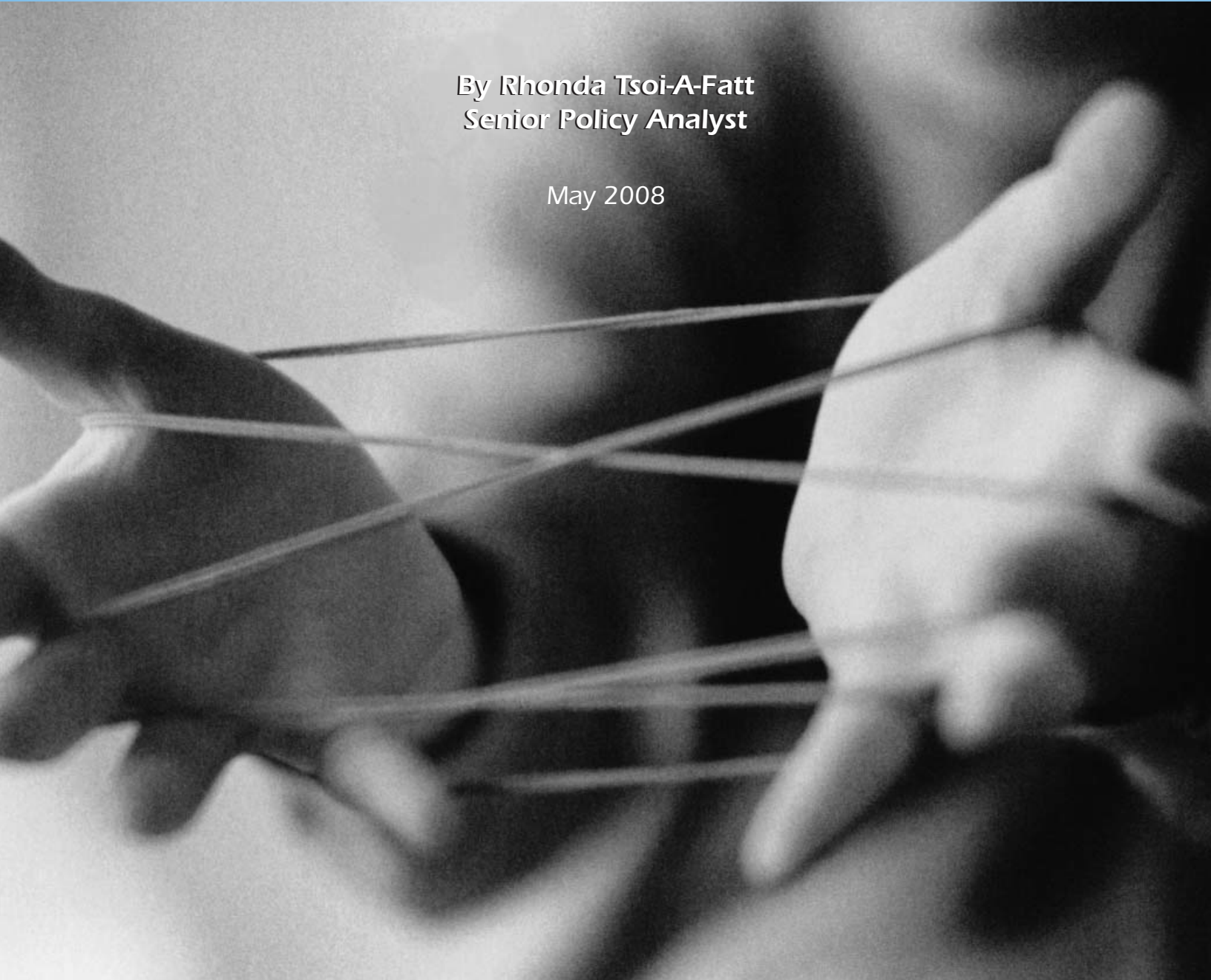


A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY, A COLLECTIVE WORK:

**Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth
in Economically Distressed Communities**

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CLASP

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national nonprofit that works to improve the lives of low-income people. CLASP's mission is to improve the economic security, educational and workforce prospects, and family stability of low-income parents, children, and youth, and to secure equal justice for all.

To carry out this mission, CLASP conducts cutting-edge research, provides insightful policy analysis, advocates at the federal and state levels, and offers information and technical assistance on a range of family policy and equal justice issues for our audience of federal, state, and local policymakers; advocates; researchers; and the media.

About the Author

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Young people in poor communities are living in a state of distress. Their healthy development and progression into productive adulthood is at significant risk. They live in communities riddled with poverty and crime, where the supports needed to foster growth are either overburdened or scarce. Schools in their communities are failing, unable to effectively educate youngsters in even the most basic reading and mathematics skills. Their parents are under considerable stress as they attempt to provide for essential family needs. The lure of the street life, either gangs or other illicit activities, is an ever-present force. Given all of these barriers, it is clear that successful transition to productive adulthood and economic self-sufficiency is a difficult or even impossible road.

Huge numbers of young people are being lost in these poor communities as they are gradually swallowed up by the risks to their healthy development. In many communities, more than half of them drop out of high school, thus beginning a downward economic spiral. This detachment from school immediately diminishes the opportunities for economic stability and future life success. Most young people without a high school diploma lack the requisite skills for success in even entry-level employment.¹ As a result, these young people tend to work less and earn less, making them far more likely to remain in poverty. On average, high-school dropouts earn 27 percent less than high-school graduates, and 58 percent less than college graduates.²

In order to support themselves and their families, many young people resort to participation in the underground economy, greatly increasing their chances of incarceration. In 2003, 75 percent of all state-prison inmates and 59 percent of federal-prison inmates were high-school dropouts.³ This lifestyle also results in increased exposure to violent crime, often resulting either in permanent disability or death. The overall life expectancy of a high-school

dropout is significantly shorter than that of a high-school graduate.⁴ These young people often leave behind their own young children who, without appropriate intervention, will face the same grim future.

Many would argue that the responsibility of rearing these youth and ensuring that they become productive adult citizens is squarely on the shoulders of the families. This may be a valid argument in a community in which a small percentage of youth are at significant risk. However, in communities where the majority of youth are not completing their education and significant numbers are victims of crime, have juvenile justice records, or become parents at an early age, it is clear that much larger systemic problems exist which create barriers for these youth. In more economically viable areas, communities have resources to protect and support youth and help them transition into adulthood, such as state-of-the-art libraries, museums, community centers, academic camps, children's theatres, music schools, and athletic programs. Poor communities often lack these resources; the programs and services that are in place are strained, under-resourced, or ill-equipped to provide the comprehensive support that is needed to protect these young people from the many risks which may impede their healthy development and transition to productive adulthood.

To bring focus to this deleterious situation, data from 10 communities across the country will be used to highlight the magnitude of the challenges faced by youth growing up in these cities. Cities were selected based upon their graduation rates (less than 60 percent) and their rates of child poverty (greater than 30 percent). The 10 cities highlighted in this paper are: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Oakland, and Philadelphia. These cities represent both areas of the country traditionally labeled as "distressed," as well as others where problems are more masked because the community appears to be thriving.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

The statistics in these 10 communities show a highly distressing situation for the youth who live there. More than one in three live in poverty—twice the national average. In the face of that poverty, these youth are almost twice as likely to be unemployed. The communities they live in have a violent crime rate more than three times the national average, and youth under the age of 24 are more likely to be victims of homicide. Young girls are almost twice as likely to become mothers. The vast majority of schools in these communities are performing poorly, so it is no surprise that fewer than half the youth who enroll in high school graduate four years later. In fact, almost one-fourth of adults in these communities do not have a high school diploma.

Another way to look at the youth in these communities is to assess the number of factors where the risk is so stark, it places their development and future life prospects in extreme jeopardy (see Figure 1). Youth in communities of high distress are affected by both a higher number of risks and a greater concentration of risk than those residing in more stable communities. The cumulative nature of these risks makes it quite difficult for youth in poor communities to transition successfully into adulthood. Taking the same seven categories of community statistics in Figure 1—which reflect exposure environments with high levels of crime, poverty, and teen pregnancy, as well as low rates of educational attainment and employment—we see that the youth in our 10 highlighted

Table 1: Profile of Youth-Distressed Cities

	% Children Below Poverty ¹	% Homicide Victims Under Age 24 ²	Violent Crime Rate ³	Teen Pregnancy Rate ⁴	Graduation Rate ⁵	% Adults Without Diploma ⁶	% Teens Unemployed ⁷
Atlanta	49.1	29.9	14.39	106	46	17.1	33.3
Baltimore	33.3	37	16.75	68	35	24.5	43.8
Boston	32.8	50.7	12.82	10	57	16	39.3
Chicago	30.8	43.9	11.82	56	52	22.4	41.3
Cleveland	47.2	38.6	14.49	87	34	25.7	36.1
Houston	37.2	36.2	11.28	71	55	28.4	37.5
Indianapolis	37.7	44.5	8.91	75	49	26.4	40.1
Kansas City	37.7	44.4	13.72	35	46	25.3	34.6
Oakland	25.3	39.8	18.2	26	46	21.2	36.1
Philadelphia	35.4	41.9	14.97	52	50	21.5	37.4
Average for Distressed Cities	36.7	40.7	13.7	58.6	47	22.9	38.0
For U.S.	18.5	33.1	4.4	31	70	15.8	22.6
Ratio of Distressed Cities to U.S.	1.98	1.23	3.11	1.89	0.67	1.45	1.68

1 Percent of children living below federal poverty line. US Census Bureau 2005 American Community Survey. <http://www.census.gov/acs>

2 Percent of city's homicide victims under age of 24. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime and Justice Data Online, 2005. <http://bjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/dataonline/>

3 Rate of incidence of violent crime per 1,000 inhabitants (forcible rape excluded from calculations). FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2006. <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/index.html>

4 Rate of pregnancy per 1,000 girls ages 15-19. US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005.

5 Four-year cohort graduation rate, Cumulative Promotion Index methodology. EPE Research Center Graduation Rate Mapping tool, data for 2004-05 school year. <http://mapsg.edweek.org/edweekv2/default.jsp>

6 Percent of persons ages 25 or older without high school diploma. US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005.

