Eduployment

CREATING OPPORTUNITY POLICIES
FOR AMERICA'S YOUTH

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Youth Transition Funders Group

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CONNECTED BY **25**

Most young people make a safe passage from adolescence to adulthood with the support of their families, caring adults, communities and schools. However, youth with few supports—such as teens aging out of the foster care system, youth who don't finish high school or youth in the juvenile justice system—need help to find the right path to success. The members of the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) are dedicated to improving the lives of the 3 million young people in the United States, between the ages of 14 and 24, in need of extra support. We believe that all youth can have a safe passage to adulthood if we collaborate to change the way that adults, youth, and systems work together. Through collaboration and strategic alliances, we are working to ensure that every young person, no matter how bumpy his or her path, can get back on course.

Our Mission

Foundations involved in YTFG are committed to achieving a common mission—ensuring that this nation's young people are successfully connected by age 25 to institutions and support systems that will enable them to succeed throughout adulthood. YTFG has adopted the theme "Connected by 25" to describe this mission. A young person who is Connected by 25 has attained five critical outcomes:

- Educational achievement in preparation for career and community participation, including a high school diploma, postsecondary degree and/or vocational certificate training

- Gainful employment and/or access to career training to achieve life-long economic success

- Connections to a positive support system—namely, guidance from family members and caring adults, as well as access to health, counseling and mental health services

- The ability to be a responsible and nurturing parent

- The capacity to participate in the civic life of one's community

To achieve this mission, YTFG members are committed to working together, thereby enhancing the likelihood that investments from individual foundations will make a real difference in promoting young people's attainment of these outcomes.

The door to adulthood is swinging shut on America's young people. Without the necessary skills or access to a job, nearly one out of five of America's youth are confronted with a future without income, a future of severe poverty, a future without opportunity. The crisis facing America and its youth can be scoped in many different ways — at different ages, from different perspectives. No matter how you cut it, we are in crisis.[1]

Graduation Gaps Remain Even While Nation's Graduation Rate Increases

With the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate reaching a high of 78.2 percent in 2010, the United States is on track, for the first time, to reach a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020.[2] However, national graduation data masks the fact that many of our students, especially low-income and youth of color, are not attaining the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and careers. Among African-Americans and Latinos, one out of four of our young people are not graduating within 4 years.[3] The high school graduation rate of youth in foster care hovers at 50 percent while those that have been in juvenile justice systems are not even monitored.[4] The continuing graduation gaps mean that over half of the states are still not on track to reaching 90 percent high school graduation rates. Each year, a million young people find themselves over-age and undercredited with few options designed to help them succeed. The efforts on the parts of districts and states to serve over-age and undercredited students through expanded alternative schools and credit recovery are at best partial solutions, given the sheer size of the crisis. Our country has yet to courageously demand that adequate resources be directed to serving students still needing to complete their K-12 education.

Our Youth

At-risk. Disconnected. Opportunity. Each decade the labels change, but the fragmented policies remain. As members of the Youth Transition Funders Group our attention is on helping youth become Connected by 25. Working together we are closing the cracks in our public systems that let far too many young people fall through. We are improving the capacity of our communities to offer the on-ramps needed by youth 14 and older without adequate education and work-related skills to make the transition to post-secondary education and careers. State-by-state, we are transforming policies to ensure youth in the child welfare systems and juvenile justice have the services and supports they need to make the transition to adulthood.

