Out-of-School Males of Color

Summary of Roundtable Discussion

CLASP
policy solutions that work for low-income people

Out-of-school, or disconnected, youth are generally defined as young people between the ages of 16 – 24 that lack a high school diploma and are not enrolled in school and are detached from work. There are 6.7 million young people in this age cohort that are out of school and out of work. Of that number, 3.4 million are "chronic," defined as never in school or work after 16 years of age and 3.3 million are "under-attached," defined as a lack of progression through college or into a job.[1] Out-of-school males of color are more likely to be unemployed and live in poverty than their white counterparts. In addition, this population faces a likelihood of increased interactions with the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

It is against this backdrop that this roundtable discussion was convened. We assembled local and national policy leaders, practitioners, advocates, and researchers around the education and employment of out-of-school males of color. Throughout the day, roundtable participants offered thought-provoking comments and responses to the questions that were posed around barriers, solutions, and creating public will to address the challenges faced by this population. However, in some cases the participants offered more obvious statements about the needs and challenges of out-of-school males of color– which will require bold and immediate solutions at the federal, state, and local levels. This paper is a summary of the notes and key themes that emerged during the roundtable discussion. The roundtable participants and the notes provide additional content knowledge in framing the education and employment policies and practices for out-of-school males of color.

Policies and Practices Impacting this Population

Participants discussed a range of policies and practices that have significant impact on education and employment outcomes for out-of-school young men of color.

Education Policies and Practices

The roundtable participants identified several education policies, implemented at the local and state district levels that present barriers to young males of color achieving positive education outcomes, including school and district level policies that serve to push young men out of school, and state policies that neglect to provide opportunities for young men to reengage in education. These include:

- Harsh disciplinary or "zero tolerance" policies push young men out of school. Positive practice approaches are limited; for example, there is a lack of conflict mediation and resolution in schools and other alternatives to suspension and expulsion. Schools need a less punitive response to these issues and

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[1] http://www.americaspromise.org/News-and-Events/News-and-Features/2012-News/January/~/media/Files/Resources/Youth%20Factsheet%201-2-12%20FINAL.ashx

to develop options beyond suspension/expulsion to keep young men attached and connected to education. Truancy policies also disproportionately push young men of color out of school. Some suspend or expel students, while the harshest policies also involve the justice system. Such approaches to a truancy problem suggest lack of priority given to the education needs of young men of color.

- State policies on recognition of GED as HS diploma impede young men from high school completion and moving forward with postsecondary opportunities.

- State and local education agencies lack multiple pathways to high school completion and dropout recovery options, such as GED to College, credit retrieval, twilight programming, and alternative school settings. The current structure of high school does not work for all students, especially for dropouts coming back to school, which often time was a setting that failed them and presents negative experiences for that young person.

Additionally, federal education policy and the consequences of its subsequent implication at the state and local district level pose another set of challenges to serving out-of-school young men of color:

- Education and justice system lack strong articulation agreements regarding educational completion during incarceration and transition back after release. Credits for educational work done while incarcerated often do not transfer back to school upon release, which hinders/discourages continued education and places that young person at a significant disadvantage.

- Federal school accountability policies affect school/district willingness to re-engage youth who dropped out and to serve those that are overage and under-credited. Accountability implementation, as is the case with school/district level assessments such as graduation rates and Adequate Yearly Progress, sometimes makes dropout problem worse as youth are pushed out of school to make outcomes appear better. Some aspects of dropout recovery programming may initially make school outcomes appear worse.

Employment Policies and Practices

Out-of-school males of color are far more likely to be detached from the workforce than males of color that are enrolled in school. Four key themes emerged during the roundtable discussion regarding employment policies and practices that impede positive outcomes for out-of-school males of color, including (a) accountability and eligibility issues with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) – the primary federal workforce funding stream for youth employment; (b) lack of federal investment in youth employment and training programs, especially for this population; (c) employer discrimination and lack of employment/workplace protections; and (d) emerging immigration issues.

- Accountability and eligibility requirements in WIA make it difficult for locales to utilize this funding stream in conjunction with other resources to create employment pathways and pipelines. Additionally, there are specific eligibility barriers- such as proof of income - that impede enrollment and ongoing participation.

- Investment in employment and training programs at the federal level has steadily declined over the last thirty years despite increasing unemployment and underemployment. There is minimal access to job training, work experience, apprenticeships, etc.