7 Unemployment rate for population ages 16-19. US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005.

Figure 1: Indicators of Extreme Risk Present in Selected Communities



Risk Factors & Indicators of Extreme Risk

- High poverty community – 1 in 3 children live in poverty
- Low academic achievement – 1 in 2 children who enter high school do not graduate
- High sexual involvement – 1 in 20 girls ages 15-19 becomes pregnant
- Juvenile victimization and exposure to violence – 2 in 5 homicide victims are age 24 and under
- Low academic achievement – 1 in 5 adults has no high school diploma
- High unemployment rates – 1 in 3 youth is not employed
- High crime community – Violent crime rate is twice the national average

communities are both disproportionately and simultaneously exposed to extreme risk for more than half of these factors. For example, youth in the city of Baltimore are subject to extreme risk in six out of the seven identified risk factors.

The statistics in these 10 communities provide a glimpse of what youth are facing in similar communities across this country. In these environments, a young person’s overall development is hampered because of the many risks faced daily—early exposure to violence and crime, extreme poverty, low expectations for achievement, and the like. As a result, these young people are more likely to have negative outcomes in their physical health, social adjustment, and academics.⁵ Only the most resilient youth are able to overcome the odds, leaving many more behind to repeat the cycle of poverty and despair. Some would argue that it is the school system’s responsibility to

educate all students well, despite the risk factors that they face. While that may be true, it is unrealistic to think that schools can single-handedly overcome the myriad of risks faced by students and educate them successfully. A community-wide plan of action is needed to create a continuum of support for these youth, without which many will not have a fighting chance for success.

While all children in these communities are in need of solutions to ameliorate the significant risks to their positive development and growth, this document focuses particularly on the middle school and high school populations. This emphasis has been chosen because middle school is a critical time for educational disengagement. The combination of adolescence and concentrated poverty exacerbates the risk that youth face.⁶ These youth are in the throes of many developmental challenges, but are less

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

equipped to handle them than their peers in more economically stable families. The street life of gangs and the drug trade that is so prevalent in many impoverished communities also begins to lure youth, particularly males, at this age. Increased family responsibilities during adolescence, such as caring for younger siblings or contributing financially to their households, also become factors for youth during this time.

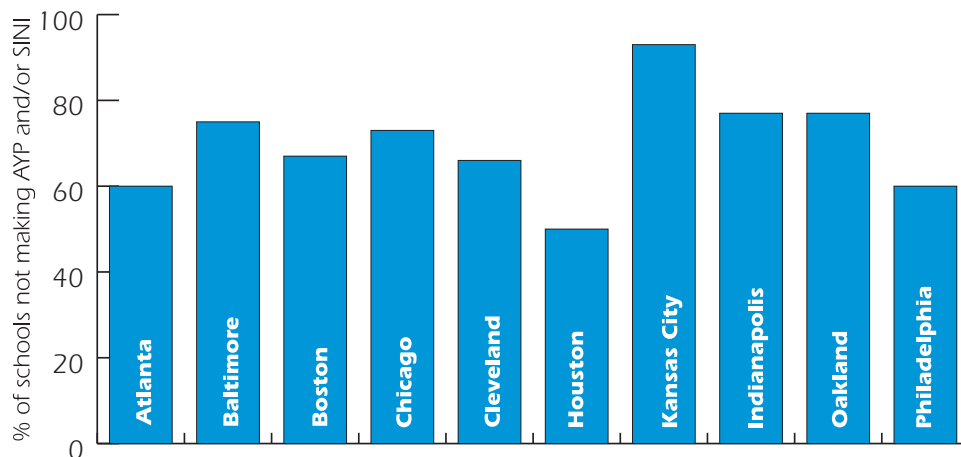
In the face of these challenges, middle-school students in high poverty communities are in sub-par schools ill-equipped to provide an educational solution that keeps young people engaged and learning. Regular attendance in school, appropriate behavior both within and outside of school, and completion of coursework are all critical to remaining engaged in school and completing an education.⁷ High-poverty schools lack the resources—human and financial—to adequately support the large number of struggling youngsters in their buildings.

It is no secret that high-poverty and high-minority schools are much more likely to be failing in the education of their student population. Using the lens of No Child Left Behind to assess school failure, in 2003-04, 57 percent of high-poverty schools made

“adequate yearly progress (AYP),” compared to 84 percent of low-poverty schools. In 2004-05, 36 percent of high-poverty schools were identified as “schools in need of improvement (SINI),” compared to 4 percent of low-poverty schools. Similarly, 34 percent of schools with high concentrations of minority students were identified as SINI, compared to 4 percent of low-minority schools.⁸ Across the country, middle schools are more likely to be identified as needing improvement than elementary schools, while high schools are less likely to make AYP than elementary schools.

An assessment of the middle schools and high schools in the 10 communities highlighted in this report reveals similar findings (see Figure 2). In every one of these school districts, at least 50 percent of the middle schools and high schools were either identified for improvement or failed to make AYP in the 2004-05 school year. In the Kansas City Public School District, 93 percent of the middle schools and high schools are low-performing. Minority students are disproportionately affected by these failing schools, as they are more likely to be enrolled in failing schools than their majority peers. High-poverty and high-minority schools are largely under-resourced, have less qualified teachers, and the expectations of

Figure 2: Percent of Poorly-Performing Middle Schools and High Schools



Source: CLASP Research.

student achievement are low. Under these educational conditions, high numbers of youth disengage from school and fail to complete their education.

High-school dropout is highly predictive, and indicators of dropout are quite evident in the middle school years. School systems can, with great reliability, predict which students are headed for dropout by

looking at attendance, behavior, and academic course failure.⁹ A student's academic performance in their 9th grade year is also predictive of high-school completion.¹⁰ An analysis of 30 high-poverty urban and rural districts around the country (see Table 2) reveals that more than 40 percent of youth who drop out do so before entering 10th grade. The number of students who leave school decreases steadily with each

Table 2: Profile of Drop-Out Points for High-School Students

School District	Per 100 students,				
	# of 9th graders who drop out before 10th grade	# of 10th graders who drop out before 11th grade	# of 11th graders who drop out before 12th grade	# of students who drop out in 12th grade	# of students who graduate
Atlanta, GA	18	12	10	14	46
Baltimore City, MD	33	14	7	11	35
Boston City, MA	21	10	1	11	57
Buffalo City, NY	24	13	7	8	48
City of Chicago, IL	18	16	10	4	52
Cleveland Metropolitan, OH	30	24	3	9	34
Dallas ISD, TX	37	11	8	0	44
Dekalb Co., GA	23	8	8	10	51
Detroit City, MI	48	17	9	1	25
Houston ISD, TX	31	11	3	0	55
Jackson, MS	24	22	2	9	43
Jefferson Parish, LA	14	14	11	7	54
Kansas City, MO	26	21	7	0	46
Little Rock, AR	13	11	10	5	61
Los Angeles, CA	25	16	14	0	45
Memphis City, TN	11	7	0	20	62
Dade Co., FL	21	12	8	10	49
Milwaukee, WI	36	7	11	0	46
Minneapolis, MN	10	9	0	37	44
City of Montgomery, AL	0	25	14	10	51
New York City, NY	22	29	4	0	45
Newark City, NJ	9	13	13	9	56
Oakland, CA	11	21	15	7	46
Orleans Parish, LA	18	10	7	9	56
Philadelphia, PA	23	17	10	0	50
Pittsburgh, PA	21	11	11	6	51
Richmond, VA	25	15	3	6	51
St Louis, MO	26	22	4	0	48
Yakima, WA	25	17	16	4	38
Sunnyside, AZ	37	19	0	4	40
AVERAGE	23	15	8	7	47

EPE Research Center Graduation Rate Mapping tool, data for 2004-05 school year. <http://mapsg.edweek.org/edweekv2/default.jsp>

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

passing year enrolled in high school. While youth drop out early in their high-school careers, this is only after several years of academic struggle and disengagement. Significant intensive support is needed—beginning in middle school and extending through high school—to strengthen both academic achievement and development, if we are to keep youth connected to high school.

As a nation, we have grossly underestimated the scale of the educational challenge that is weighing on these distressed youth in poor communities. The resources put into these communities are not nearly enough to provide the level of intensive programming that is necessary to ensure a quality education. Many youth need far more rigorous services than a drop-in community center environment can provide. The situation is particularly pressing for older youth, as there is no dedicated funding stream for out-of-school services for that age group. There are federal resources designated to fund the provision of educational services, family support, and after-school/out-of-school care for low-income children birth through age 12 in these communities through provisions such as Head Start and child care subsidies. While these programs are themselves under-funded, proportionately much more money is spent on children under the age of 12 than on older youth.