We will refer to these policies and practices as "opportunity policies." We will refer to the target population as "our youth." They are not someone else's children; they are ours. They are our future.
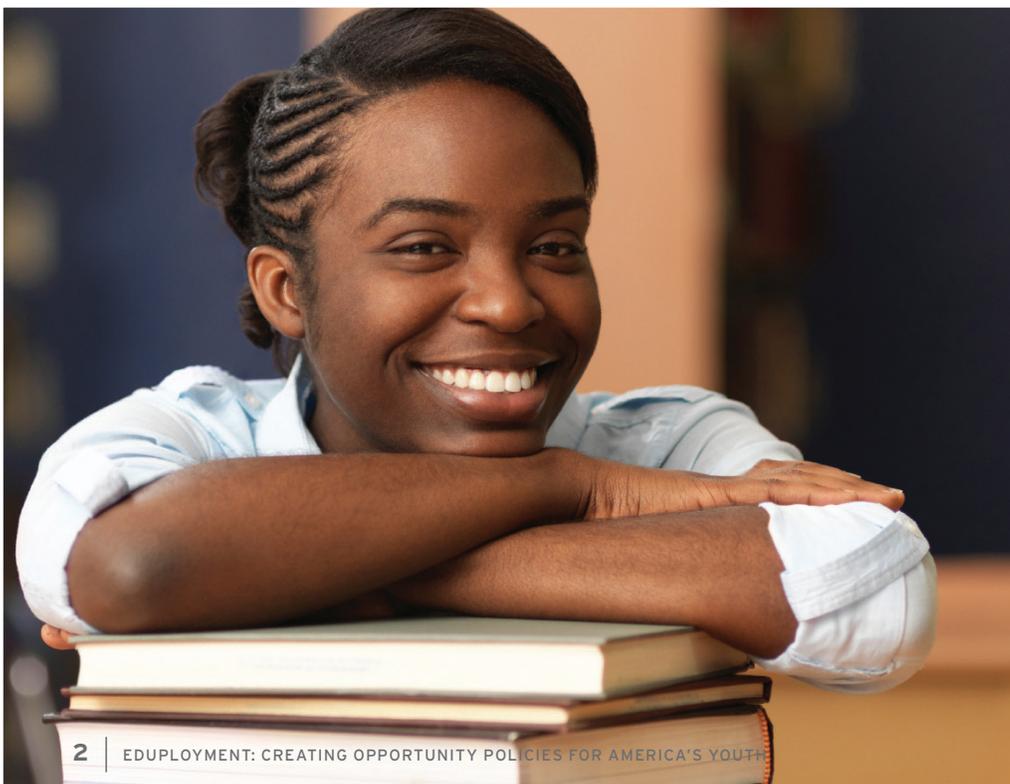
Youth Employment Lowest Level since World War II

According to the report *Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity*, "Only about half of young people ages 16 to 24 held jobs in 2011. Among the teens in that group, only one in four is now employed, compared to 46 percent in 2000. Overall, 6.5 million people ages 16 to 24 are both out of school and out of work, statistics that suggest dire consequences for financial stability and employment prospects in that population.[5]" The report, *Education to Employment: Designing a System That Works,* describes the tragic paradox of continued skill shortages in the labor market while youth unemployment increases.[6] This is a massive misalignment of our systems and resources that needs to be corrected before it gets any worse.

It is a crisis that has an impact on not only the economy and our young people, but also their children and our efforts to enhance early childhood development. This is an intergenerational crisis that threatens the strength of our nation.

It is not for lack of trying that our young people are increasingly facing such a dismal future. Our country has been working hard to improve the education system and expand opportunities for learning. Yet we have been hampered in addressing the crisis for three reasons:

RIGIDITY IN FRAMING THE PATHWAYS TO ADULTHOOD: We rely too heavily on out of date dichotomies — school or work, college or careers — when shaping educational opportunities for young people. This bifurcation leads us to undervalue the role of work and career development in motivating students and creating a college-going culture. Looking through a singular lens, it is easy to forget that for most students, balancing school and work starts in high school and continues throughout postsecondary education. Most worrisome, this dual approach makes it possible to decide some students aren't "college material," opening the door to different standards. It's time to embrace a contemporary framework of *eduployment* that recognizes the multiple ways work and schooling reinforce each other and prepare a young person for taking on the responsibilities of adulthood.

MISMATCH OF POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS: Our communities have been trying to plug this growing crisis with irrational federal, state and district policies, short-term grants, and a hodgepodge of small programs.[7] Most high schools are ill-prepared for serving over-age, undercredited students even though that may be nearly half of their student population. Our most vulnerable young people, those that are trying to navigate adulthood with 4th and 5th grade reading levels, are offered the least support through current policies. Program funds are distributed such that narrow programs serve only a handful of young people, leaving teens hopping from one program to another in search of help. It would be more effective to approach this crisis systemically, illuminating the variety of needs of young people, and designing streamlined, "just-in-time" supports and opportunities.

SHORT-TERM RESPONSES: The scale of the crisis is well beyond our current public investments and policy infrastructure. At most, through the mishmash of programs, we are offering a door to college and careers for 10 percent of the young people without a high school diploma.[8] While youth unemployment grows and schools struggle to implement the higher expectations of the Common Core State Standards before us, we are turning our backs on our communities as they try to do something for youth with inadequate tools and resources. Comprehensive, long-term strategies will take courage, a bold vision and organizing at the local level. Together we can create a systemic response to a structural problem.

