CHANGING PLACES

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HOW COMMUNITIES WILL IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF BOYS OF COLOR

Edited by Christopher Edley Jr. and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco

With a foreword by Robert Phillips

BerkeleyLaw
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity and Diversity

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University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

Manufactured in the United States of America

12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*).

Cover: The cover image was designed by Oakland, California–based printmaker and digital artist Favianna Rodriguez. Using high-contrast colors and vivid figures, her composites reflect literal and imaginative migration, global community, and interdependence. She has lectured widely on the use of art in civic engagement and the work of bridging community and museum, local and international. Rodriguez is coeditor of *Reproduce and Revolt!* with stencil artist and art critic Josh MacPhee (Soft Skull Press, 2008). An unprecedented contribution to the Creative Commons, this two-hundred-page book contains more than six hundred bold, high-quality black and white illustrations for royalty-free creative use. Rodriguez's artwork also appears in *The Design of Dissent* (Rockport Publishers, 2006), *Peace Signs: The Anti-War Movement Illustrated* (Edition Olms, 2004), and *The Triumph of Our Communities: Four Decades of Mexican Art* (Bilingual Review Press, 2005).

NINE

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS FOR LOW-INCOME YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Linda Harris and Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield

ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at strategies for connecting male high school dropouts of color between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four to pathways to postsecondary credentials that have value in the labor market. Many of the millions of young men of color who have dropped out of school have the talent, ability, and aspirations for a better future and can benefit from being connected to a supported pathway to postsecondary credentials. This tremendous pool of talent and potential, if properly supported and channeled, can help close the skills gap in the United States and greatly contribute to the nation's productivity and competitiveness. Converting this raw talent into skilled workers with the credentials and mastery for the twenty-first-century economy will require considerable rethinking of how our secondary, postsecondary, workforce, adult education, youth development, and youth recovery systems work in tandem to build the supports and create the pathways at some scale to bring these youth back into the education and labor-market mainstream.

The chapter addresses why it is essential to invest in building postsecondary pathways for young men of color who are high school dropouts and highlights examples of innovations in policy, community intervention strategies, program delivery, pedagogy in basic skills, youth development and dropout recovery, and postsecondary education. While advocating for expanded adoption of these best practices, we also want to seed thinking about ways these policies and practices, if better integrated and funded, can bring about more robust and successful dropout recovery and postsecondary education to ensure that more male youth of color gain the skills and credentials necessary to open the door to higher wages and career opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

This analysis considers the current labor-market status of low-income young men of color. We review current and historical factors that contribute to their high rates of unemployment and underrepresentation in middle-skilled jobs, and we call for the development of aggressive community-intervention strategies to build multiple postsecondary pathways aimed at putting young men of color on track to economic success. For many young men of color, particularly those residing in communities of concentrated poverty, finding and retaining work is a considerable challenge. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in January 2010 only 28 percent of black men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four were working, compared with 43 percent of Hispanic men and 44 percent of white men in the same age category (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010b). The percentage of young men working across all racial groups has declined dramatically in less than a decade. In 2002, 41 percent of black men, 78 percent of Hispanic men, and 60 percent of white men ages sixteen to twenty-four were working (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2002).

While the expectation isn't that all youth should be employed, the precipitous decline in youth employment in general, the dramatic decline in employment rates for young Hispanic men, and the persistently high level of joblessness for young black men is cause for concern and reason for action. Although male joblessness in communities of color has been an issue for decades, the recent economic recession has had a calamitous impact on the labor-market prospects for youth of color. The slow jobless recovery combined with historical barriers presents a crisis for young men of color, the communities in which they live, and the families they will not be able to support.

A publication of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, *Losing Our Future,* presented data for the hundred largest school districts which showed that those districts with the highest percentage participation in the free and reduced lunch program were also districts with predominantly black and Hispanic student populations; most had graduation rates below 60 percent (Orfield et al. 2004). These also tend to be the communities with high unemployment rates, much higher rates of crime and violence, and substantially diminished resources for communities and families. In these communities far too many young men are trapped in a perpetual cycle of low expectations, low achievement, limited labor-market prospects, increased exposure to the criminal justice system, and an inability to provide economic stability for their families. The permanence of these condi-

tions has contributed to a cycle of limited opportunity for generations. Priority attention must be given to implementing strategies to impact the labor-market situation for young men of color in these communities.

Another reason for urgency in improving the labor-market status of young men of color is the census projection that by 2023 minorities will comprise more than half the children in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Given this demographic trend, investing in building the skills and credentials of the nation's young minority male population is essential to assuring economic stability for these children and a sufficiently skilled labor pool to sustain the nation's economic growth.

The ages from sixteen to twenty-four represent the formative years for developing labor-market skills. Through early work experiences, part-time and summer jobs, internships, and other vocational and career awareness experiences, youth are exposed to the expectations of the workplace, learn workplace skills, develop a work portfolio, and have the opportunity to explore their interests. Studies have demonstrated that early work experience positively correlates with future labor-market success and earnings. An analysis released by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston has suggested that cumulative work experience has very substantial effects on the wages and annual earnings of young men and women. The report found that expected economic returns from work experience influence the decision of men and women to actively participate in the labor force. The study concluded that those who have only limited work experience in their late teens and early twenties cannot command high wages in the labor market, and their limited wage prospects reduce the economic incentive for them to participate in the labor market (Sum, McLaughlin, and Khatiwada 2006).

Thus the lack of access to jobs during this critical developmental period has an impact on the earnings capacity of young men of color well into their adulthood as they take on family, civic, and personal responsibilities. In January 2010, 44 percent of young white males were employed, compared with only 28 percent of young black males. This gap has grown over time. As young white men build their work portfolios during the same period that young men of color remain jobless, the competitive advantage in the labor market for young white men will continue to grow.

Improving labor-market opportunities for young men of color is about more than just jobs. It is about dramatically increasing the number of young men of color who are equipped with the postsecondary skills and credentials they will need to obtain opportunities in the labor market. It is also about improving their access to jobs that will provide them with stable

employment at decent wages and opportunities for advancement. The solutions must be at a scale to close the gaps between young white men and men of color in terms of education attainment, labor-market penetration, and earnings. The situation is complex. The solutions to address employment disparities require making the labor-market situation of young men of color the central focus for strategic action and assembling the talent, resources, and innovation to address the multiplicity of barriers that have historically impeded their stable employment at decent wages.

This chapter focuses on low-income young men of color in high-poverty communities. We make the case that if the story to be told a decade from now about the labor-market situation for these young men is to be substantially different from the disturbing narrative of today, we need new strategies. Such strategies must be commensurate with the challenge and must bring together: (1) leadership in the public, private, and community sectors; (2) the expertise of education, workforce, and youth development professionals; and (3) community resources in a coordinated way to put these young men on track to better futures. We recommend the following strategies:

- Establish a collective community strategy that focuses on putting young men of color on pathways to economic success.
- Set postsecondary success as the predominant focus of interventions for young men of color.
- Create multiple pathways that combine education, training, work experience, and support to help young men, especially those who lack high school diplomas and job skills, achieve successful postsecondary outcomes.
- Leverage regional economic development, community development and revitalization, and infrastructure-building, and "green" energy activities to build pipelines to the emerging opportunities in these areas.