Placing blame solely on the school system, however, and charging the educational structure to fix the problem of high-school dropouts is not a realistic solution. Failing schools are only one part of a broken, piece-meal community infrastructure which struggles to provide for the needs of youth within its jurisdiction. Communities must take action to protect their young people, ensuring that throughout childhood and as they pass into adulthood, they have access to the tools, resources, and activities necessary to develop positively, and to shield them from the risks that threaten their growth. No one youth-serving system can tackle this issue alone. It will take a

concerted effort by *all* entities which touch youth to create a path toward more successful life outcomes for youth in distress. Only by rallying together in the best interest of young people can communities stem the tide of the dropout problem, and instead propel students to postsecondary opportunities and future life success.

It is important to understand that communities do currently provide services and supports to young people, and have done so for many years through local youth-serving systems, utilizing both local resources and pass-through federal and state funding. These supports, however, have not been maximally effective because they are both uneven and disjointed. After-school/out-of-school service providers in a community are not joined together or organized in a way that assures that there is capacity to 1) serve all young people who wish to participate, and 2) address all of the developmental needs of young people. There are five key problems with the way that youth services are currently administered in many communities:

1. **Funds for services are limited to a specific age group.** The majority of federal, state, and local resources go to support younger children, leaving older youth out. Child care subsidies, for example, are often only granted until children are 12 years old. Many parents cannot afford to pay the cost of after-school care for their children when the subsidy is no longer given, thus these children are unsupervised at the end of the school day. The after-school hours are the peak time for juvenile criminal and violent activity.¹¹ This is true of all communities, and particularly of distressed communities. Families would prefer to have their youth in structured after-school environments, but the prohibitive cost excludes them from participation.
2. **Services are limited to youth with a specific “problem.”** Segregated pots of money in various youth-serving bureaucracies allow for the funding

of youth programs or services to benefit a particular population of young people, such as youth involved in the juvenile justice system, or homeless youth, or youth aging-out of foster care. Thus, there are some youth in a community with multiple opportunities to access services, while others have none. As indicated by the assessment of risk in distressed communities, all young people who live in these communities are in need of additional support and services in order to be successful.

3. **Services are limited to academic support.** In this current age of school accountability and high-stakes testing, most resources are aimed at enhancing the academic achievement and cognition of children and youth in the areas of mathematics and reading. Many local youth-serving organizations are hard-pressed to find resources to fund other youth activities in personal development, visual or performing arts, or health education. Supporting the healthy development of young people in all domains has a positive effect on academic achievement. The need for addressing multiple areas of development is particularly important for distressed youth in poor communities, who have significant needs and require more intensive programs and services.¹²
4. **Services are limited in scope, not changing to support the evolving needs of youth as they grow older.** One of the biggest issues that providers of youth programming cite is lack of sustained youth participation. We assert that a part of the reason for this lack of participation is that programs and services may not seem relevant or meet a need for youth. As young people get older, programming and services need to be more focused around employment preparation and experience, career exposure, postsecondary opportunities, etc. Additionally, communities must recognize that there are some potential barriers to youth participation such as the need to work, lack of transportation, or family responsibilities.¹³

Services and programs should be structured with flexibility to accommodate these issues, and provide incentives for participation.

5. **Services are limited to a small number of youth.** Many communities will point to a long list of programs or projects done throughout the year for youth, and ask, “Haven’t we done enough?” Maybe, but probably not. Often, a program or service may be made available to a specific number of youth in a community on a first-come, first-served basis. The number of spaces in a particular program or service is undoubtedly limited by budget or capacity, but a community should not be lulled into a sense of accomplishment for simply providing an activity or service to the first 100 youth who happened to sign up. The question that community leaders need to ask themselves is, “How many youth participated in that program versus how many youth still need that program or service?” In communities of distress, there are often thousands of young people who require programs and services to support their development and positive growth. The small interventions in place do not begin to put a dent in the need.

If communities have any hope of making meaningful change in outcomes for young people, they must revise their thinking about how services to youth are administered. Communities need to shift the paradigm to focus on all areas of healthy development which will propel youth to high school graduation and future success, and provide services at the necessary scale to impact the majority of youth in the community. This requires a community-wide focus where the many systems and organizations seeking to serve youth have a formal network where they plan their work jointly, based on the many developmental needs of the youth in that particular locale. This allows for the creation of a continuum of support that protects, nurtures, and guides young people into adulthood.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

Creating a Community-Wide Continuum of Support

Communities of high youth distress understand that supportive activities and services broaden the horizons of young people and provide a strong foundation for their future. The struggle, however, is how to make these opportunities happen at scale, how to ensure that young people take full advantage, and how to provide supports that are robust enough to make a difference in the lives of even the most vulnerable youth. A community-wide continuum of support responds to these challenges by galvanizing all stakeholders in the community around the issue of youth to share resources and expertise to create a web of activities and services that support all young people on the road to positive, productive adulthood.

A continuum of support is a purposeful weaving together of resources and systems to support youth in all aspects of their development toward adulthood and progression along a path to meaningful careers and eventual self-sufficiency. This is a simple, yet powerful concept which has far-reaching implications

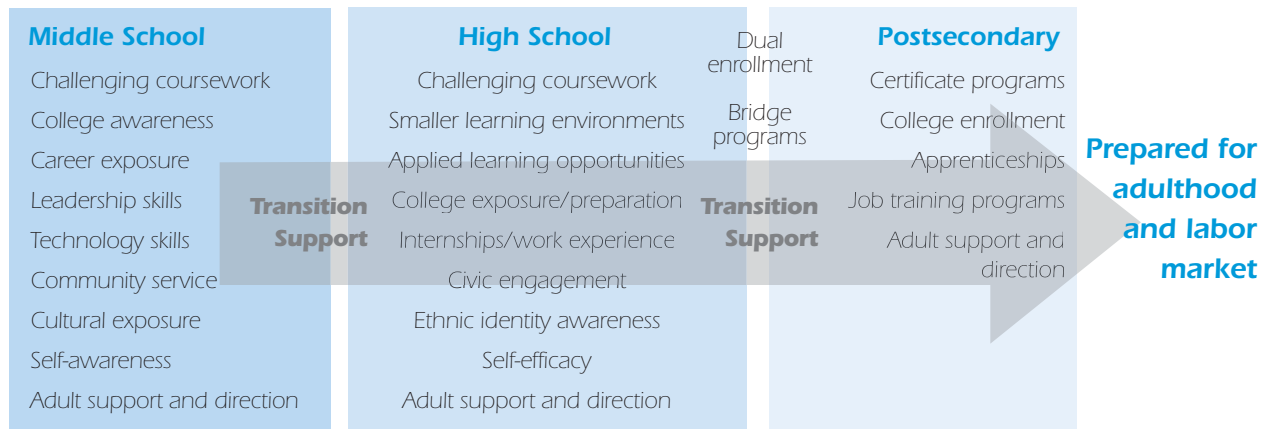
for the youth touched by this new way of thinking and structuring of resources and services. When supports are structured in a continuum, youth in a community are able to receive a wide variety of activities and supports they need as they grow and develop. The community is also better able to identify gaps, and to respond more quickly to new needs which may develop. There are three key elements of this continuum of support construct:

The continuum must provide opportunities for youth to be continuously engaged in activities that develop their skills and abilities in multiple domains.

Leaders from key systems and sectors must coalesce around the creation of the continuum of support.

The continuum must connect the resources, expertise, and services of all state and local youth-serving systems.

Figure 3: Community Continuum of Support



Opportunities during school, after school, and in the summer.

The continuum must provide opportunities for youth to be continuously engaged in activities that develop their skills and abilities in multiple domains.

As young people move through childhood into adolescence, many developmental changes occur which set the stage for successful passage into adulthood. Youth are developing cognitively, physically, and emotionally, while also establishing a sense of ethnic identity and belonging in their communities and exploring vocational interests. In more affluent communities, youth are supported in this development through access to a wide range of activities and programs. Activities such as field trips to museums and cultural events, overnight camps, music lessons, career-exploration camps, entrepreneurial projects, leadership schools, athletic clinics, and part-time jobs in meaningful fields are continuously available to youngsters and help to nurture their growth and development. In most poor communities, however, these types of activities are virtually non-existent for large segments of the youth population because their communities lack the resources to provide these supports on a large scale. Many children and youth sit at home in the afternoons and during the summer, making them prime targets for the temptations of juvenile delinquency. As youth get older, many of the programs and activities offered are no longer suited to their needs or interests. Thus, continuums of support in communities need to expand both the number of opportunities and the types of activities available to youth.

Beyond the school day, after-school hours and the summer provide opportunities to make youth a captive audience for nurturing activities that will stimulate their positive development. However, in youth-distressed communities this opportunity is not maximized. Many of the after-school and summer opportunities offered in youth-distressed communities are primarily academic in nature, providing remediation services in direct response to the struggles around school accountability. Huge percentages

of these youngsters are failing standardized examinations of their proficiency, so significant resources are being poured into strengthening their cognitive skills in the areas of reading and mathematics.

While cognitive skills are necessary, it is the simultaneous positive development in all domains (cognitive, social/emotional, physical, ethnic identity, civic, and career) that leads to the best academic outcomes for youth. Each of these developmental domains has a profound impact on academic achievement, both in terms of a young person's intellectual ability and their attitude toward school and learning. Youth need to be supported to acquire the skills, attitudes, and values that will propel them forward into academic achievement and, ultimately, a productive adult life. In order to make a sustained impact on academic achievement and future life success, it is imperative that youth be continuously involved in activities that address their development in all domains. There is no hope for increasing academic achievement if we fail to address these other areas simultaneously.