We need to commit to resolving this crisis genuinely, before greater harm occurs to our families, communities, economy and security. Eduployment needs to become our shared framework so that we equally value learning and work in the transition to adulthood. We need to embrace a culture of connectivity that refuses to let young people slip away during this vulnerable time of their life. We need to create a multi-sector infrastructure that refuses to let go of young people. We need to craft powerful opportunity policies that are proportional to the size of the crisis so that we can open doors to a future in which young people can be productive citizens.

Shared Vision, Common Assumptions

Philanthropic collaboration requires a shared vision and common assumptions upon which to build strategies. The following assumptions should drive our work together:

Eduployment: The bifurcation of school and work, education and employment, college and career is out of date and meaningless. We need to use a both/and rather than an either/or framework in going forward. We call this eduployment.

Access to Education Cannot Be Denied: For too long vulnerable young people have been denied an education through practices such as school disciplinary policies, school-to-prison pipeline practices and inadequate budgeting to serve students wanting to complete their education after disengaging from school. There is no excuse, even the economic pressures on our country, for denying students a right to education.

Growth Mindset: All youth can pursue postsecondary education or training if they are provided the right supports and services in all domains, including academic, social and emotional, career, life skills, health, mental health, etc.

Personalization: Our young people that are falling off the path to college and careers are heterogeneous. Some may need more flexibility, others more structure. Some have strong skills and discipline while others are trying to make their way with elementary school level skills. Opportunity policies need to respond through segmentation analysis and personalization.

Racial Equity: Although we know that parental education and income is one of the most powerful influences for educational achievement and attainment, we must continue to be vigilant in challenging patterns of institutional racism and seek how we can better serve our young people of color, especially young men whose college attainment levels are too low. This will require us to take into consideration the interplay between juvenile justice and education at every step.

Cost-Effectiveness: We know the costs of our current systems are enormous to families, communities and public budgets. The cost of re-aligning our public systems around opportunities will also have substantial costs. We must be vigilant in seeking out the most cost-effective strategies for providing youth the services and opportunities that will help them make the transition to adulthood.

We firmly believe a large part of the solution to this crisis is rooted in the K-12 system fully taking responsibility for serving all students until they complete their requirements for a high school diploma. We believe our youth can learn and be successful when given respectful and responsive learning environments and supports. Similarly we believe our K-12 system can learn to be successful serving over-age and undercredited students with greater personalization, flexibility and effective deployment of resources.

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L et's face it — this isn't going to be easy to do. It is complicated and requires communities, employers and the public sector to collectively work together. We've got an under-capitalized, antiquated policy infrastructure. There are tremendous forces at play, and this can make it difficult to determine which direction to take or where to make investments. And there are fears, beliefs and assumptions about our young people that make us hesitate to demand that resources be directed toward their education and skill development.

Upgrading the Policy Infrastructure

The concept of second chance systems, born in the second half of the last century, were based on cultural and economic conditions that no longer exist today. The skills needed to enter the primary labor market are increasing. We have raised the bar for what we expect students to be able to do at the completion of high school. We have embraced an equity agenda that demands low-income students be able to access and succeed in college. With the introduction of the concept of over-age and undercredited students, we are eliminating the notion that districts can allow students to drop out of school. With technological advances, we are finally able to personalize schooling to respond to the wide range of educational experiences and academic skills of our youth.

However, our policies simply do not reflect these changes. Federal policy has begun to include over-age, undercredited students in describing high needs students. However, undercredited and over-age students remain marginalized as they are not fully integrated into the Elementary and Secondary Education Act nor most state policies. State accountability systems do not measure the recuperative capacity of districts, nor do they provide financial incentives to re-enroll students. In fact, accountability systems are a barrier for schools that want to serve students with significant skills gaps. Schools serving students that did not receive an adequate elementary school education are not rewarded for accelerating learning; instead, they are labeled as low performing. These are just a few examples of the antiquated policies that need to be upgraded. We should no longer aim to tweak existing policies. We need to start fresh in creating opportunity policies aligned with today's world.

A Changing World

The world is changing, and we will need to position ourselves to adapt so that we can take advantage of emerging opportunities and assert leadership if trends appear that will be disadvantageous to our youth. Below are just a few of the major forces that are shaping our young people's lives, the dynamics of our communities and the capacities of our public systems.

ECONOMIC DYNAMICS: The global economy, climbing out from under a recession and increased skill requirements will have vast implications for how our youth gain access to jobs with family wages. One change we are already seeing is the extension of adolescence and young adulthood, with many young people unable to support themselves until well into their twenties.[9] Those young people who come from very low-income families themselves are unable to depend on their families for continuing support. We need to ensure they are getting a foothold in the labor market and have ways to support themselves.