THE CHALLENGE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A high rate of unemployment for young men of color in the United States is not a new phenomenon. For decades the crisis of minority male unemployment has been documented in scholarly research, has been chronicled in articles, and has been the subject of various commissions:

- In the 1987 publication *Workforce 2000*, economists looked at demographic trends and cautioned that without substantial

adjustments in policies and investments in education and training, the problems of minority unemployment, crime, and dependency on public systems would be worse in the year 2000 (Johnston and Packer 1987).

- The 1988 report of the William T. Grant Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship—*The Forgotten Half: Non-college Youth in America*—noted the discouraging labor-market situation for minority youth and recommended that comprehensive policies and programs be developed to address the growing gap between more fortunate youth and those with far fewer advantages.
- The 1990 report *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* called for a dropout-recovery system that would build the connection between education and work for youth without high school certification (National Center on Education and the Economy 1990).

The labor-market challenges facing young men of color have been noted over the decades, and the recommendations for increased investments for education and training of low-income and minority populations have been consistent. Yet since the mid-1990s, the level of federal investment in employment and training programs that could put these young men on better footing in the labor market has declined dramatically. The employment rates for young men ages sixteen to twenty-four have dropped dramatically across all racial and ethnic categories since 2002 (figure 9.1). Although employment rates for young Hispanic men have been higher over the past decade than those for young white men, young Hispanic men have experienced the greatest decline in employment. Employment rates for young black men have lagged substantially behind both white and Hispanic men. The persistence of these trends for young men of color is cause for great concern and reason for aggressive action.

As the nation's economy pulls out of the current recession, the slow pace of job growth coupled with fierce competition for the few available jobs will undoubtedly leave young men of color at the end of the queue. An analysis by the Center for Law and Social Policy of employment and earnings data during the peak business cycles from 1979 through 1999 found that despite the robust economy of the 1990s, young men with a high school diploma or less—and in particular black men in this category—were less likely to be working than their counterparts two decades earlier and more likely to be earning substantially less (Richter et al. 2003).

Over the next ten years renewable energy, health care, technology, re-

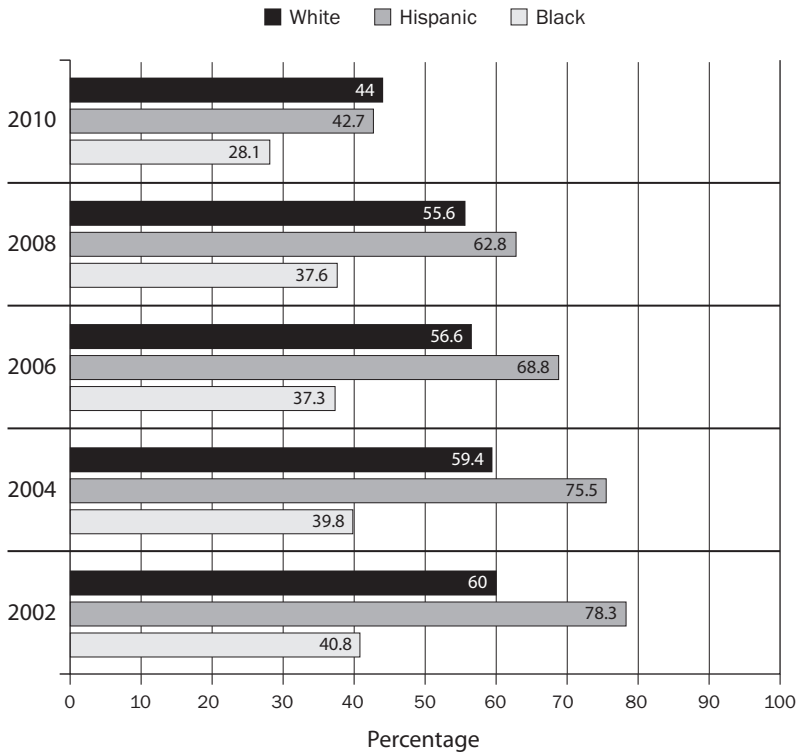

Figure 9.1. Percentage of employed men ages sixteen to twenty-four, by race and ethnicity, selected years. *Sources*: Compiled from data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: one-year estimates, years 2002–08; and Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010.

building the nation's physical infrastructure, and replacing skilled baby boomers will be the engines of job growth and opportunity. Strategies to improve the labor-market status of young men of color should be tied to these engines—not just at the entry level but by creating the skilled technicians, craftsmen, management, and professionals who will be needed to fuel these industries. This will require building multiple pathways to these opportunities and supporting and nurturing young men as they navigate these pathways.

WHY POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS?

We define "postsecondary pathways" as the integrated set of activities, interventions, and supports that lead youth to the attainment of certificates,

credentials, licenses, and two-year or four-year degrees that have demonstrable value in the labor market. Let us be clear: we are not advocating simply expanding the enrollment of young men of color in traditional two- or four-year institutions. Rather, we recommend the creation of nontraditional options that allow concurrent pursuit of academic and labor-market credentials and that combine work, training, career exposure, and support. We discuss many of these options and approaches in this chapter, including career pathway bridge programs, early and middle-college programs, career academies, and integrated basic skills and occupational programs. We advocate a postsecondary focus for three reasons:

1. To introduce expanded horizons and build a culture of higher expectations for young men of color and the delivery systems and programs that work with them.
2. To close the gap in postsecondary attainment—and the corresponding gap in employment and earnings—between young men of color and young white men.
3. To reinforce to young men of color that economic success in the twenty-first-century labor market will require postsecondary skills and credentials.

Expanding Horizons

When there are more youth unemployed than working and when the only models they see for prosperity are sports superstars, rap artists, or those involved in illicit activity, their behaviors, aspirations (or lack thereof), and actions are shaped by that reality. Young people can't aspire to occupations or careers to which they have not been exposed or that they believe are out of reach. With high school dropout rates in many communities of color in excess of 50 percent, the options for access to "middle-skilled" career opportunities—that require some postsecondary training, pay decent wages, and provide career advancement—are seriously curtailed.

One way of providing expanded options for the economic success of young men of color is through developing pathways that lead to the attainment of postsecondary skills and credentials. Beyond just preparing young men for individual success, having such efforts in place in a community can expand the horizons and influence the aspirations of these young men and create a sustained culture of high expectations and optimism in the youth population. The millions of young men of color who are languishing outside the labor-market mainstream have talent, ability, and aspirations

for a better future. These young men can benefit from being connected to supportive pathways to postsecondary credentials. There is compelling evidence that given the opportunity, young male dropouts display considerable persistence and resilience. In 2000 the federally funded Youth Opportunity Grant program provided substantial resources to high-poverty communities to build supported interventions to connect high-risk youth to education, training, college, and the labor market. Sixty-two percent of the eligible, predominantly minority, out-of-school youth enrolled in the program (Harris 2006). The national evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Grant program found that the program:

- Reduced the number of out-of-school and out-of-work (disconnected) youth overall.
- Increased the percentage of Pell Grant–eligible students who received the grants in urban sites.
- Increased the labor-force participation rate overall and specifically for teens (ages sixteen to nineteen), women, blacks, and in-school youth.
- Increased the employment rate among blacks, teens, out-of-school youth, and native-born youth and had a positive effect on the hourly wages of women and teens.