Ironically, in the making of policy and laws which affect youth, little attention is paid to the many dimensions of development which affect a young person's ability to succeed. Research shows that adolescents are developing across six specific domains: cognitive, physical, social/emotional, ethnic identity, civic engagement, and career.¹⁴ Each domain is an equal part of the healthy development of a young person, so no portion can be ignored. The outcomes associated with each domain have an impact on a young person's ability to be successful in school, to learn marketable skills, to participate in meaningful work opportunities, and to make a contribution to their community. Given the support to develop positively in each of these domains, youth in distressed communities will have much better life prospects.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

Table 3: Continuum of Support for Middle- & High-School Students

	SUPPORTIVE ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES
COGNITIVE	<p>Youth need opportunities that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase their academic achievement in core subjects ▪ Support them to take more advanced courses ▪ Provide individual or small-group attention ▪ Strengthen their abilities in critical thinking and problem solving ▪ Demonstrate use of classroom learning in real-world environments ▪ Give hands-on practice of skills learned in classroom ▪ Integrate the latest technology into learning ▪ Merge the teaching of skills with student interests and teen culture ▪ Expose them to people they can relate to who use these cognitive skills in their careers ▪ Demonstrate use of these cognitive skills in particular careers or entrepreneurial ventures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academically prepared for transition to high school ▪ Prepared for transition to postsecondary training ▪ Better prepared for employment
PHYSICAL	<p>Youth need opportunities that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage better nutritional habits despite lack of community resources ▪ Educate them on the relationship between eating habits, exercise, and the diseases prevalent in their communities ▪ Discourage the use of alcohol and drugs ▪ Enhance physical fitness through a wide variety of sports and physical activities ▪ Teach them how to introduce better habits into their families ▪ Promote preventive self-care of one's body ▪ Teach sexual safety and how to prevent the spread of diseases ▪ Provide access to healthcare options and teach the value of a medical home ▪ Provide a forum for discussing life goals and how decisions about physical health impact their future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better decision making about health, self-care, and family planning ▪ More goal-oriented attitudes and behaviors
SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL	<p>Youth need opportunities that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase pride in themselves and their families by teaching them to identify and value their own strengths and those of their family ▪ Solidify connections to positive groups and organizations ▪ Nurture consistent positive relationships with caring adults of similar backgrounds and experiences ▪ Give incentives for positive behavior to offset the perceived incentives of delinquent behavior ▪ Create close relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors ▪ Forge strong links between family, school, and community activities that support youth and hold them accountable for their behavior ▪ Reshape their perceptions about intelligence, abilities, and worth ▪ Teach them about the dangers of substance abuse as a reliever of stress ▪ Provide positive, healthy outlets for emotional stress ▪ Give support to deal with grief, loss, and victimization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased self esteem ▪ More positive attitude toward school ▪ Increased academic achievement ▪ Reduced problem behaviors ▪ Reduced use of drugs

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	SUPPORTIVE ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES
ETHNIC IDENTITY	Youth need opportunities that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support the development of positive ethnic self-image ▪ Explore the issue of ethnicity and personal identity ▪ Allow them to demonstrate cultural pride by teaching others about their culture ▪ Expose them to positive individuals from their ethnic background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced self esteem ▪ Better psychological health ▪ Better reasoning ability ▪ Increased confidence about career self-efficacy ▪ Increased ability to resolve conflict in a healthy manner
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	Youth need opportunities that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase their understanding about community issues ▪ Enable them to voice their opinions about community issues ▪ Engage them in activities to change a problem in their community ▪ Cause them to understand the effects of delinquent behavior on the community as a whole ▪ Teach them to have a voice in issues that affect their lives ▪ Enable them to practice leadership in their community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased engagement in school ▪ Improved attitudes toward other community residents ▪ Greater likelihood of continued civic engagement
CAREER	Youth need opportunities that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach them life skills and provide opportunities to practice ▪ Expose them to postsecondary options and guide their decision-making ▪ Educate them about various careers and expose them to individuals in these careers ▪ Give them exposure to careers through spending time in settings as a volunteer or shadow ▪ Enable them to work in meaningful jobs that teach industry-specific skills and lead to a career ▪ Provide flexibility in structure of school day to allow for work experience ▪ Allow them to earn credit for participation in school-work partnerships that increase their academic and career skills ▪ Give them a jumpstart on postsecondary opportunities through apprenticeships, dual enrollment, or certification programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased school attendance ▪ Increased postsecondary participation ▪ Reduced criminal behavior ▪ Expanded labor market prospects

Sources:

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A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

Cognitive Development

All youth need to be challenged and supported to develop more advanced thinking and analytical skills. Youth in distressed communities need significant support to achieve these same skills. Huge numbers of these youth are not reading on grade level, and are unable to pass standardized assessments of their reading, writing, and mathematics proficiency. They are in need of additional time and attention provided in individual and/or small group settings to help master these basic skills, which lay the foundation for more complex learning and vocational abilities. In addition to these basic academic skills, youth need to be challenged to master other cognitive skills which will serve them well later in life. Comprehension, problem solving, and critical thinking are skills that are necessary not only to complete school, but also to be competent in the workforce. Research shows that youth in high-poverty, high-minority schools are not given the same level of rigorous instruction, have fewer opportunities to take advanced courses, and that high grades in these schools are not comparable to high grades in more affluent schools. The academic success of these youth, their preparedness for postsecondary education, and their ability to succeed in the workforce begins with high expectations. Teachers and youth workers must believe that these young people have the ability to master high-level skills. Communities must marry those high expectations with continuous opportunities for youth to engage in activities that will increase their cognition, stimulate their creativity, and build their skills for the future.

Physical Development

The physical development of the nation's youth is in peril because of health issues such as obesity, juvenile diabetes, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases. Youth in distressed communities are at disproportionate risk for many of these diseases,

and require support to make healthful decisions about their physical development and growth.¹⁵ Large percentages of them are not accessing proper medical care, do not make healthful food choices, and are unprotected from the easy availability of alcohol and drugs in their communities. The prevalence of illnesses such as hypertension, high blood pressure, and heart attacks in poor communities are an indication of the future health of these youth if no action is taken. People in poor communities spend significant amounts of money on healthcare following the onset of disease, largely because preventive care was unavailable or their knowledge of preventive measures was limited. Teaching youth preventive health strategies enables them to be more proactive about their health, which strengthens the community as a whole. It also enables them to become agents of change for the health practices within their families.

Similarly, education about reproductive health is necessary in order to reduce the number of births to teenaged parents and the rate of infection with sexually transmitted diseases. Youth with clear goals for the future, such as postsecondary or career aspirations, are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as unprotected sex. To reduce the magnitude of the teenage pregnancy issue, communities must make the message of pregnancy prevention relevant to young people. Youth who have children before completing high school are less likely to complete school because of the pressures of parenting and the need to earn money to support the child. In communities of high youth-distress, the rate of teen pregnancy is sometimes three to four times the national average. This means that within the community, there is currently a whole subpopulation of youth who require intense support to complete their education and become prepared for the workforce. This support is critical, as the future life success of their children is largely hinged upon the success of the parents. Failing to guide these youth to a high school diploma will likely predestine their children to the same grim future.

Social/Emotional Development

Adolescence is a tumultuous emotional period, and young people need considerable adult support as they navigate this difficult time in their lives. This support often comes not just from parents, but from other caring adults such as teachers, coaches, youth workers, or mentors. The triad of family, school, and community supportive relationships is never more important than when dealing with young people in distressed communities. Parents living in these high-risk communities are more likely to have poor mental health, more frequent feelings of stress or aggravation, and greater worries about the ability to provide for the needs of their children.¹⁶ These burdens impact the ability to parent effectively. The support of other caring adults in the lives of these youth fills the void that is left when parents are under such significant pressure. In distressed communities, there is a dearth of caring, supportive adults and institutions available to form connections with young people, many of whom face unimaginable life trials and conditions on a daily basis. Providing this measure of support and care gives youth a sense of belonging to a place, “a home base,” and a feeling of accountability to individuals who care about their future and challenge youth to be and do more. These relationships expand the horizons of possibility for young people, exposing them to ideas and goals that perhaps were never considered or that seemed impossible.

Ethnic Identity Development

The process of ethnic identity formation begins in the early adolescent years, and continues through late adolescence. As children become adolescents, they become more aware of the world outside of their families and their own communities. Young people begin to define their identity within the context of the broader society in which they live. Youth are exploring their ethnic identity while simultaneously engaging in a process of forming an identity for

themselves, separate from their parents and siblings. In poor communities where most of the population is minority, the intersection of ethnicity and poverty plays largely into a young person’s self-image. Their perceptions of themselves and their worth are based largely on what they see in the community around them—deplorable living conditions, dirty playgrounds, empty lots and abandoned buildings, homelessness, and hunger. These young people are ill-equipped to deal with the negative emotions about their self-image and ethnic identity which, not surprisingly, can lead to destructive behaviors. In affluent communities, ethnic identity development is supported by institutions and local government that regularly provide cultural events, classes, festivals, and services to individuals in the community. These types of supports are critical to overcoming the negative images that youth develop about themselves based on their background, their family situation, and the community in which they live. Research has found many positive outcomes associated with higher levels of ethnic identity development, including better reasoning ability, higher academic grades, and strong beliefs about career self-efficacy.¹⁷

Civic Engagement

As youth begin to identify themselves as individuals beyond their family unit and within a broader community, it is important to create opportunities for them to experience a sense of belonging through civic participation. There is a level of apathy present in many distressed communities which often manifests itself among youth as vandalism, property crime, and other inappropriate behaviors. This is largely due to having no positive connections to the community. Youth are quite perceptive—they see the problems in their community and are able to articulate strong feelings about ways in which the community is failing its citizens, particularly young people. Engaging them in dialogue about problems within the community and allowing them opportunities to take the

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

lead on creating solutions cultivates feelings of power and pride.