- Employer discrimination is a significant barrier for young men. In particular, in some cases credit score is used to eliminate people from applicant pools. This phenomenon, coupled with a lack of employment protections for people with criminal history, presents a barrier to gainful employment.

- Immigration issues, including citizen documentation and the emergence of punitive immigration laws can impact the perceived employability of men of color.

Cross-Systems Policies and Practices

The roundtable participants noted that the needs and challenges that this population faces do not fall under one particular system or agency domain. To improve outcomes for the out-of-school youth population, multiple systems must come together and polices/practices at the federal, state, and local levels.

- Federal accountability policies across multiple systems, including K-12 education, adult education, workforce, and higher education, offer no incentive to recover and serve the lowest literacy/ skilled youth.

- There is a lack of staff development to ensure culturally competent staff, able to appropriately work with this population in a variety of settings. Youth development principles are often not embedded into the instruction and training of staff in justice, child welfare, and education systems.

- Service delivery to this population of youth requires longer and more intense programming, which costs more and is in conflict with the expectations of funders (public and private) that want to see results in a short and unrealistic timeframe.

- Out-of-school youth are often subject to multiple to systems (child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and workforce); Lack of data and information sharing or confidentiality agreements between systems prevents services from being comprehensive or maximally beneficial.

External Policies Impacting Education and Employment

The roundtable participants also identified other policies that significantly impact pathways to education and employment for out-of-school males of color. These include:

- An array of criminal justice policies and practices, such as drug laws and parole issues, which lead to recidivism.
- Child support policies are quite harmful to low-income fathers, and often detrimental to getting young men connected to employment.

Potential Solutions

Policies

- A number of policy solutions discussed have implications for changes in federal polices, specifically the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Workforce Investment Act. Other policy solutions suggest a shift in the approach to how communities are funded (through public and private dollars) to address the needs of this population. Comprehensive intervention strategies are needed, such as Youth Opportunity Grant Program, which federal resources were targeted to high poverty communities to create cross-systems, community wide approaches to achieve education and employment outcomes. In this way, resources are directed to build the capacity of a given community to create education and employment options across multiple systems.

- Administrative and statutory barriers to serving disconnected youth can be changed without changing law. These can be negotiated to support a community-wide strategy to meet needs of population. In the absence of reauthorization and the need to do more with less, consider these regulatory fixes. For example:
  - Negotiation of performance measures across funding streams
  - Streamlined eligibility across funding streams
  - More clarity on industry recognized credential
  - State waivers if certain outcomes are reached

- Importance of a having a caring adult in the lives of young men is essential. This can be achieved through a variety of approaches and funded through federal, state and local vehicles, such as case management function youth advocates played in the Youth Opportunity program or the role graduation coaches are having in select communities.

The following are relevant education policies with implications for changes within ESEA:

- Adapt Average Daily Attendance (ADA) policies to maximize services to disconnected youth, such as having ADA dollars follow the student.   Increase upper limit on age for services, increase flexibility, and allow use for GED completion. States such as WI, CA, WA, OR, TX are examples of this work.

- Tie school/district dropout recovery to funding to create incentives for the development of new education options that are a part of a dropout recovery system.

The roundtable discussion yielded the following policies for establishing employment pathways for out-of-school males of color:

- Fund, implement, and advocate for subsidized employment programs as a part of an employment pathway strategy. Subsidized employment offers a step to full-time work and a living wage. In addition, increase the emphasis on entrepreneurship models and opportunities as a part of employment skills training.

- Fund replication and deeper evaluation of programmatic models that have had success. They key here is not necessarily on the specific program model, rather focus should be on the actual intervention elements included in such models. For example, Job Corps, Year Up, Career Academies, and the small schools initiatives in NY. There are some programmatic and community-wide efforts achieving success, but they are not scaled up.   This is an area of tremendous need. "Scaling up" means more than just increased resources; also organizational development is necessary.

- Consider *Make Work Pay* policies to incentivize participation in labor market. Examples may include EITC, child support, etc.

Legislative Vehicles

The following are major pieces of Federal legislation that can have a significant impact on creating education and employment pathways for out-of-school young men of color:

- Workforce Investment Act
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- Carl D. Perkins Act
- Higher Education Act
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Transportation Act

Below are smaller bills that have been introduced in the past year that would also provide opportunities to better serve disconnected young men of color:

- RAISE UP Act
- Secondary School Reentry Act
- Pathways Back to Work Act

Solutions between Legislation and Implementation

- Target resources by neighborhoods with high youth distress (high poverty, unemployment, and dropout rates) to create comprehensive approaches to service provision. This would allow for both urban and rural areas to be served.