Recent studies have revealed that despite a premature exit from high school, high school dropouts display substantial resilience, motivation, and aspirations for higher education and a better life. An analysis by Jobs for the Future of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study found that nearly 60 percent of young high school dropouts eventually earned their high school diploma; when researchers controlled for income, minority youths were just as likely to earn their GED as white youths. The researchers concluded that the commonly held perception of dropouts as lacking in motivation and not sharing mainstream values is incorrect (Almeida, Johnson, and Steinberg 2006). The Center for Law and Social Policy came to similar conclusions in a 2006 survey of 193 dropouts from 13 communities who had enrolled in alternative education and training programs. When asked why they enrolled, both minority men and women responded overwhelmingly that they wanted their GED and a better life. Forty-five percent of the young men had postsecondary ambitions (Harris 2006). Thus, finding ways not only to expand access to postsecondary education and training, but also to support these youths so that they reach some level of credentialing is integral to putting them on track to good jobs and good wages.

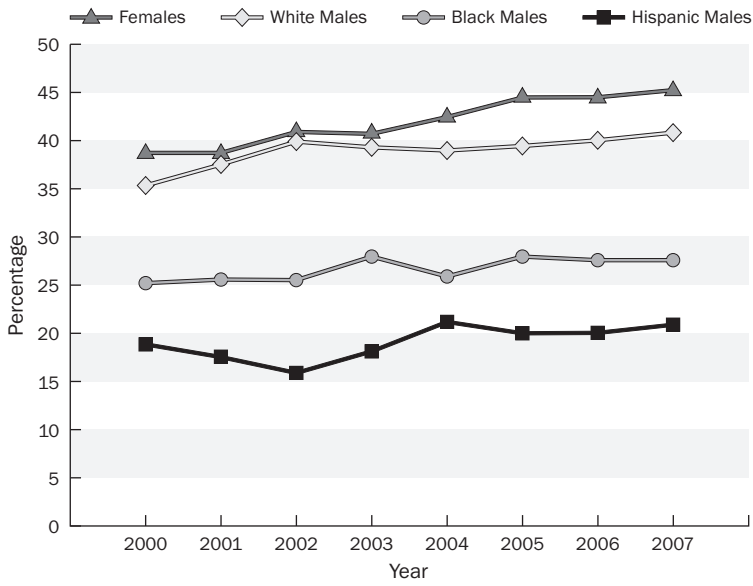

Figure 9.2. Percentage of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds enrolled in college. *Sources*: Based on data from Ryu 2009.

Closing the Employment Gap

Part of the disparity in employment rates and earnings for young men of color when compared with their white counterparts is attributable to the much lower rates of enrollment and completion at the postsecondary level for young men of color. The percentage of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old black and Hispanic men enrolled in college is 27.8 percent and 21.8 percent, respectively—far below the 45-percent average college-enrollment level for this age category. The American Council on Education found that black and Hispanic men represented only 3 percent and 2.7 percent, respectively, of all bachelor's degrees awarded in 2006—not any better than a decade prior (Ryu 2009). Black and Hispanic men represented 3.6 percent and 4.1 percent of associate's degrees awarded during this same period. Figure 9.2 shows the dramatic gaps by race and comparisons to a decade ago.

Closing these gaps will require adopting nontraditional approaches and finding ways to concurrently support the educational attainment and labor-market exposure of males of color over a longer period of time. These nontraditional approaches will entail integrating education instruction with skills training, work experience, support, career exposure, and counseling

to put these youths back on track. Such a commitment will help young black and Hispanic men find security in the labor market by equipping them with the academic, occupational, and personal skills they need to succeed.

Labor-Market Success and Postsecondary Credentials

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 2008 and 2018 the U.S. economy will produce 15.3 million net new jobs, nearly half of which will require postsecondary credentials. The fastest growth will be in occupations requiring an associate's degree. Of the thirty fastest-growing fields—including allied health, computer-related professions, environmental science, and social and human services—the majority will need a highly skilled and educated labor pool to draw from to remain competitive in a global market (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009). Increasingly, access to family-sustaining wages is predicated on a skill set that reflects postsecondary training and credentials. Figure 9.3 shows the difference in employment rates for youth sixteen to twenty-four who are not enrolled in school by educational attainment and race.

Education and credential attainment are highly correlated with earnings and employment. In 2009 adults with an associate's degree earned 22 percent more and had an unemployment rate 30 percent lower than those with a high school diploma. The course of study that one chooses to pursue matters in the labor market as well. The returns on occupational associate's degrees are higher than those for academic associate's degrees, although these returns vary by occupational field (Grubb 1999). Occupational certificate and associate's degree holders also generally experience higher returns on education in terms of employment and earnings than those with similar years of education but no credential (Bailey, Kienzl, and Marcotte 2004).

INADEQUACIES OF THE WORKFORCE, ADULT EDUCATION, AND HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Four main support systems exist for young men who have dropped out of high school: the secondary education system, the adult education/English literacy system, the postsecondary education and training system, and the workforce system. Ideally, these systems should work together, to provide the education, training, and access to higher education credentials needed by this population of young men. However, despite overlapping missions,

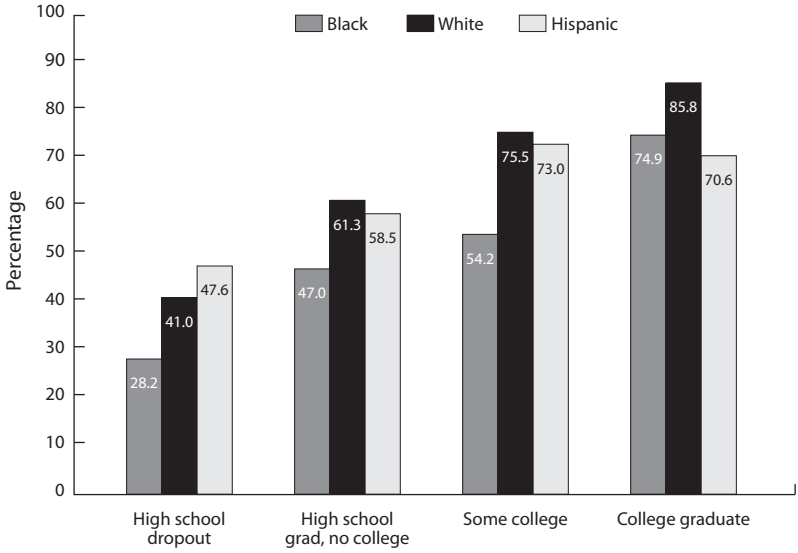

Figure 9.3. Percentage of out-of-school youth ages sixteen to twenty-four who are not employed, by education level and race/ethnic group, 2010. *Sources*: Calculated from Current Population Survey (CPS), Household Data, Table A-16, "Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 to 24 years of age by school enrollment, educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, January 2010."

these systems are most often designed and implemented locally and poorly coordinated. Although resources are being spent in most localities on these systems, they are each failing to bring the majority of male youths of color to any level of postsecondary readiness. In this section we focus on the workforce, adult education, and higher education systems—the principal systems that help provide youth a second chance at an educational pathway.