Participation in community or civic engagement projects has been shown to improve youths' attitudes toward others in the community, and to increase subsequent civic behaviors. Youth are also more engaged in school, and have higher goals for subsequent postsecondary education.¹⁸ Increased opportunities for participation in civic engagement activities may increase the number of youth who actually take an interest in changing their communities. Pairing these opportunities with a grounding in the history and political climate of the community will give the activities greater meaning for youth, allowing them to see themselves as making a significant difference.

Career Development

As youth move into middle and high school, exposure to careers and employment is an important part of expanding horizons and establishing life goals. Young people begin to articulate career and life aspirations at very early ages. These aspirations are like seeds of hope for youth. These seeds need to germinate in the rich soil of age-appropriate activities, supports, and resources that encourage them to reach their full potential. Middle-school students need meaningful exposure to careers and individuals who work in them, and to be put on a continual path of success in school that leads to these future careers. In high school, youth should be exposed to the industry-specific skills that are needed to enter a particular career, and given concrete opportunities to bridge their high-school coursework with the world of work. Teen employment also teaches youth dependability, responsibility, teamwork, and many other “soft skills” necessary for success in the workforce.

In poor communities, rates of youth and young adult unemployment are higher than in other suburban communities around the country. There is also a significant disparity between the employment rates of minority and white youth.¹⁹ As stated earlier, huge percentages of young people are dropping out of high school, so they are without the necessary credential to pursue gainful employment, postsecondary options, or many industry-training programs. Sadly, even those who complete high school are often unprepared for high-wage employment due to inadequacies in their education. Unless communities work to change all of these trends, many youth will undoubtedly be unprepared for meaningful work experiences that will eventually allow them to sustain themselves and their families. There are many creative ways to enhance the career development of youth, particularly when partnerships are created between school districts, departments of labor, and businesses located within the community.

In each of the domains, youth need to be supported through a broad range of programmatic interventions and resource support in order to develop positively. These activities and services must:

- Be age-appropriate, providing progressive skill development for youth as they grow older and their needs change
- Be aligned across the age span so that, as youth get older, they are moved seamlessly from one activity or service to the next
- Provide increased exposure to new experiences and broaden their horizons beyond their communities of distress
- Link the family, the school, and the community together to provide a wide safety net for youth
- Be attached to a “hub” or safe place for youth to go

- Be staffed or managed by consistent, caring adults able to establish positive ties with youth
- Be culturally sensitive

Ideally, parents and youth would be proactive and self-select into activities and programs of interest. The reality, however, is that many young people and their parents in these communities live under conditions of great stress, therefore seeking out

opportunities for developmental activities is not high on their priority list. Thus, the approach must be different. We cannot “build it and they will come,” so to speak. Communities need a comprehensive delivery structure, a mechanism for identifying and funneling youth into opportunities, and the capacity to provide continual follow-up support to ensure consistent participation.

Leaders from key systems and sectors must coalesce around the creation of the continuum of support.

Most communities of high youth distress are confronted with the challenges of high dropout rates, juvenile crime and violence, increasing gang involvement, and health and safety concerns that accompany these types of high risk behaviors. In communities across the country, there are many examples of efforts that have been enacted to address specific aspects of the youth challenge—gang prevention initiatives, community schools, enhanced summer-job programs, college-incentive programs, youth commissions, youth councils, and a myriad of other interventions. In most places, these multiple efforts take place with little coordination across systems and no attention to the articulation necessary to help youth and their families navigate the programs or processes of various youth-serving systems. Generally, these endeavors also are only able to serve small segments of the community’s youth population because of limitations in funding or organizational capacity. While the individual efforts may be laudable, this disparate and fragmented approach cannot provide interventions on the scale needed to change the landscape and move the needle on outcomes for youth in these communities. As a result, thousands of youth with serious issues and tremendous needs may never be touched by any intervention.

There needs to be a clear rallying cry for these troubled communities to take hold of their youth population. Young people are falling by the wayside everyday and, absent a major movement for change; communities will be powerless to save them. The community must generate the energy and the will to take charge of the youth predicament and outline a plan of action to re-direct the life trajectory of these young people to place them on a path to future success. True, sustainable change will require the active participation of all segments of the community.

Community-based organizations—churches, employers, professional organizations, fraternities, sororities, schools, etc. —must each acknowledge the responsibility and accept the charge to contribute time, energy, and resources to create the continuum of activities necessary to support youth. Without this total community buy-in, the supports necessary to successfully buoy young people to adulthood cannot be constructed at sufficient scale to make a real difference.

The movement within a community to support its youth will require significant reframing and restructuring of the way youth services are defined and administered. Youth need continual, consistent support in their transitions from middle school to high school, and ultimately to adulthood. In response to that need, communities must create a broad continuum of support for all youth, with interconnected activities and services that essentially create a web of safety. To galvanize the community around this charge, the leadership will need to chart a course of action that is clear, concrete, and comprehensive. This plan should paint a clear vision for the desired future for young people, and the essential activities and supports needed to get them there. All entities within the community should be able to easily see where their organization fits and how they need to participate in constructive and supportive ways. Most importantly, the plan must encompass the needs of all youth in the community.

Creating a community framework and infrastructure to coordinate and expand supports and services to youth along a continuum from middle school to high school is a challenging undertaking. Agencies, organizations, programs, administrators, businesses, funders, and officials must be willing to think differ-

ently about youth in their communities, to consider more systemic approaches, and to define their role in the solution. To create this continuum to support youth, the community needs to engage in a comprehensive planning process with a group of committed stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. These partnerships generally allow stakeholders to coalesce around shared goals, share resources, work together toward common objectives, and use shared decision-making to guide their work.²⁰ To be successful, the process will require: committed leadership, quality stewardship, and informed decision-making and collective accountability.

Committed Leadership

The successful planning and subsequent implementation of a continuum of activities, services, and support for youth will be directly related to the commitment of leadership at multiple levels:

Leadership by elected officials and other notable public figures

Elected officials (i.e. mayors, county executives, city council members, etc.) and other highly-regarded public figures have the political clout and the decision-making authority to move systems, programs, and the citizenry in a direction that is more beneficial for young people. Incubating the development of youth into strong adults and productive citizens is a cause that is beneficial to the community as a whole, and the active role of elected officials in this process signals to other key constituents the importance of the effort. Conversely, efforts that go forth without the strong support of elected officials will most likely have difficulty in exacting change within public agencies to support the process. Specifically, elected officials can champion the process in the following ways:

- Elevate Youth Issues – Highlight that youth are a community’s human assets who need to be developed to sustain the community and ensure continued economic competitiveness.

- Require Full Involvement – Insist that public systems work together to change paradigms and create collective solutions.
- Call for Action – Legislate the creation of a body to develop solutions to youth problems.
- Commit Resources – Dedicate sufficient resources to fund a comprehensive strategic planning process.
- Engage Business Leaders – Use influence to engage the business community as a participant in creating solutions.
- Inform Planning – Maximize relationships with elected officials in other communities to share lessons learned.

Leadership in the key agencies, organizations, and systems

Multiple agencies touch these youth by providing various programs or services. As presented in section below, many funding streams can be tapped to support more robust strategies to support youth. Decision-making on the service delivery structure and the flow of funding rests with the state, county, and municipal leaders that govern these agencies and systems. Their participation in the visioning and strategic planning process is essential if these systems are to ultimately collaborate to more effectively serve all young people. It is not just about financial resources. It is about rethinking how this population of vulnerable youth is viewed, and how their development can be better supported by more effective collaboration between child welfare, law enforcement, courts, group homes, schools, summer job programs, and others that interact with youth on a regular basis.

Leadership in local community

Within the community, there are many community-based and faith-based organizations that play an important role in serving the needs of youth and families. These organizations operate on the ground,

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

feeling the pulse of communities, and offer tremendous context and understanding of the issues affecting youth. Their leadership will be critical in the development of a continuum, as they are best suited to galvanize the community around a new paradigm for youth activities and service. They engender a trust from community residents that bureaucratic systems do not and thus, are key to any solution being positively received by community residents and utilized by young people. Local organizations can be relied upon to aid the process in the following ways:

- Provide practical context for implementation of programs, services, and activities
- Inform the process on how to ensure youth get connected to the various supports
- Bring community voices into the strategic planning process
- Rally community constituents around the issue of youth and get their buy-in

Leadership in Business Community

Progressive leaders in the business community are also a key in this effort. All businesses are concerned about the quality of their labor force and the economic conditions in their primary market. For more broad-minded business leaders, this interest manifests itself in active concern for the improvement of outcomes for youth in the community. Most often, this has taken the form of supporting educational reform efforts. These business leaders, however, must be engaged to understand their potential role in supporting the overall development of youth which, in turn, affects their academic and life outcomes. Business leaders can contribute to the process in the following ways:

- Leverage their significant political influence to move changes to benefit youth programming
- Identify key roles for business and engage less involved business colleagues in these roles

- Re-evaluate their company's current philanthropic funding priorities
- Consider how business/community partnerships that benefit youth could be created or expanded to support both high-performing youth and those who need more targeted supports

Quality Stewardship

The logistics of a process of engagement to create a continuum of support for youth must be carefully considered. Large group efforts at strategic planning and consensus building often prove unwieldy. Strategic processes which span extended periods of time and primarily produce reports and planning documents often quickly lose the energy and excitement needed to move an action agenda. The key is defining a process which allows for informed, strategic decision-making while concurrently creating action on important parts of the agenda. This two-part approach will sustain the energy of the movement and grow public will. While individual communities will need to define a process that builds on its own strength in leadership and works in its particular political environment, there are some important elements to be considered:

The process requires a convener.