**TECHNOLOGY:** Rapid technological advances are creating new opportunities for our young people. Online and blended learning are allowing extraordinary flexibility and personalization of education both in and outside of physical classrooms. Education data and analytics are growing rapidly with new data warehouses and adaptive software. Data is being generated that can help us understand the dynamics of youth disengagement from

schools, and, more importantly, successful re-engagement with schools. Employers and the military are using more online and game-based training. Social networks are reshaping how we engage with friends and professional connections—and how we seek employment.

MOVING PIECES IN EDUCATION: Across our nation, states are aligning policies around college and career readiness. Most are implementing the Common Core State Standards, which raise expectations for students' mathematical and literacy skills. Simultaneously, innovators within states, districts and schools are exploring how next generation learning emphasizes blended learning, competency-based education and personalization. We can expect the learning sciences to generate more knowledge about social-emotional learning, student engagement and motivation that will inform school design.

CONNECTED BY 25 YOUTH POLICIES TAKE HOLD: The last decade has seen steady advancements in improving opportunity policy for our youth. The Foster Care Children and The Affordable Care Act extended the age that youth in child welfare can be supported, and introduced the idea of educational continuity. States are reforming juvenile justice policies to be more rehabilitative, and emphasizing effective interventions, in part by responding to new insights into the adolescent brain.[10] In 2012 we saw the push-out practices known as the school-to-prison pipeline come to a screeching halt with attention from Congress and the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice to school discipline policies.

SOCIAL CHANGE PARADOXES: Although our politics are more polarized than ever before, there also appears to be a stabilizing understanding that we must return to a barn-raising mentality to address important issues in our communities. Often referred to as "collective impact," the collaborative approach that framed YTFG's Connected by 25 initiative[11] to support youth transitioning from foster care and the Multiple Pathways to Graduation investments[12] is now generally thought to be the best, and really the only, way to address complex social issues. This means that we must be building bridges and seeking out unlikely allies constantly, all the while investing in organizing and voting so that our young people's voices can be heard.
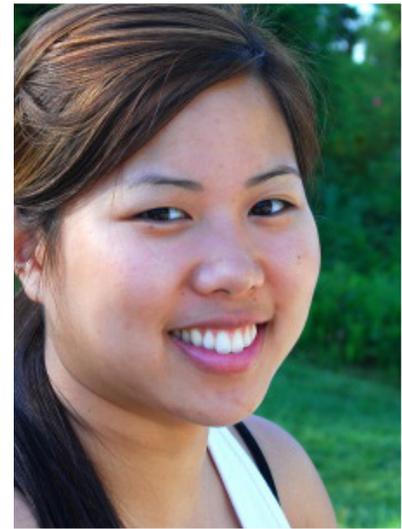
These forces and trends are powerful and complex. As they build momentum and intersect with each other and the current infrastructure, new opportunities and challenges will emerge. The key to taking advantage of these forces is to keep a bird's eye view, to look ahead of today's headlines and seek openings for high leverage changes.

Building The Opportunity Agenda for Youth

We need to design an overarching opportunity policy for our youth, a youth policy designed for this century, not the last. There are three elements needed to create an effective, overarching policy agenda: a vision for the changes we want to see in young people's lives and how communities offer support; organizing to inspire national, state and local leadership to do the right thing for our country and our young people; and an agenda that makes it clear that all of our young people need a job and an education that prepares them for postsecondary employment success. We need an opportunity policy agenda.

A. IMPACT — DESIGNING THE EDUPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK UPON WHICH OPPORTUNITY POLICIES WILL REST

"Eduployment" is a funny word, but we need new language to help us overcome the bifurcation of school and jobs, college and careers, learning and work, white collar/blue collar. This siloed way of thinking trips us up every time. Although our

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policies now speak about college and careers, the emphasis is primarily on college, with little thought to the developmental process young people go through as they build an identity as a worker, manager, inventor or entrepreneur.

In order to build an opportunity policy framework we need to be clear about four important junctions in eduployment, the pathway that young people must travel from secondary school to a job in the primary labor market.

KEEPING STUDENTS IN SCHOOL: While our K-12 system undergoes the transformation of lifting up standards and introducing next generation learning, we still must stay focused on the basics—making sure our students are engaged in schooling in order to learn. The year 2012 was a major turning point in the effort to eradicate unproductive school discipline policies. After 20 years of local advocates challenging push-out practices, federal and congressional leadership have finally aimed a spotlight on practices that undermine achievement and harm children and their communities. However, there is much more to do to establish a culture of connectivity that keeps students in school, including offering engaging curriculum, supports when students struggle, strengthening the sense of psychological safety and respect in schools, building a culture based on restorative justice and positive behavioral intervention, and addressing the underlying issues of chronic absenteeism. Most importantly our secondary schools need to build the capacity to help students missing the prerequisite knowledge for high school courses to fill in the gaps of their learning.