The Workforce System

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) authorizes the nation's federally funded workforce-development system and provides funding for one-stop career centers in which employers and job seekers can access a wide array of employment and training services. WIA is made of up five titles, but the main funding streams that support youth participation in career pathways are the Title I Youth and Adult programs and Title II.[1]

Title I Youth and Adult Programs. Within Title I youth are primarily served through the Youth and Adult funding streams. The majority of these funds are distributed to states and local areas through a formula and

administered by local Workforce Investment Boards. The intent of the WIA Title I Youth funding is to provide comprehensive interventions to prepare low-income youth, ages fourteen to twenty-one, for labor-market and postsecondary success. Local areas are required to make services available to youth participants consistent with a service strategy based on individualized assessments of needs. WIA establishes a set of well-defined program elements drawn from best practices that make this funding stream ideally suited to contribute to the development of supported career pathways for youths who need more intensive assistance in navigating the transitions to college, occupational training, labor-market credentials, and economically self-sustaining employment. At least 30 percent of WIA funds must be spent on out-of-school youth.

Local WIA Title I Adult formula funds support the one-stop service-delivery system that brings access to several federally funded workforce development programs and services together in one place. It also funds employment and training services for eligible individuals older than eighteen. WIA-funded programs provide career counseling, assessment, job placement, work experience, short-term prevocational training, occupational training, customized training, and on-the-job training (OJT). These funds can also support career-pathway approaches at postsecondary institutions and the related supports necessary for participation, including child care, transportation, and needs-related payments (money to help cover living expenses while someone attends training).

The workforce system faces many challenges in serving youth. First, it lacks the resources to address the magnitude of need. Nearly half a million youth drop out of school annually, and as of 2010 an estimated 5.8 million youths (ages sixteen to twenty-four) are out of school and out of work.[2] Yet in 2007 the WIA Title I Youth Program, which provides state and local funding for comprehensive services to help youth achieve educational and labor-market success, served slightly more than one hundred thousand youths between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. Among the 108,418 youths who exited Title I Youth programs in 2007 (the most recent year for which data are available), only 27,681 were high school dropouts (Social Policy Research Associates 2008). Second, both the Title I Adult (which funds the employment and training services for eligible individuals older than eighteen) and Youth programs insufficiently target training to individuals most in need, including high school dropouts. Since the enactment of WIA in 1998, there has been a steady decline in the share of program participants who are low-income and those who face barriers

to employment—such as limited English proficiency, low basic skills, and/or low-income—from 84 percent in 2000 to 54 percent in 2008 (Baider 2008). Third, the Title I Youth Program delivers very few youths to postsecondary enrollment. Fewer than 10 percent of youth who exited Title I Youth programs went on to postsecondary education and training—and only 5 percent who were high school dropouts went on to postsecondary education or advanced training (Social Policy Research Associates 2008).

Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of WIA, provides states with funding for a variety of services to develop basic cognitive and language skills for youth and adults. The federal adult education law places strong emphasis on preparation for employment and for postsecondary education and training; this approach fits well with the career-pathway and bridge approaches described earlier. The adult education and English language services (ESL) that AEFLA supports can open doors to postsecondary career pathways programs and fund bridge programs below the postsecondary level for youths whose low skills or limited English might otherwise keep them out. AEFLA can also fund support services, an integral component of any successful strategy. Eligibility is largely targeted at those who are at least sixteen and are not currently enrolled, or required to be enrolled, in high school.[3] The individual must either lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, or function below that level (even if the student has a high school diploma), or have limited English proficiency.

The adult education system is one of the largest providers of educational services for dropout youth, yet it suffers from poor outcomes, with very few students achieving GEDs or transitioning into postsecondary education and training. In program year 2008–09 the WIA's adult education system served 326,950 young men of color between sixteen and twenty-four, accounting for 13.6 percent of the 2.4 million adults and youths who are served by adult education programs nationwide.[4] The WIA's basic skills system that serves hundreds of thousands of young men of color suffers from variable quality and in most cases fails to provide these youths with a stepping-stone to attaining meaningful credentials. Adult education students do not typically remain in the program long enough to advance even one grade or English ability level (Tamassia et al. 2007; Comings 2007; McHugh, Gelatt, and Fix 2007). Even though most young men of color who are in the adult education system are seeking a GED, most of these students do not earn one, let alone a college certificate, diploma, or degree (Porter et al. 2005; Patterson, Song, and Zhang 2009).

The Higher Education System

The postsecondary education and training system is comprised of institutions of higher education, including but not limited to public two-year community colleges and four-year baccalaureate granting institutions. We focus largely on two-year institutions, since the majority of low-income young men of color attend these institutions. The Higher Education Act, the main piece of legislation influencing higher education institutions, includes a plethora of programs that can help youth of color access and succeed on postsecondary pathways. Funding flows directly to institutions and students under the provisions of the Higher Education Act. The programs range from Pell Grants to the eight federal TRIO programs, which fund educational institutions to provide supports intended to increase college attendance among low-income high school students and college-based services, including advising, tutoring, and mentoring to help low-income college students persist and complete their studies. Yet completion remains an elusive goal for many students. Forty-six percent of students who begin their postsecondary education at community colleges never complete a degree (Brock and LeBlanc 2005).

Outcomes for those students who enroll in community colleges—the main higher education system explored in this chapter—are inadequate as well. Fewer than three of ten students who start at community colleges full time graduate with an associate's degree in three years (National Center for Education Statistics 2007). Part-time students complete their course of study at community colleges (whether that is a certificate, an associate's degree, or transferring to a four-year institution) at even lower rates. A majority of community-college students, including low-income young men of color who are returning to the educational pipeline, need help with basic skills and enroll in at least one developmental education course. Developmental, or remedial, education is the formal coursework in reading, writing, and mathematics, and the academic support services provided to students who are underprepared for college-level work. Students with GEDs are even more likely to participate in remedial classes than students with a high school degree. Developmental education has similarly high attrition rates as adult education and ESL, with more than a quarter of all students failing to complete their prescribed developmental courses (Jenkins 2003). Given that such large numbers of students need developmental education, postsecondary institutions must improve the outcomes of students who enroll in these courses for more young men of color to achieve postsecondary credentials and find good jobs.

The largest federal financial aid initiative is the Pell Grant program. It is designed to fill the financial gap by providing need-based grant aid for tuition, fees, and living expenses to low-income students in eligible postsecondary-education and training programs that lead to a certificate or degree. In addition to requiring verification of low income, eligibility criteria include, but are not limited to, being a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen, having a high school diploma or GED, and resolving any issues related to drug convictions.[5] In lieu of a high school diploma or GED, the student may also show the "ability to benefit" through testing or completion of six postsecondary credits with a C average or better that are applicable to a degree or certificate offered by the school. The ability to qualify for financial aid without having a high school diploma or a GED is a significant recent policy change that, if effectively promoted, could increase the number of youths of color who attend college.

The financial aid and support systems designed to help students complete their studies need to be fixed. Although the Pell Grant provides low-income students with considerable assistance with paying for college, an individual student's unmet need may run in the thousands of dollars, and state financial aid programs have been inadequate in meeting this need. Student supports at postsecondary institutions, including advising and tutoring, are extremely underfunded by federal and state governments and are typically the first budget line cut when college and state finances are tight. For instance, the federal Student Support Services (SSS) program serves only 7 percent of eligible students. Rather than proactively identifying and serving students, the SSS program helps only those students who know about their services. SSS does nothing for those students who are unfamiliar with their services but who are at risk of dropping out. The tragic irony is that a young man can persist through four systems—secondary, adult education, workforce, and college—and yet find himself facing stumbling blocks because multiple systems are failing him. Although each of these systems is underresourced in terms of supporting the needs of vulnerable populations, it is imperative that these limited resources be used in a more effective and coordinated way.