It is important that an entity be identified to shepherd the process. This provides a clear structure and accountability for the work. It also ensures that necessary supports are in place to carry the process through to completion. This entity should be responsible for convening the stakeholders in the community to craft the vision, establishing desired outcomes for youth, developing the blueprint for the continuum, defining roles and responsibilities of all partners, and assuring the deployment of multiple streams of resources to support the continuum model. This entity also institutes processes for how work will be conducted, how information will be

shared, and how decisions will be made. To successfully fulfill this task, the designated convener must have credibility in the community, strong leadership skills, and ability to elevate the strategic discussion beyond individual agendas. The convener could be a youth-serving government agency, local nonprofit, an intermediary, a contracted consultant firm, an advocacy organization, or any other respected entity within the community. This decision is best made by considering the political climate and relationships in that locale.

Sufficient organizational and staff capacity is needed to manage the process.

Strategic planning is complex work that requires dedicated staff with the appropriate skills to maintain momentum throughout the process. This piece should not be overlooked, as the quality of the planning is significantly diminished without this support. Handling the many responsibilities—organizing meetings, facilitating discussions, managing individual relationships, completing tasks generated from meeting discussions, documenting the process, etc.—is time consuming and requires consistent, dedicated staff time. The staff support given to this process must be more than simply administrative in nature. While assistance with logistical coordination is needed, the process is far better served by staff that understands youth issues, is skilled in group facilitation, understands models for community change, has some experience with strategic planning and organizing, and can work comfortably across the cultures of multiple types of agencies.

Stakeholders must be guided to understand, acknowledge, and own the youth problem in the community, then commit to a collective solution.

The planning process must be rooted in a meaningful partnership between the stakeholders in the community. This diverse group of individuals—in-

cluding law enforcement officials, business leaders, community advocates, government employees, educators, parents, etc.—has varied reasons for being invested in the success of young people in the community. They also come with varied perceptions of young people and the youth problem. An alliance can only be created when there is unity of thought around the youth problem that the community faces, and synergy around a collective solution. Stereotypical perspectives of youth behavior, motivations, and ethics can endanger the planning process. Stakeholders should be guided through an explorative process of unpacking the complexities of the youth problem. There are issues within the community that literally push youth toward failure. For example, a lack of teen employment opportunities within the community pushes young people toward the underground economy; poorly designed, unsafe, and inflexible school systems push young people to drop out. It is important that everyone around the table acknowledges that there is an intricate relationship between community issues and youth outcomes. This part of the process gives stakeholders a different understanding of the youth issue, and opens the door for a more robust, unified solution.

The process must include a mechanism for input, feedback, and buy-in for the broader community.

As strategic planning is occurring, opportunities must be created for the broader community to participate in the process. It is easy for this to become a cumbersome task, so developing a tight, well-managed plan for engaging the larger constituency groups is essential. Four things should occur to ensure that the broader community is engaged:

- At the beginning of the process, solicit various constituents to provide their perspective on the youth problem, the most pressing needs of youth, and solutions that they believe would impact young people.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

- In the middle of the process, request feedback from constituents on progress and potential plans.
- At the end of the process, petition constituents to actively support the plan and celebrate the beginning of implementation.
- Throughout the process, provide opportunities for people to receive ongoing information about strategic planning work, and evidence of meaningful integration of constituent perspective into the process.

Youth, parents, and service providers all need opportunities to be engaged, so the process should address each of these constituent groups. A variety of methods for engaging the broader community should be considered, tapping into the most effective means of communication for various groups. Active mechanisms for involvement, such as focus groups, community forums, surveys, or blogs, will be needed to get input and feedback. Other means, such as a Web site, emails, meeting minutes, speaking engagements at local events, or locally broadcasted television and radio interviews, may be used to provide regular updates about the planning efforts. Communities should consider the best mechanisms for communicating, and craft a plan of broader constituency engagement that is both comprehensive and manageable.

The process must consider sustainability from the beginning.

A critical part of the strategic planning is considering how the community will sustain the continuum of support for its youth. Too often, partnerships between organizations or systems are predicated upon personal relationships between the individuals who brokered the partnerships. In these instances, when someone retires or moves to another position, the partnership often falls apart. To create a sustained effort for youth in a community, all relationships should be formalized—through Memoranda of

Understanding, Executive Order, legislation, or some other official means. The financial sustainability of the continuum must also be considered. While discretionary grants from the federal government, foundations, or other private sources may flow into the communities to support initial work, these funding streams are not infinitely guaranteed. There must be a plan in place to continuously seek funding sources, and to identify consistent funding streams. Advocates in other arenas have been creative in their development of sustainable funding streams. Examples include: establishing private endowment funds; tapping into funds generated for a specific purpose, i.e. lottery profits or special taxes; highlighting the dearth of supply in response to demand to expand current investments. Advocacy for creating permanent funding streams for older youth should be a part of initial planning.

Informed Decision-Making and Collective Accountability

The goals and elements of a community's continuum of support for youth must be rooted in solid information about the youth population and the community that surrounds them. Communities of high youth distress are not monolithic. Some, on their face, appear to be rather affluent, with burgeoning economies and many opportunities, while others are more easily identifiable as troubled and suffering. The problems and needs are varied and based on many factors such as size, industries present in the community, proximity to other volatile communities, the various ethnicities present, and even environmental factors. In addition, the resources already in place into a community vary greatly. These factors, obviously, greatly impact where a community ought to place their emphasis and energy. Thus, communities must fully assess and own both the problems and potential in their jurisdictions, then work toward the specific solutions that work best for their youth population. It is only with

this starting point that communities can accurately gauge their success at changing their outcomes for their young people. To effectively create long-term change, communities will need to invest time and resources into defining the dimensions of the problem, mapping community assets, and creating a structure for accountability.

Defining Dimensions of the Problem

To plan appropriately for the youth population in a community, one must be aware of the magnitude and dimension of issues that affect young people. This establishes a community baseline from which progress on youth outcomes can be measured. This also enables resources to be directed in adequate proportion to address the most pressing needs of youth. The key to this process is understanding which data to gather, and how to gather it.

There are two types of information to be gathered—data on youth outcomes, and data on youth risk. Data on youth outcomes provide the baseline for how youth are currently faring in the community. Examples include: high-school graduation rates, percentage of youth enrolled in postsecondary education, percentage of youth employed, teen pregnancy rates, number of youth homicides, number and percent of youth incarcerated. Communities can use this information to understand the breadth of the problem within the community and to set goals for impacting these end outcomes for young people. The data on youth outcomes also serves a second purpose—to give a clear picture of what types of intervention programs are needed within the community to help youth who are already in trouble. Data on youth risk encompass all of the factors that have been identified as impacting a young person's ability to thrive. Communities need to assess the extent of the risk affecting its young people and which risks are particularly pervasive, and use that information to guide planning and programming.

Collecting community data is often a challenging process because data is often aggregated at the state or county level, and community level data is more difficult to obtain. To be effective, communities will need to get as much information as possible disaggregated to get a fuller understanding of youth needs and priorities. Breaking data down by zip code, census tract, or neighborhood will give a sense of where programming ought to be geographically located. This also gives an indication of the concentration of a particular risk or problem within particular parts of the community. Communities should also consider other dividers that may make sense in analysis of data. For example, if a specific divide (i.e. a highway, a body of water, railroad track, etc.) cuts through a community, this may make sense as a way of splitting the data. Some communities are served by multiple school districts, so dividing data along these boundaries may also provide some relevant information or insight.