- Target a percentage of resources specifically to serve males of color.

- Create incentives for serving males of color effectively.

- Require groups representing the interests of males of color to be consulted in federal, state, and local RFP processes. Through this consultation elements such as required partnerships and intervention strategies can be achieved.

Messaging the Issue of Out-Of-School Males of Color

The experts convened provided important information on what data currently exists, what is missing, and the type of messages that are needed to generate broad-based support. Lastly, the group posed an important question as to how does policy and practice address race.

- There are credible numbers on the impact of high school dropout and disconnection, including lost earnings, lost resource, lost of human capital. However, they have been under-utilized and have not been really used locally to make the case.

- There is also a need to focus on political inequality. Males of color need to understand political process to mobilize them to act on behalf of this population and this issue.

- Utilize a compassion frame and the social impact on the larger society.

- Use of the "population change" statistics – the fact that the nation is experiencing a rapid demographic shift and soon people of color will be the majority. Continuing these negative outcomes for employment and education of males of color will lead to negative outcomes for the nation as a whole.

- We need to use an asset based approach. Paint a different image of young men of color, and encourage communities to think of this population as assets.

- There is a big divide about whether to name this as a racially-specific or racially-neutral issue. The barrier to speaking with coherence and authority is having to consider comfort levels of those who could potentially be allies. Questions to consider - who will it move to discuss this issue in a racially-specific manner? How do we use it to mobilize and engage? How do you put lens on the issue without unintended consequences? This is not an either/or discussion. We need both framings in order to move this issue.

Creating Political Will to Make Change

- Creating the political will to move the needle for this population will require a multi-pronged approach from champion cultivation and training to investments in research, and directing resources to local communities. The business voice is critical. The out-of-school youth population impacts their employee pool. Consider ways of getting business to champion this population. As an idea, RWJF could consider hosting a meeting on this topic and inviting the US Chamber of Commerce /local Chamber of Commerce.

- Cultivate young people to be champions.

- Consider using a "paid sick days model." Choose a handful of places at the state and local level with political opportunity and focus efforts there.

- Conduct more research on out-of-school youth and use results to build public will. Many systems are targeted to prevention, not intervention. The strength of the research is in prevention, which hinders the will of changing policy for out-of-school youth.

Creating Partnerships to Impact This Issue

There are many individuals/organizations that are engaged and interested in this topic and interested in cross sector conversations. There needs to be ongoing staff support and organization to create that table. Examples of potential partners include, but are not limited to:

- Out of school time and youth development organizations
- Non-profit advocacy groups who currently do work locally
- Workforce Investment Board Youth Councils
- American Pediatric Association
- American Bar Association
- Schools of Public Health
- Healthcare, energy, etc—fields that will have employment gaps and trade associations
- Disproportionate Minority Contact committees

- White House Council on Community Solutions
- Behind the Cycle
- There are also national coalitions and councils that have formed at the national level that would be ripe to facilitate conversations about solutions and action around this population i.e. Campaign for Youth

Other Observations for Consideration

- Need to be realistic about the amount of resource and time it takes to work with out-of-school youth and get them to completion and success. The cost to reconnect/recover youth is higher because they require more intense services. In addition, the duration of service/programming is higher. This is problematic, however, when funders want to see results in a shorter time frame.

- Mid-size towns that are economically viable and have community infrastructure may be manageable places to try solutions, not just big urban centers.

- Rural communities and schools face different challenges with recovering out-of-school youth.

- There is a major gap between policy development, implementation, and outcomes. When you see a successful program working, how do you transition these learnings into policies that can be implemented broadly in other systems?

- We have to be careful because some proposed solutions, when rigorously analyzed, are not successful. Which begs the question of what is actually being analyzed? It is difficult to evaluate systems change and easier evaluate programmatic models. However, time has proven that program models alone aren't enough to address the significance of the challenges facing out-of-school males of color.

- There is a role for national policy and advocacy organizations to play in assisting local communities and states on their advocacy for this population, and to raise their voices to the national level. There are decisions that happen at the state/local level and people need to be equipped to impact those.

Participants

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