A COMMUNITY INTERVENTION STRATEGY FOR BUILDING SUPPORTED PATHWAYS

The intent of a community intervention strategy is to assemble resources from multiple systems—education, workforce, and other youth-serving systems—along with community-based resources to support successful

labor-market transitions for low-income young men of color. The biggest challenge is that the responsibility for programming for youth who are out of school and out of work without a high school diploma does not fall within the purview of any single publicly funded system. The K–12 system no longer has responsibility for the education of this population, since most have left the system. The academic skills of these youths are far below those required by the higher-education system; thus this population is not of interest to most postsecondary institutions. The workforce system, which provides training for youths and adults, is governed by a complex set of performance measures and often does not target services to the most difficult population groups. Although many of these young men find their way into the adult education system, that system falls short by failing to deliver them to the level of academic proficiency needed for labor-market success. Private employers tend not to see this group of young men as potential employees; rather, they often see only their liabilities.

The magnitude and complexity of the issues confronting this population of young men require intentional approaches that go beyond any one program model or service agency. The key elements of a community-intervention strategy fall into two categories: (1) programmatic interventions—those delivery approaches that will be necessary to build the skills, abilities, experiences, and career and labor-market exposure of the young men; and (2) system building, which focuses on leadership, management, stewardship, and cross-system/cross-sector connections. Highlighting various pathways to economic self-sufficiency for young men of color, figure 9.4 shows the interplay among these important components.

Although this chapter focuses on building multiple pathways to postsecondary credentials and labor-market success, it is important to examine each of the components of a successful community-intervention strategy individually. Without these strategies, it will be difficult for a multiple-pathways approach to succeed and grow to scale. The system-building components that are critical to a successful community-intervention strategy include community leadership/collective accountability, cross-system and cross-sector collaborations, formal connections with community development and regional economic development, and quality management.

Community Leadership and Collective Accountability

Leaders can play a vital role in creating a sense of urgency and issuing a call to action on the economic crisis facing young men of color. Having the right people at the table—those who care about these issues and are com-

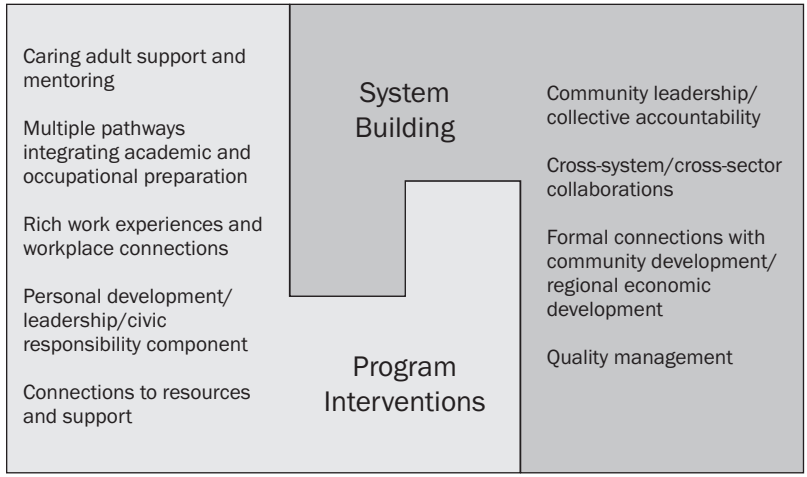

Figure 9.4. Building pathways to economic self-sufficiency for young men of color: key components of a community-intervention strategy. *Source*: Authors' rendering.

mitted to being part of a broad-based, sustained solution—is an essential first step. Project U-Turn in Philadelphia is an example. This is a citywide campaign that focuses public attention on Philadelphia's dropout crisis by designing strategies and leveraging investments to resolve it. The citywide collaborative includes representatives of the school district, city agencies, foundations, youth-serving organizations, parents, and young people themselves. The "right" people are those in leadership—whether public, private, not-for-profit, community, or foundation representatives—who can commit or substantially influence their respective agencies or sectors. Voices representing young men of color must also be included, not just to give the process legitimacy but to also ensure that the strategies and solutions under consideration actually address the issues and obstacles that young men of color face in the labor market.

The participation of the mayor and other elected leadership in a community that is tackling these issues signals the importance of putting young men of color on positive pathways. Such participation is also essential in convincing key leadership from business, industry, and the economic-development sector to be part of the strategic thinking. Committed leaders can inspire others to be part of a process that sees putting these young men to work as a critical part of an economic development and community development agenda. Leaders can assign those in their respective sectors to assess resources, practices, expertise, and talent to identify ways that their

sectors can contribute meaningfully and substantively to programs and interventions. This assessment can also lead agencies and organizations to alter their policies and practices to achieve the goals of this effort.

For example, the Boston Youth Options Unlimited (YOU) Initiative is a citywide partnership that targets court-involved, incarcerated, and gang-affiliated youth to redirect them toward a positive, self-sufficient future. It is a strong example of partnerships among workforce development, juvenile justice, law enforcement, education, and other youth-serving systems. Through innovative arrangements with law enforcement, courts, and corrections, the YOU program gains early access to intervene with the youth and supports them through community reentry and beyond. YOU draws on local, state, and federal resources from across the systems and connects youth with intensive case management, educational opportunities and support, and employment year-round (Hastings, Tsoi-A-Fatt, and Harris 2010).

Implementing comprehensive, broad-based community-intervention strategies requires a strong convening entity to engage community leaders in a vision process, to facilitate planning and implementation, to identify resources and opportunities, to use data effectively to lay out the dimensions of the challenge, set goals and benchmarks, move from strategic planning to action, track progress, and celebrate successes. Collective responsibility means that all assembled in the effort "own" the challenge, participate in setting goals and benchmarks, ask tough questions, use data to monitor progress, and assure accountability in the short and long term.

Cross-system and Cross-sector Collaborations

Cross-system and cross-sector partnerships are formal agreements among systems or sectors to alter their policies and practices in ways that promote collaboration and innovation in the provision of service to a targeted population. Successful cross-system partnerships lead to better structures and practices for sharing valuable information; improve the experiences of young people dealing with disconnection; and change the way individual systems operate and how existing agencies do their work (Moore 2007). The secondary, postsecondary, adult education, workforce, justice, and social services systems need to be leveraged to create pathways that connect disconnected youth—including young men of color—to good jobs, with good wages, and opportunities for advancement.

Many young men of color have been touched by one or more of these systems. For the most part, however, intentional strategies that align the

programs and services across systems do not exist. Thus young men may transition from one system and one service to another without getting any closer to employment. For example, young men under the jurisdiction of the justice system, or those challenged with child-support issues, should be connected to the workforce and postsecondary systems. Increased coordination may help men of color obtain employment that in turn helps them meet the financial obligations imposed by these systems. The unfortunate reality is that all too often, such connections are not made and these men remain unemployed, further exacerbating their situation.