Mapping Assets

Within the community are many valuable assets which can be drawn upon to support the creation of a continuum of support for youth. (See Table 4.) A part of the planning process should allow for the identification of these resources—human, material, financial, natural, etc.—so that they can be maximally utilized for the benefit of the community's young people. A comprehensive catalog of community assets makes it easier to outreach to potential partners in a strategic and organized way, forge relationships, and involve them in the goal to tackle the complex issues facing youth in the community. The identification of the community's assets breeds new thinking about opportunities for community building, and new approaches to existing problems are able to evolve. These added partnerships bring new life and possibility to planning and implementation, and novel approaches to existing problems may evolve.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

Table 4: Community Asset Mapping Categories

Individual Assets	Institutional Assets	Organizational Assets
Individuals and their <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ skills ▪ talents ▪ experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ churches ▪ colleges & universities ▪ fire departments ▪ hospitals and clinics ▪ mental health facilities ▪ libraries ▪ police departments ▪ schools ▪ utilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ community centers ▪ radio/TV stations ▪ small businesses ▪ large businesses ▪ religious organizations ▪ nonprofit organizations ▪ clubs ▪ citizen groups ▪ business associations
Governmental Assets (State & Federal)	Physical & Land Assets	Cultural Assets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ city government ▪ state capital ▪ economic development departments ▪ military facilities ▪ forest services ▪ small business administration ▪ state agencies, i.e. education, work-force, etc. ▪ telecommunications agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agriculture ▪ parks/recreation areas ▪ vacant land ▪ lakes, ponds, streams ▪ waste resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ethnic/racial diversity ▪ cultural traditions ▪ cultural preservation organizations ▪ historic/arts groups ▪ crafts/skills

Adapted from: Bonner Curriculum: Community Asset Mapping, Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, downloaded March 10, 2008, http://www.bonner.org/resources/modules/modules_pdf/BonCurCommAssetMap.pdf

Accountability

The goal in creating the continuum of support is that outcomes for youth will improve as a result of the community's efforts. To be successful, communities will need to develop a system of accountability to ensure that the continuum is effective and youth are indeed having improved life outcomes. Stakeholders will need to define realistic benchmarks of progress over a specific timeframe. These benchmarks should be based upon the baseline of current youth outcomes and the long-term desired results for the youth population. In addition, performance measures and indicators are needed to monitor the quality of activities and programs that are a part of the continuum. A schedule of periodic assessment will help to ensure

that the efforts of the continuum of support stay on track. Communities may also consider the implementation of a shared data system to enable multiple systems to track the progress of youth and suggest provision of other necessary supports, while also enhancing systems accountability for youth outcomes. Creating this structure for accountability strengthens the continuum in several ways. It:

- Holds partners accountable for specific results
- Provides knowledge about what elements of the continuum are or are not working
- Directs ongoing strategy around the continuum toward changes that would increase outcomes or results

- Monitors if particular efforts are productive
- Tracks the level of return on funds invested in specific activities
- Depicts how resources allocated are tied to actual results for youth

Examples

There are a few places around the country that have been particularly successful in developing an infrastructure to better support youth. The city of Florence, South Carolina, is one such example. In 2004, Mayor Frank Willis established the Mayor’s Coalition to Prevent Juvenile Crime. The vision of this group is “to promote and support a community that works together to help youth become healthy and productive citizens.” With no initial funding, the Coalition rallied a broad range of stakeholders—youth, parents, neighborhood associations, educators, law enforcement, human service agencies, and faith based organizations. Under the mayor’s leadership, they have garnered funding and have developed a full menu of interventions for youth. One premise of their plan is that since the people with the greatest need have the least access and resources, services should be brought to them. This has prompted the implementation of after-school programs, parenting programs, child immunizations, and other services on-site in public housing facilities. In addition, summer jobs and training have been expanded through a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, and high school dropouts are now offered credit recovery as a tool to reconnect them to education.²¹

Other communities working toward a stronger system of services for their youth include:

Chicago, IL – Mayor Richard M. Daley and his wife, Maggie Daley, were the drivers behind the creation and growth of After School Matters, a city-wide after-school initiative for older youth. Through partnerships with multiple public agencies and community-based organizations, youth in vulnerable communities participate in hands-on job training in the arts, sports, technology, communications, and science. After School Matters now serves more than 20,000 young people each year.²²

Philadelphia, PA – Mayor John Street and his wife, Naomi Post Street, championed a Children’s Investment Strategy (CIS) that has been successful for four key reasons—involvement of high-level leadership, strong coordination across agencies supported by intermediaries, creative use and sharing of funding, and data-driven methods and firm accountability measures.²³ The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) and Philadelphia Safe and Sound (PSS) are key partners in this city-wide strategy. Since 1999, over 32,000 youth have benefited from PYN after-school and summer programs which link academics, work readiness, and college awareness.²⁴

Providence, RI – Mayor David Cicilline encouraged leaders to re-think how after-school programming was provided and to consider a citywide approach, which resulted in the creation of AfterZones. Targeted initially at middle-school students, all after-school services in a geographic zone are now part of a coordinated schedule of varied opportunities, with a single point of registration for youth. Through partnership between schools and AfterZones, transportation is provided and links local and citywide programs.²⁵ The mayor now plans to expand this concept to the high-school population.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

The continuum must connect the resources, expertise, and services of all state and local youth-serving systems.

This continuum of activities and supports for youth must rest on a strong foundation of partnerships between the schools, youth-serving systems, and community-based organizations. In communities of high youth distress, the problems loom so large that systems may struggle to conceive the solutions. There are, however, many youth-serving systems existing in communities already providing supportive services to segments of this youth population. In addition, many federal and state funding streams have the flexibility to provide youth services, (See Table 5) and can be convinced of the pressing need to move in that direction. The table below delineates possible uses of funds for a number of federal and state funding sources.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) system, for example, has been used for many years to fund programming and services for at-risk youth. Despite the recent curtailment of TANF due to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, states are still finding opportunities to provide additional services and benefits to reduce poverty and better address the needs of low-income families, including youth, under its four purposes—to provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or the homes of relatives; to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these preg-

Table 5: Allowable Use of Funds²⁶

	Medical Care	Family Support Services	Mental Health Services	Pregnancy Prevention & Family Planning	Youth Development Activities
Child Support – basic funds	No ¹	No	No	No	No
Child Support – discretionary funds	No	Yes*	No	Yes*	Yes*
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Medicaid	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes*
State Children’s Health Insurance Program	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Community Services Block Grant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social Services Block Grant	No ²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment Block Grant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes
Mental Health Services Block Grant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes*
Family Violence Prevention & Services	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act	Yes*	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*
Child Welfare Services	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes
Promoting Safe and Stable Families	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes

1 While state child support programs do not pay for medical services or insurance, they are required to pursue health care coverage for children participating in the program if it is available to either parent through employment and at a reasonable cost.

2 SSBG can be used for a very limited set of medical services related to other services being provided.

* Denotes that the use of funds is permissible but not specifically mentioned in the relevant statute or regulations.

nancies; and to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.²⁷

Each of these purposes is relevant to youth programming, and there are a myriad of youth programs functioning in communities which serve these purposes. For example, interventions which work with youth to reduce disruptive or delinquent behaviors are eligible for funding under the first purpose. Before- and after-school programs provide a service to parents, enabling them to work or participate in training in preparation for work. These programs could be funded under the law's second purpose. Guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services allows programs which help youth remain in school, provide supervision after school, and/or increase self esteem and motivation to be funded under the third purpose.²⁸

Several states and communities are currently using TANF funds for after-school and summer programs, summer youth employment opportunities, and youth development programs. In Texas, TANF funds are used to support the Communities in Schools dropout prevention program which provides many services, including academic training, mentoring, gang and violence prevention, career exploration, and work experience opportunities.²⁹ In Pennsylvania, \$15 million in TANF funds are allocated to local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). The city of Philadelphia receives a large portion of this allocation, and uses the funds to provide summer employment opportunities to 3,000 youth ages 14-18.³⁰ Using TANF funds, the state of New York created the Advantage After School Program. Currently, the program has a \$27.5 million budget, and operates in 250 sites, providing educational, recreational, and cultural age-appropriate activities.³¹ These states have effectively demonstrated that expansion of existing high-quality community programs or creation of new initiatives is possible by utilizing the resources available in the TANF system.

Decisions about the allocation and use of TANF funds are made on the state level by the State TANF Director, usually in collaboration with other governmental employees responsible for related block grant programs such as Community Services Block Grant, Child Care and Development Block Grant, and Social Services Block Grant. Planning for these funds is done on a three-year cycle, and communities have opportunities to weigh in on these plans through a public-hearing process. Many governors also have councils or cabinet groups focused on family services that weigh in on TANF state plans. The critical part in this planning is whether the innovations proposed on the state level translate into meaningful services and activities in local areas. Communities can make the case for investment of TANF funds in youth services by highlighting the needs of youth in low-income families and proposing strategic solutions to state leadership.

In addition to the funding streams noted above, there are several large youth-serving systems that need to be engaged in any process to create a continuum of services for youth. They include:

The Education System, which is responsible for the education of all youth in a community. In communities of high youth distress, most schools are high-poverty and are eligible for Title I funds through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In addition, many of the schools in poor communities are also failing, making students eligible for Supplemental Education Services (SES). These funds can be used to support the types of youth programming needed to ensure both academic success and healthy development. As defined in law, Title I resources are to be used to fund strategies that enable all students to meet proficient and advanced levels of student academic achievement. This is to be accomplished by using effective methods to 1) strengthen the core academic program of the school, 2) increase the amount and quality of learning time, and 3) include interventions to meet the educational needs of

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

historically underserved populations. Some acceptable uses of Title I funds include:³²

- Extended school year
- Before- and after-school programs
- Summer programs
- Counseling
- Pupil services
- Mentoring services
- College and career awareness and preparation
- Personal finance education
- Use of innovative teaching methods, such as applied learning and team-teaching strategies
- Integration of vocational and technical education programs

Local education agencies (LEAs) individually make decisions about priorities for Title I spending in their districts. More progressive superintendents and LEAs use their Title I funds to pay for innovative educational supports which engage students differently and spark their interest in learning, and which support students' total development and preparation for the future. The Community Learning Centers initiative in Lincoln, Nebraska, has a network of 19 sites providing before- and after-school programming to youth. Through a partnership with the school district, Title I funds are used to pay for curricula, site supervisor salaries, and coordination of the network.³³ Supplemental Education Services (SES) are approached differently, in that state education agencies (SEAs) establish criteria for SES provider eligibility. Some states allow significant flexibility, while others have restricted the pool of potential providers to a narrow list of entities providing individualized tutoring services. In Boston, the school system uses its SES resources to fund service providers that use inventive approaches with students such as the Citizen Schools, which uses an experiential learning model to build academic skills through

apprenticeships with area artists and professionals.³⁴ These examples illustrate that when the educational system has a clear picture of the needs of youth in the community and engages in strategic partnerships to meet those needs, they maximize their resources to support the healthy development of young people who are more able to succeed in school and graduate.