EARLY WORK EXPERIENCE: Early work experiences while we are teens play a critical role in motivating us, helping us to understand consequences, building the necessary dispositions and aiding our development into young adults. Youth practitioners will all testify to the transformational power of a job or internship. For many young people, having a job also means keeping food on their family's table. Too many teens do not ever have this early labor market experience that gives them a foothold in the secondary labor market. Furthermore, low-income youth will have to balance school, work and family throughout their secondary and postsecondary experiences.

ENSURING STUDENTS GRADUATE WITH A MEANINGFUL DIPLOMA: Efforts to improve the quality of education are well on their way with the Common Core State Standards and the rapid advancement of personalization through competency education and online and blended learning. The policies and practices of multiple pathways to graduation have continued to gain traction in federal policy and districts. However, for our youth, lack of access to education continues to be a fundamental denial of civil rights. Too many students quickly fall off track upon entering secondary school with few paths to help them get back on track. Advocates refer to this as the "black hole" of education, where irrational policies and a dearth of services provide few opportunities to build the foundational skills they need for the next steps of their journey. There is no excuse for our nation, our states and our districts to continue to deny educational services to our young people who are over-age, under-skilled and undercredited.

SUCCESSFUL POSTSECONDARY SKILL DEVELOPMENT: Colleges have a lot of work to do to create the connective tissue to keep students on the path to their careers—quality developmental education, transferability of credits, affordability and meaningful diplomas are just a few. Higher education and workforce development policies will have to be more aligned with the skills needed and jobs available in the labor market. Trends towards competency education, even for a Liberal Arts B.A., could address many of these issues. The outcome of an effective postsecondary education should be a living-wage job in the primary labor market.

As foundations, large and small, partner with government and community leaders, these four junctures can be used to establish shared goals. How well are we doing in keeping students in school and on track? For those who fall off track, how well are we doing in getting them back into school and on track? How successful are young people in making an early entrance into the labor market? How successfully are our colleges ensuring students, especially those who have fallen off track at some point, get meaningful skills and training? How many students get a living-wage job upon completion of their postsecondary education? It is upon the answers to these questions that opportunities policies will rest.

B. INFLUENCE — BUILDING MOMENTUM SO STRONG WE CANNOT BE STOPPED

Any effort to bring about social change needs to create a sense of excitement, possibility and inspiration. It needs momentum. A coalition is forming, with the energy, expertise and vision equal to the crisis. It is engaging leaders from across all the sectors of American life and across every state. Below is just a sample of recent efforts:

- The White House Council for Community Solutions provided guidance for how we as a nation can address the crisis.

- The Clinton Global Initiative's Reconnecting Youth Working Group is creating strategies that unlock opportunities to connect youth with education and employment, while building new sources of skilled and diverse talent for employers.

- Opportunity Nation is bringing together a diverse and bi-partisan coalition to expand economic opportunity and close the opportunity gap in America.

- The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions and the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund are mobilizing needle-moving collaborative strategy to re-engage youth in eduployment.

- An Ad Council campaign is shifting perceptions of youth from social liabilities to essential economic assets while also changing business practices so that employers of all sizes engage in mentoring, internship and higher rates of hiring youth.

The emerging Opportunity Youth Network will play a coordinating role to ensure that these efforts are building upon each other and reaching community leaders across our nation. The Network is co-convened by Opportunity Nation, Forum for Youth Investment, Gap Inc., Bank of America, the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions and the Youth Transition Funders Group.

To build the level of influence needed we will have to move beyond national efforts. Local leaders can take advantage of the national efforts and resources to grow the momentum in their own communities while also building the national momentum. We need to create pressure on city, state and national elected leaders so that they have no choice but to do the right thing — implement a new opportunity policy agenda.

C. LEVERAGING CHANGE — CREATING THE OPPORTUNITY POLICY AGENDA

In addition to sharing a vision for what is possible for our public systems and for our young people, we need to have a strategic direction. We should have a sense of what we want to change. Although each of our foundations may focus on specific areas, in order to advance a powerful policy agenda, we need to share a broader set of goals. The following is a proposed opportunity policy framework:

NATIONAL, STATE AND COMMUNITY-WIDE RESPONSIBILITY: For far too long our youth have been invisible as they slip through systemic cracks and silos. We need to revisit statewide information systems to produce analytics providing timely feedback to mayors, superintendents and state managers on the well being of our youth. This will need to include recuperative outcomes for students that fell off the track to graduation, early work experiences and postsecondary credentials for students that had the courage to re-enroll in high school. Our public systems need to be accountable for our young people that have been supervised by child welfare and juvenile justice, ensuring that our young people get the diploma for access to careers and college.