Fortunately, there has been considerable progress across all these systems in altering the ways that services are delivered and resources are deployed. Innovations abound—from credit recovery and competency-based approaches to the awarding of high school diplomas, to concurrent enrollment to achieve high school diplomas and college credit, to postsecondary bridge programs, customized sectoral programming, and try-out employment in the workforce system. The task is to expand these innovations so that they are the norm and not the exception, and to use them to build the multiple pathways to postsecondary success for young men of color. But only through collaboration among these systems will this be achieved at scale.

Formal Connections with Community Development and Regional Economic Development

Providing young men of color with the academic, occupational, and employment skills necessary for postsecondary labor-market success is only part of the solution. These skills alone will not automatically create access to higher-wage jobs and career opportunities in the regional labor market. Discrimination still exists in the hiring process. The geographic mismatch between the location of good jobs in the region and residency of minority populations creates barriers to access to those jobs. Research has documented that address has been used to screen the applicant pool. More often, referral networks and references are the mechanism used to identify candidates for hire.

Thus unless strategies are put in place to dramatically expand access for young men of color to occupations, industries, and workplaces where they can access higher-wage jobs with advancement opportunities, then these young men will be educated and trained with a ticket to nowhere. Developing these intentional strategies will require fostering ongoing relationships with leaders in economic and community-development agencies, workforce investment boards, chambers of commerce, transportation and

natural-resources agencies, and key industry sectors. The question to be asked of each economic development effort, each infrastructure project, every community revitalization effort, and of representatives from the growing industry sectors—especially renewable energy and health—is: How can the learning, earning, and training of young men of color be tied into each of these efforts? Formal job-referral mechanisms are necessary but not sufficient. Formal networks and pipelines must be built that will expand access, mentor young men of color, and nurture their upward mobility. Engaging these leaders in strategizing solutions can catalyze creative thinking about ways to leverage energy and transportation funding, federal job creation efforts, the Community Development Block Grant, other federal funding streams, and business and industry expansion activities to forge employment pipelines to the jobs that are created.

The lingering perceptions that make employers wary of hiring youth of color need to be overcome. Consider, for example, that among sixteen- to twenty-four-year-old youths who are not enrolled in school, white high school graduates with no college experience have a higher rate of employment (62 percent) than black youth with college experience or an associate's degree (55 percent) (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010b). This discrepancy suggests that factors other than education come into play. Discrimination still poses an impediment to access in many workplaces, and many young men of color lack access to formal and informal networks meant to help them successfully navigate often unwelcoming environments. Algernon Austin, of the Economic Policy Institute, has recently refuted many of the stereotypical reasons often given to explain the low employment rates of black men. He counters the argument that young black men don't want to work for "chump change" with data showing that nonworking black men's reservation wages—the economic term for the lowest wage at which an individual will work—is consistently lower than white men's reservation wage and lower than all other racial and ethnic groups. He challenged the notion that the disparities in employment are simply attributable to a lack of skills, citing the work of the Center for Labor Market studies findings that the poorest white teens with the lowest employment rates among whites were still able to obtain jobs at a higher rate than more prosperous black youth (Austin 2008).

There is no simple or quick answer to dismantling all the policies and practices that result in the disparities that have been noted. A good starting point, however, is to ensure greater inclusion of young men of color in every effort that brings jobs to the community. For example, business and workforce leaders can help identify "middle-skilled" and professional jobs

that will require a highly skilled workforce. They can identify the types of training, work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, part-time placements, scholarships, and on-the-job training experiences required for such positions. Business and workforce leaders can also support the building of a continuum of work-related activities—work experiences, internships, job shadowing, and career awareness—that can expose young men of color to an expanded range of opportunities, occupations, and work environments. Equally important is for business and workforce leaders to learn to view young men of color as a talent pool they can and want to tap.

Many workforce boards and progressive community organizations have implemented successful approaches for linking economic development activities with employment opportunities for low-income individuals. Some vehicles that should be considered to improve access to employment for young men of color include:

- *Community benefit agreements (CBAs).* These are legally binding contracts between developers and community coalitions that ensure major development projects benefit local community residents. Common elements of CBAs include first-source hiring agreements, living wages, and affordable-housing assistance.
- *First-source hiring agreements.* These are often included in economic development packages or loan agreements. They usually require employers that are beneficiaries of public resources to give priority in hiring to targeted populations by the appointed agent of the jurisdiction (e.g., the workforce system). The strongest agreements require sufficient advance notice of potential openings to allow for the preparation and training of candidates.
- *Customized training.* This involves developing specific training to meet the needs of a particular employer for existing job openings. The employer participates in identifying the skills and certification needed for success. Often, workforce entities partner with community colleges to develop customized training. Employers enter into a contract requiring them to hire all successful candidates who complete the training. This strategy has been used successfully by Workforce Investment Boards around the country and represents a win-win strategy for the employers with specific needs for a trained workforce and for the trainees.
- *Try-out employment.* These programs provide wage subsidies to private-sector employers to hire candidates whom they may have been reluctant to hire because of age, inexperience, or other

perceived barriers. Under this arrangement employers get the opportunity to assess the abilities of the new hires without the wage obligation for an introductory period, the program can assist employees with any work-related or other issues to assure retention, and the employees have access to employment opportunities that they may have had difficulty obtaining on their own. WIA youth programs in many cities—Baltimore, Boston, Houston, and Kansas City—use this vehicle to gain access to jobs in quality work environments for youth completing education and training programs that they fund.

Quality Management

A strong collaborative effort requires management and coordination support. Such a management entity must have: (1) staff with leadership skills and the capacity to work across systems and with community entities, to implement the strategies identified in the collaborative process; (2) effective management systems in place to assure fiscal and programmatic accountability; (3) the ability to work effectively with providers to assure the consistency and quality of the delivery of program services across the partnering organizations and agencies; and (4) the ability to facilitate data-sharing across systems, evaluate progress and encourage improvement, negotiate agreements, write proposals for funding, and keep the partnerships vibrant and action-oriented.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTION

Programmatic interventions are those delivery approaches that will be necessary to build the skills, abilities, experiences, and career and labor-market exposure of the young men. The education level, skills, talents, and deficits of this population of young men of color will span a considerable range and will require a varied mix of program education options and program strategies, supports, and approaches. In identifying the key components of program intervention, we chose those elements that are common to programs that have been evaluated and found to be effective (Doolittle and Ivry 2002). These components are essential if the program is going to succeed in addressing the range of needs—employment, academic, social, personal, family, and life skills—when working with groups with significant barriers to employment. These elements must all be present to provide the kind of holistic approach necessary for young men of color to

attain the skills, credentials, and experiences that will lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Caring Adult Support and Mentorship

A caring adult advocacy and support system helps youth navigate a complex maze of programs, services, and educational options and guides them in choosing the set of services that best suits their individual needs. Such a system creates a personal relationship of respect and support between the young men and well-trained, caring adult advocates. This relationship should continue until the young men achieve stability in the labor market. These advocates serve as role models; provide encouragement and feedback; and encourage young men to stay focused on their long-term goals.

