Drug Rehab ▪ Day Care ▪ Shelter/Foster Home	▪ IDEA ▪ Title I ▪ ADA ▪ Perkins
Dropout between 16-18, risk factors vary	▪ Credit retrieval ▪ Small group learning ▪ Standards-based, alternative curriculum ▪ Work based learning ▪ Twilight school ▪ Special Education ▪ Adult Basic Education	▪ Diploma ▪ GED	▪ Counseling ▪ Drug Rehab ▪ Day Care ▪ Employment services ▪ Flexible hours ▪ Health care ▪ Case management ▪ Career counseling ▪ Work readiness training	▪ IDEA ▪ Private grants ▪ WIA ▪ TANF ▪ Other state, local funding ▪ AEFLA
Dropout and over age 18	▪ Credit retrieval ▪ Small group learning ▪ Standards-based, alternative curriculum ▪ Dual enrollment ▪ Modular credits ▪ On-line learning ▪ Work based learning ▪ Evening school ▪ Special Education ▪ Adult Basic Education	▪ Diploma ▪ GED	▪ Counseling ▪ Drug Rehab ▪ Day Care ▪ Employment services ▪ Flexible hours ▪ Health care ▪ Case management ▪ College & career counseling ▪ Work readiness training	▪ IDEA ▪ Private grants ▪ WIA ▪ TANF ▪ Other state, local funding ▪ AEFLA
Incarcerated	▪ Credit retrieval ▪ Small group learning ▪ Standards-based, alternative curriculum ▪ Work based learning	▪ Diploma ▪ GED	▪ Counseling ▪ Drug Rehab ▪ Career exploration & counseling ▪ Work readiness training	▪ Juvenile Justice ▪ Private Grants ▪ IDEA

Developed by Betsy Brown Ruzzi (2005), Washington, D.C.: National Center on Education and the Economy

Source: Aron, L. Y. (2006) An Overview of Alternative Education. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. p. 7.