Furthermore, we need a bi-partisan, multi-sector working group to redesign federal policy for older youth. Drawing on the advances in technology, we need to rethink what is possible if we draw upon digital tools to close the cracks in the system, support youth to stay connected to high school and college, and help young people access the labor market.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION: There are three critical policies that must be clearly stated and implemented at all levels of governance.

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- **Connectivity of Schools**: States and districts must monitor how effectively they are keeping students in school, including absenteeism, disciplinary action and disengagement. This requires paying attention to school culture and positive behavioral interventions such as restorative justice.

- **Adequate Resources for Over-age, Undercredited Students**: Districts must offer adequate on-ramps to a high school diploma. This will require school capacity so that all students who have not yet completed their diploma may continue and/or re-enroll without waiting lists. This must include educational continuity for students upon release from detention.

- **Extended Graduation Rate**: Five and six year graduation rates must be used by federal, state and districts within all accountability systems. It is unrealistic to believe that all students will complete high school within four years given they may be entering with elementary level skills or may need to interrupt their education because of family- or work-related issues.

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act and federal leadership must direct attention to the graduation crisis, taking bold action upon these three items. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education should create a Race to the Top Competition for serving over-age, undercredited students.

RESPONSIVE EDUCATION: Although the following are important to all students, districts will have difficulty serving over-age and undercredited students without them:

- **Personalization and Flexibility**: We need to take advantage of blended learning to provide greater educational continuity, personalization and flexibility for our most vulnerable students.

- **Competency-based Education**: Over-age and undercredited students face aging out of the K-12 system before they have completed their education. Competency-based education provides explicit focus on the skills they need to attain, a process for demonstrating that learning, regardless of where it was learned and the capacity to accelerate their learning.

- **Aligned Funding Policies**: It is clear that we need incentives for districts and schools to both support students to be on track to graduation as well as to serve over-age, undercredited students. A recuperative weight responding to the depth of the skills gap students have at the beginning of 10th grade can be balanced by the percent of students that are on track by the end of 9th grade.

- **Meaningful Accountability**: In order to ensure that they are receiving high quality educational services, we will need to upgrade accountability to take into account the growth students are making, not just whether they are proficient at grade level. This requires us to be honest about where students are in their learning progressions. In addition, we need to ensure that students enrolled in alternative education are receiving adequate preparation for college and career readiness.

ACCESS TO JOBS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- **Early Work and Work Experiences**: Our young people need to have work experiences while they are in high school. This may be a job, or it may be work-based learning such as an internship. It might be in the private sector or a form of service learning. We need to ensure that all students have the opportunity to work, explore careers and visit

Business Steps Up

The business sector knows there is a crisis. They also know it is economically imperative that it be solved. Not only are they having difficulty finding people with the skills they need now, the future customer base is at risk as well. They see young people as an opportunity, not a liability. No longer is investing in youth delegated to charitable giving — it is becoming a way of doing business. For example, the Gap's This Way Ahead is offering opportunities and meaningful feedback for students to understand what will be expected of them in the world of work through career exploration, job skills and the opportunity to apply for a job.

Opportunity Nation is making it easy for employers to learn about how to make a difference. Connecting Youth and Business offers tools, resources and peer networking.

college campuses. Clearly high schools cannot do this alone, but they can easily monitor this essential step in order to motivate and engage students in their education and career paths.

- **Community-based Employment and Skill Development**: The current infrastructure for youth employment has been undercapitalized to the point that it is serving less than 10 percent of all eligible youth. This is clearly unacceptable. Young adult employment services need to be upgraded so adequate support is provided to young people who need help in navigating new environments and accelerating maturation.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- **Access**: High school graduation isn't enough. Our young people need to be prepared for college. Policies are needed to support dual enrollment and other strategies that help to create strong Back on Track Through College pathways. This will require flexibility for balancing college, work and family by providing supports and quality online/blended learning.

- **Affordability**: Our young people are often inhibited from scholarships because their GPA fails to reflect the tremendous challenges they overcame in order to graduate. In addition, the Pell eligibility "ability to benefit" for young people who have not completed high school, but who can demonstrate an ability to succeed in postsecondary education, needs to be restored.