Mentoring is another important intervention to help youth stay on a pathway to education and a good job. Successful youth-employment and apprenticeship programs provide community- and work-based mentors who offer guidance and encouragement to young men and women. A meta-analysis of evaluations of mentoring programs for youth found that youths from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to benefit from such programs than those from less disadvantaged backgrounds (DuBois et al. 2002).

Multiple Pathways Integrating Academic Skills and Occupational Preparation

The education and competency levels of young men of color who have dropped out of high school span a broad range. Students whose basic skills and English literacy are at low levels need substantial amounts of education to achieve a secondary school credential; students who have sufficient skills to quickly earn a high school diploma or GED may be nearly ready for college. Given these differences, a system that allows for multiple entry and exit points along an educational continuum is most useful in meeting the diverse educational needs of the dropout population. If communities are to succeed in reengaging these young people, it is essential to provide multiple pathways to ensure that members of this population can obtain the education and training that lead to decent-paying jobs that match their interests and aspirations. These pathways require leveraging the multitude of federal, state, and local resources available to serve this population, improving the performance of education and workforce systems, as well as aligning programming across the systems that serve young men of color.

Rich Work Experiences and Workplace Connections

A range of paid work experiences is essential to provide young men exposure to a variety of work environments and to foster the development of appropriate workplace skills and a work ethic. In addition, many young men have family and other financial obligations that require that they have an income. The ability to sustain participation in education and training over a longer term is therefore directly dependent on earning income. The array of work related options should include subsidized employment, work experience, internships, paid community service or unpaid community service (with a stipend), on-the-job training, try-out employment, part-time and full-time employment, and college work-study. These offerings should be arranged along a continuum that allows young men to progress from the most sheltered experiences to unsubsidized private-sector workplaces, depending on their level of work preparedness and comfort. The quality of work sites and work experiences is important. Poorly constructed projects and poorly supervised work experiences reinforce inappropriate work behaviors. The entire community—including hospitals, public agencies, public lands, nonprofits, and for-profit establishments—should be considered fertile ground for work experiences.

Personal Development, Leadership, and Civic Responsibility

Preparing young men for success in postsecondary endeavors and for advancement in the workplace requires not only developing their critical academic and occupational skills, but also honing their personal, communication, social, and life-management skills. Activities that expose young men to new environments, engage them in civic projects, allow them to volunteer, and provide them with opportunities to lead and to function as part of a team all contribute to the development of their skill set. Helping these young men mature into responsible adults who possess integrity, a strong work ethic, and a sense of personal, civic, and family responsibility is a key objective of program intervention. An evaluation of service-corps programs that provided labor-intensive work on civic projects in conjunction with education support and leadership-development activities found that the corps had significant positive employment-related effects on the young black and Hispanic men who participated (Jastrzab et al. 1996).

Connections to Resources and Support

Even young people with the best intentions of pursuing an education can be sidetracked by the weight of financial burdens, family responsibilities, and personal crises. *The Silent Epidemic,* published by Civic Enterprises, surveyed dropouts and found that 32 percent left because they needed to work, 22 percent left because of pregnancy, and 22 percent had to take care of a relative (Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison 2006). A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on disconnected youth noted that in its review of programs in thirty-nine communities, access to health, mental health, and substance-abuse services; HIV testing; child care; housing; and food were important supports accessible at the program site or through formal partnerships (U.S. GAO 2008).

ALIGNING SYSTEMS TO CREATE EFFECTIVE CAREER PATHWAYS

To ease transitions between different levels and types of education and to align program content with industry requirements, states, school districts, and postsecondary institutions are increasingly using a "career-pathways approach."[6] The adoption of this approach can lead to more low-income young men of color attaining postsecondary credentials that in turn lead them to good jobs. Career pathways are carefully crafted programs that link education, training, and support services to "enable students, often while they are working, to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in a given industry or occupational sector. Each step on a career pathway is designed explicitly to prepare students to progress to the next level of employment and education."[7]

Ideally, pathways begin with short, intensive remedial programs for those at the lowest literacy levels and extend through postsecondary certificates and degrees. Creating and maintaining pathways entails weaving together various education, training, and support services into an interlocking web that leads to postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market while allowing the individual to reach higher levels of educational and professional achievement. Good pathways incorporate a number of innovations in instruction and delivery and help students realize their goals faster. Career pathways are not only a way of organizing and offering services at the local level, but also a framework for the alignment of multiple systems that serve youth. Such alignment ensures that there are no gaps or

barriers among the systems serving this population. Because these systems are governed by different laws and regulations, this alignment requires intervention at several levels. Alignment entails restructuring the laws and rules governing various programs to ensure that pathways can be built at scale. Other barriers to alignment are embedded in the culture, protocol, or interpretations of rules. These barriers can be addressed through dialogue among state and local administrators, who can redirect programming and resources to effect better alignment and integration of delivery of service.

The career-pathway framework is helpful in developing strategies to serve young men of color because this approach is based on the assumption that multiple pathways lead to the final goal of employment that provides good wages. It also acknowledges that differentiated strategies are necessary to ensure that more students reach their educational and employment goals. As noted earlier, many of these young men have found their way to adult education, GED, and developmental education programs only to find that these programs use the same traditional instructional approaches that often lead to repeated failure. New strategies and practices are needed for a population that has struggled with and abandoned the traditional education pipeline. Figure 9.5 illustrates the multiple-pathway approach. Successful career pathways require innovation in approaches that accelerate learning and the time to obtain a credential or degree along with innovations in program content and delivery approach. Fortunately, over the past decade several approaches have proven successful for working with out-of-school youth who have substantial academic deficits.

APPROACHES THAT ACCELERATE LEARNING

A number of promising innovations emerging from the secondary, adult education, workforce, and postsecondary systems demonstrate that learning and the achievement of secondary and postsecondary credentials can be accelerated, even for students who have previously not done well in school. Rather than relying on a sequential approach and the underlying assumptions about teaching and learning that are embedded in the traditional education system, these innovations accelerate learning through a variety of strategies, including credit recovery, competency-based approaches, dual enrollment, and bridge programs. If these innovations are incorporated as part of a multiple-pathways approach, young men can attain academic competencies, master occupational skills, and achieve postsecondary credentials in a shorter period of time.

Overcoming the academic deficits of youths who have left school prema-

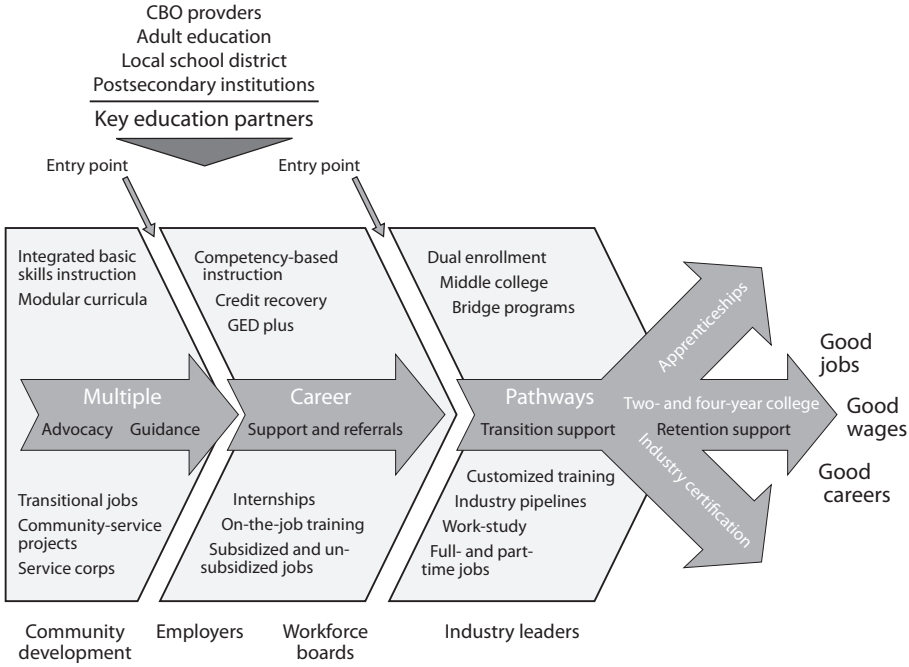

Figure 9.5. Multiple pathways schematic. *Source*: Authors' rendering.