Juvenile justice resources through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Programs (OJJDP) support states and communities to develop and implement effective prevention and intervention programs, and to make improvements to their juvenile justice systems. OJJDP seeks to help locales to protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and provide treatment and rehabilitative services tailored to the needs of juveniles and their families.³⁵ The legislation is quite broad in its description of programs eligible for funding, which allows for significant flexibility and creativity on the part of communities in crafting programs to meet the specific needs of youth in their locale. Examples of programs that may be funded through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act include:³⁶

- Community-based programs to strengthen families so that youth may remain in their homes or return home following incarceration
- Comprehensive programs which meet needs of youth through formal collaboration between local systems including, schools, child protection services, welfare services, mental health agencies, etc.
- Programs that provide treatment to youth who have been victims of child abuse or neglect
- Educational programs or supportive services to encourage youth to remain in school, and to transition to work and self-sufficiency
- Counseling, training, and mentoring programs
- Gang prevention
- Programs that foster positive youth development, including a sense of safety, belonging, self worth,

social contribution, control over one's life, and positive interpersonal relationships

- Hate crime prevention
- Re-integration and follow-up services
- Mental health services

Funds are administered by OJJDP in two ways—through block grants to states and discretionary grants to states, local government, and/or local private agencies. Each state has an advisory group, appointed by the governor, responsible for charting the vision and crafting the triennial plan for juvenile justice efforts in the state. The state planning agency then carries out this plan, and a Juvenile Justice Specialist is responsible for ensuring that block grant funds are administered according to the state's priorities. As all of this work is happening on the state level, communities of high youth distress should be at the table, infusing the process with information and perspective. Significant attention and financial investment must be made in crafting a system and a process to support adjudicated youth and those at risk for delinquent behaviors. Communities of high youth distress have a higher concentration of youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and these youth face different challenges than the average young person and require more intensive supports. Issues like youth unemployment, poor-quality education, teen parenting responsibilities, and youth development should be central to discussions about the role of the juvenile justice system, and should inform the local activities and services provided.

Since 2003, OJJDP has provided technical assistance to several communities utilizing their Targeted Community Action Planning (TCAP) process to help them assess their juvenile justice and delinquency prevention needs and assist them in developing targeted responses. This technical assistance process takes a community approach, wherein the leaders of that locale are convened to identify and discuss par-

ticular challenges and to rally their resources around a cadre of solutions. Integral to the TCAP approach is the involvement of the full continuum of youth services in the locale around a set of multifaceted responses for young people. Many communities around the country have engaged in the TCAP process, and have found it quite valuable. For example, in Brockton, Massachusetts, the TCAP process was spearheaded by the Plymouth County District Attorney's office and involved all of the youth-serving systems—Departments of Youth Services, Juvenile Justice, Child Protective Services, Mental Health, Public Health, Transitional Assistance, Education, and Workforce. The community planning process helped the agencies to move from a deficit approach to a more supportive strength-based model for working with juvenile offenders. As a result of this technical assistance from OJJDP, the leaders in Brockton were able to devise a plan to allocate existing resources differently to better meet youth needs, and also garnered new funding to provide additional programming and services.³⁷

The Workforce Investment System, which funds youth employment programming in states and communities across the country and, through its legislation, strives to integrate youth development in order to engage and retain youth. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provides clear opportunities for funding quality out-of-school programs for older youth. Highly functional Youth Councils are the key to communities harnessing these resources to meet the vocational needs of youth. Youth Councils are tasked with mapping existing resources, developing localized strategies, coordinating youth services, and providing oversight for eligible service providers. Many Youth Councils, however, are not functioning optimally, so communities miss the opportunity to maximize these resources. The legislation outlines 10 required program elements which must be available to youth. While the service provider is not required to provide programming in all 10 areas, the Youth

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

Council is responsible for ensuring that all 10 elements are available to youth in that locale. These 10 program elements are meant to place greater emphasis on comprehensive, year-round youth services. They are:³⁸

- tutoring, study skills training, instruction leading to completion of secondary school, including dropout-prevention strategies,
- alternative secondary-school services,
- summer employment linked to academic and occupational learning,
- paid and unpaid work experience including internships and job shadowing,
- occupational skills training,
- leadership development which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility,
- supportive services,
- adult mentoring during program participation and at least 12 months subsequently,
- at least a 12-month follow-up upon program completion, and
- guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral.

Many communities across the country have successfully used WIA youth funds to create significant out-of-school opportunities for older youth. Modesto City Schools in California accessed WIA funds to create a job-training program for 18-21-year-olds. These youth are employed in the district's 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and eventually become certified as paraprofessionals, which enables them to work in schools.³⁹ Communities in Schools in Macon-Bibb County, Georgia, have used WIA funds to create a computer-based tutoring program to aid students in developing reading, mathematics, and leadership skills. Youth are compensated for completion of each tutoring module.⁴⁰

The reality is that, while each of these systems or institutions exists in the community, they often operate independently of each other, working exclusively with their segment of the youth population. Many provide similar or even identical services, but only to the youth who fit a narrow definition of eligibility. Many youth, or their families, interface with multiple systems on a regular basis. Given the statistics around dropout, juvenile-arrest rates, teen-pregnancy rates, etc., it is a safe assumption that the individual efforts of these systems are not yielding significantly positive outcomes for large percentages of young people. A disproportionate number of youth in these communities are in need of supportive activities and services, and the resources do not match the need. If systems collaborated on the creation of a solution for youth in their communities, duplicative effort would be reduced and youth would not fall through the cracks of a fragmented support structure.

There are several things that state and local youth-serving systems can do to improve the capacity of a community to serve its youth, including:⁴¹

- Share data in order to make more substantive decisions about services for youth
- Align program requirements and streamline the oversight procedures to support more integrated service delivery
- Pool resources to create a unified funding stream for programming and technical assistance
- Require evidence of partnerships and collaboration in future funding requests, and provide incentives for currently-funded programs to partner in their service delivery
- Make the case for increased resources to effectively serve the youth population through assessing the current supply/demand ratio for services within the community
- Identify opportunities to amend regulation to expand eligibility or use of funds

Conclusion



All youth deserve a chance at a viable, productive future. The fact that this future is an unattainable dream for most young people in distressed communities should be unacceptable in a country of such wealth and promise. While much attention has been focused on the need for early childhood programs, Head Start, and interventions in the early grades, there has been little focus on extending that support to youth as they navigate their middle- and high-school years. Consequently, students in communities of high youth distress display many of the early signs of academic disconnection in middle school, and drop out in alarming numbers in high school. Creating a new reality for these youth, one that delivers them to a future of hope and opportunity, will require the collaborative effort of all levels of government, all youth-serving systems, and all those working on the ground with young people each day. While this goal requires funding, that is not the only solution. It also requires that communities revamp the systems, policies, and relationships currently in place such that there is a new focus: the healthy development of all youth into strong, successful adults. Every entity in the community must rally around this cause, and come to the table prepared to contribute to a solution that provides a continuous, systemic structure of support and nurture for its young people. To build this continuum of support, communities of high youth distress need to do the following:

- 1. Elevate the Youth Challenge in a Holistic Way.** Communities will need to create an environment where all stakeholders—educators, parents, civic leaders, employers, faith- and community-based organizations—share a common concern about the life outcomes of their youth and see their role and responsibility in contributing to the solutions.
- 2. Galvanize Community Around the Challenge and Commit to Building Solutions.** Mayors, public officials, and civic and corporate leaders can play a pivotal role in sounding the “call to action” to build a continuum of support to under-gird student success and to craft solutions at scale.
- 3. Create a Forum for Visioning and Planning.** A well structured process that engages all stakeholders can create a collective vision for the community’s youth that can reframe the thinking around possible solutions. With strong stewardship, this vision can guide the re-alignment of services, resources, and social-supports for youth, and can lead to the development of a sustainable plan of action for the community.
- 4. Address the Many Developmental Needs of Youth with a Particular Focus on Those Who Are Falling Behind.** When supports are structured in a continuum, youth in a community are able to engage in a wide variety of age-appropriate activities and receive the supports they need as they grow and develop. Youth in vulnerable situations and those transitioning among systems—child welfare, justice, homeless shelters, etc.—can be better supported.
- 5. Leverage Existing Resources in the Community.** The many financial, institutional, organizational, cultural, governmental, physical, and individual resources within the community should be used to provide a broad spectrum of opportunities, services, and supports for youth.
- 6. Establish Measures of Accountability.** Monitoring the quality of initiatives and incremental gains of youth allows communities to fairly assess the success of their continuum model, make changes as necessary, and match investments to outcomes for youth.
- 7. Be Bold.** Innovative solutions can be found by stretching the paradigms of the programs and services of the existing youth-serving systems and providers. Communities can accomplish a great deal by being open to new innovations and partnerships that will serve youth well.

A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work:

Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities

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