- **Competency-based Pathways to a Credential**: Low-income young people need to have fast paths to careers. Competency-based higher education recognizes the skills young people bring with them, as well as offering accelerated skill-building. [13]

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ENABLING PHILANTHROPIC COLLABORATION

For over a decade the members of YTFG have forged collaborations and strategic alliances to improve the life outcomes of our youth. We are dedicated to ensuring that every young person, no matter how bumpy his or her path, can get back on course. Our investments are paying off with dramatic improvements in how public systems respond to young people. Yet the current graduation and unemployment crises threaten all of these accomplishments. Many of our young people, especially those in child welfare and juvenile justice systems, are facing an unforgiving economy without adequate skills and preparation. The crisis and the dynamic forces shaping our country demand that we position ourselves for adaptive leadership and adaptive grantmaking.

Strategic grantmaking that produces results requires collaboration and a clear, common message. Powerful opportunities emerge when national and local foundations commit to working together. Generally, national funders focus on building knowledge on specific issues, developing and testing solutions in the communities with the greatest likelihood of success. Geographically bound, local foundations develop deep understanding of the interplay of issues critical to cultivating cross-sector collaborations. This difference in perspective can be a source of both creativity and tension.

YTFG has excelled in maintaining ongoing communication across foundations big and small, national and local, and across program areas because it focuses on generating results. Framing our work in terms of impact, influence and leverage provides a common language so that foundations can learn from each other, build on each other's accomplishments, and see how investments move beyond individual grants. For example, over the past decade, the Youth Transition Funders Group has played a critical role in introducing the concept of multiple pathways to graduation to our nation's education policy.

The Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) will be pooling funds to support re-engagement strategies in select cities between 2013 and 2018. This extraordinary collaboration is just the start—YTFG can play a role in engaging funders to support similar efforts in other cities, as well as build knowledge, including research and development. Most importantly, coordinating with the OYIF and the Opportunity Youth Network, YTFG can create a strong groundswell through communication, advocacy and leadership development. Given the time limits of the OYIF investments, YTFG will also need to be in position to ensure sustainability beyond this initiative—not of the specific OYIF grants, but in ensuring that foundations that have joined the effort to support our youth through OYIF can continue to collaborate in other meaningful ways. Thus, it is critical that the members of YTFG invest in building relationships with the members of the OYIF funding network through the Opportunity Youth Network as well as through individual networking.

Two essential ingredients are required for philanthropic collaboration. One is for program staff to know each other well enough to engage in learning together. The second is a framework that can guide discussion across the wide variation of

strategies, framing and values that characterize foundations. Below is a proposed structure by which YTFG can organize its collaborative efforts.

A. KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

As described above, the world is changing. YTFG has always played a critical role in helping foundations accelerate professional development and strategy development through its network of program officers with a range of expertise and knowledge in the field of youth.

In addition to helping program staff access knowledge on the different systems, key organizations, and cutting edge advocacy and programming, YTFG can organize learning on 5-10 areas to produce cost-effective methods of professional development. These topics should include but not be limited to:

- Building community-wide re-engagement systems;
- Next generation learning for over-age and undercredited students, including technology-enhanced and competency-based models;
- Further exploration into an eduployment pathway;
- Innovation in training and employment;
- Learning sciences and social-emotional learning; and
- Bridges to postsecondary for students without a high school diploma.

B. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

There is a need for broadly defined research and development to support the creation of opportunity policies and community-wide re-engagement systems. Such research and development should include:

- Developing an accountability policy that recognizes the special challenge in helping over-age and undercredited students, most of whom have significant skill gaps and complex lives, complete a high school diploma without penalizing schools or encouraging lower expectations;
- Determining the cost-effectiveness of alternative education options, including credit recovery to support state and district level deployment of resources;
- Exploring the viability of accelerated learning rates within a competency-based environment;
- Redesigning federal opportunity policy that creates valuable on-ramps to meet the needs of at least 50 percent of youth;
- Designing a social impact bond model for helping over-age, undercredited students get their college-ready high school diploma;
- Assessing the impact of different reforms on either reducing the percentage of over-age and undercredited students or improving their outcomes.

C. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

If we are going to upgrade the current youth policy infrastructure to opportunity policies, those that take into consideration the well being of youth and provide genuine opportunities for youth to succeed, we need to have advocates who understand young people's needs involved in the early stages of any policy development. In general, the current funding process is too slow and limited to ensure advocates are funded to participate in all the conversations that are ongoing across the country that may impact youth. We need to find a better way.

Furthermore, we need to support leaders in the youth field who are able to offer a vision despite the last thirty years of undercapitalization. So many of our leaders have had to deploy their creativity and leadership towards keeping their program alive that they haven't had the opportunity to lift their heads to think about what is possible. The members of YTFG are in a unique position to identify emerging leaders, those who have stubbornly held a vision for what is possible and those that can think out of the box of the current policies. YTFG can intentionally support leaders in the field, invest in emerging leaders and, most importantly, support people who understand the needs of youth or have had personal experiences of struggling to complete their education so they are able to move into positions of power and influence. Consider inviting leaders to participate in the learning of YTFG as well, so that they too can have the chance to reflect on future direction.

CONCLUSION

The youth policies of yesteryear are creating a vicious cycle that is holding our country back. Even the best designed school or program is undermined under the constant churning of good people trying to make sense of a broken system.

There is only one thing to do — stand up together and say enough is enough.

We have to solve this crisis before it becomes any worse, before one more young person has to try to find their way out of poverty with a sixth grade reading level. We can create a virtuous cycle, in which middle school children see their older brothers and sisters re-enrolling, receiving their diploma and heading off to college. Districts can learn what it takes to serve over-age, undercredited students — then take that very same learning and transform their high schools. Employers and employees can make mild adjustment to their daily operations so that there is room and opportunity for young people to get their foot in the door of the labor market.

We can do this. The momentum builds each day with another news article that highlights the drop out crisis, the youth unemployment crisis, the shortage of skills. We need to work together to keep our minds and hearts open to what is possible, to support each other's leadership, to think strategically together. Most importantly we must not lower our own expectations of what we can do together.

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ENDNOTES

1   It is estimated that for the 16-24 age group at least 6.7 million or 17 percent of the population are out of school and out of work. As the authors note in The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth "Opportunity youth are typically defined by what they are not doing." They also note, "Some opportunity youth are 'chronic': they have never been in school or work after the age of 16. Others are 'under-attached': despite some schooling and some work experience beyond 16, these youth have not progressed through college or secured a stable attachment to the labor market." In the paper, the authors estimate, "The economic potential of an opportunity youth cohort is very large. Considered over the full life-time of a cohort of 6.7 million opportunity youth who are aged 16-24, the aggregate taxpayer burden amounts to $1.56 trillion in present value terms. The aggregate social burden is $4.75 trillion. These costs 'roll over' each year because each year brings a new cohort of opportunity youth." See The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth by Belfield, Clive R.; Levin, Henry M.; Rosen, Rachel in association with Civic Enterprises. Published by Corporation for Community and National Service, 2012.

2   *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic* (2013) published by Alliance for Excellent Education, America's Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

3   According to this report African-American graduation rate was 66.1 percent and Latinos was 71.4 percent. Please note that some states include GED in this graduation rate. Source: Stillwell, R., and Sable, J. (2013). *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009–10: First Look (Provisional Data)* (NCES 2013-309). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 3/1/13 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

4   Wolanin,T.R. (2005). *Higher education opportunities for foster youth: A primer for policymakers.* Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy.

5   *Youth and Work: restoring teen and young adult connections to opportunity*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, (2012).

6   Mourshed, M., Farrell, D., and Barton, D. (2012). *Education to employment: Designing a system that works.* McKinsey & Company.

7   The 2003 White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth identified over 300 programs that states and cities can apply to for funds.

8   It is very difficult to determine how many young people are served because this population is "invisible" within the public systems. State and local education accountability systems do not include over-age and undercredited students and the multiplicity of programs inhibit an overview of services to youth. The best research on this topic is A Snapshot of Public Funding to Reconnect Youth to Education and Employment by Lezar Treschan and Christine Molnar published by the Community Service Society in 2008. In the report they estimate that less than 8 percent of the disconnected youth are served by the district and workforce development programs.

9   According to *The Network on Transitions to Adulthood,* "Since the 1970s, there has been a 50 percent increase in the number of young adults in their 20s living at home."

10 *Trends in Juvenile Justice State Legislation 2001-2011.* National Conference of State Legislators (2012).

11 See the Foster Care Work Group for more information on the collaboration between the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Stuart Foundation, Sherwood Foundation and many others to improve outcomes for foster youth.

12 See Multiple Pathways to Graduation: A Collaborative Philanthropic Initiative to learn how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, William Penn Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation and Meyer Foundation catalyzed education policies to serve over-age and undercredited students.

13 See Cracking the Credit Hour by Amy Latinen, New America Foundation, 2012 for more information.

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