turely, with various levels of academic mastery and credit accumulation, is a daunting challenge, particularly in light of the inadequacy of the basic skills systems (including WIA's adult education system and the remedial and developmental departments in community colleges) to meet these youths' needs. Most of them cannot return to a traditional school environment, in which credit accrual is based on seat time (that is, spending a particular amount of time in a classroom) because they are too old, too far behind to matriculate in the traditional setting, or other district policies preclude their return. GED programs generally require students to have skills at the ninth-grade level or above, which eliminates many youths from eligibility.

Given these barriers, many states, districts, and colleges have developed more flexible approaches to instruction and the awarding of credit and credentials. Some of the same approaches that blur the line between secondary and postsecondary education and are commonly used for more advanced students, such as dual enrollment and early- and middle-college programs, have been shown to dramatically help lower-skilled students catch up. Communities that want young men who have dropped out of

high school to more quickly achieve high school credentials and increase postsecondary connections should consider adopting the following innovations, which have been successful with the out-of-school population. These educational strategies are being used in youth recovery programs, adult education programs, and in many bridge programs at the college level. Each of these approaches is often used as part of broader program interventions and is accompanied by comprehensive supports to ensure that students succeed.

Credit-recovery programs. These programs allow a student who previously has not completed a particular course to "recover" credit for that course by demonstrating competency on the content standards of the course instead of requiring him to spend a particular amount of time in a classroom. Credit-recovery programs are particularly effective in helping students who are beyond the average graduation age and behind catch up and earn their high school diplomas.

Competency-based approaches. These programs award a high school diploma based on attainment of the skill-proficiency equivalent of a high school graduate. This approach is even more flexible than a traditional credit-based approach.

Dual enrollment at the secondary and postsecondary levels. These programs allow students to work toward a high school diploma while accruing postsecondary education credit. Also called concurrent enrollment and dual-credit programs, these approaches expose students to postsecondary-level work, add rigor and intensity to the educational experience, and help students achieve their goals faster. Dual enrollment allows students to increase multiple skills concurrently and facilitates the accumulation of college credits in a compressed time frame. The most common secondary-level dual-enrollment programs are collaborations between secondary schools and community colleges. Colleges can use dual enrollment in a number of ways, including combining adult and developmental education or dual-enrolling students in adult education or ESL and occupational training. Dual enrollment accelerates the time in which a student's skills are remediated. These models also make college more financially accessible, because tuition-free adult education can be used to offer developmental education, and financial aid is available to students enrolled in degree programs that integrate adult education and English literacy.

Early- and middle-college programs. These programs involve collaborations between secondary schools and local postsecondary institutions to give students the opportunity to earn college credit while attending high school. Often offered on or near the college campus, these initiatives famil-

WASHINGTON STATE'S I-BEST PROGRAMS

Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) programs use an integrated approach to provide educational access and support for adult education and ESL students to progress faster and further along career pathways. There are more than 135 I-BEST programs spanning a variety of professional fields at the state's thirty-four community and technical colleges. The Architectural CAD Drafting I-BEST program at Clover Park Technical College is a three-quarter program designed to start ESL students on a pathway toward the Architectural Engineering Design associate's degree. The program at Clover Park pairs English-language and allied-health instructors in the classroom to advance students concurrently in both areas, while the students earn credits toward certificates or degrees. Colleges provide robust student supports to I-BEST participants, including financial aid assistance, system navigation, and career and educational planning.

In the Architectural CAD Drafting I-BEST program, each of the technical courses applies directly toward the associate's degree. The courses provide foundational terminology, concepts, and knowledge essential for success in the architectural and drafting industry. They also provide the technical skills required for entry-level CAD drafting positions. The program is 684 clock hours and 30 credits, spread over three quarters. All I-BEST programs have to be part of a one-year certificate program or another occupational program with proven ability to place graduates in higher-wage jobs (at least thirteen dollars an hour in the state and fifteen dollars an hour in the Seattle area). An independent study of I-BEST showed that participants take more college courses, persist in postsecondary education and training, and earn credentials at higher rates than those who are not enrolled in I-BEST (Jenkins, Zeindenberg, and Kienzl 2009).

iarize youth with college life. They serve students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out as well as students who have higher skills. Upon graduation from these programs, students receive a high school diploma and some postsecondary credit. For early-college high schools, the secondary and postsecondary institutions develop an integrated academic program so that students earn from one to two years of transferable college credit (Nodine 2008).

Integrating remediation with occupational instruction. Another strategy to reduce the time to credential is to integrate remediation with occu-

NEW YORK'S MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION

The New York City Department of Education's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation has established programs that combine a number of the best practices in youth development and education and training to ensure that more students who drop out or are at risk of dropping out get on a pathway to postsecondary education and training. The Youth Adult Borough Centers (YABCs) are full-time evening academic programs that feature supportive learning environments where youth between the ages of 17.5 and 21 concentrate only on the credit portfolio needed for graduation. YABCs rely on the flexibility of credit recovery in customizing the educational programming for overage and undercredited youth. Each site is operated jointly by the Department of Education and a community-based organization that provides services to students, including youth-development support, college and career advising, individual counseling, and tutoring. Transfer schools are small, academically rigorous, full-time high schools designed to reengage students aged sixteen to twenty-one who are behind in high school or have dropped out. The essential elements of transfer schools include a personalized learning environment, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and a focus on connections to college.

Learning to Work (LTW) is an in-depth job readiness and career exploration component offered in conjunction with the academic component of some YABCs, transfer schools, and GED programs. LTW provides students robust wraparound supports, including academic and student support, career and educational exploration, work preparation, skills development, and internships. Students gain valuable work experience through internships in a variety of sectors, including education, health, business and retail, and nonprofit and social services (Crotty and Pendleton 2009).

pational training, rather than requiring students to complete remediation before starting for-credit occupational coursework. This approach can be used by adult education, workforce systems, and community-based providers in conjunction with postsecondary remedial options to contextualize academic learning and remedial coursework, to allow concurrent mastery of academic and occupational skills, and to apply those skills in the context of the occupation or workplace. An integrated approach accelerates learning by customizing the basic skills and remedial coursework to the student's occupational pathway and provides for an easier transition to higher-level study or certification.

Bridge programs. These programs incorporate occupational or academic content into basic-skills training as a means of providing students with the foundation needed to advance and succeed in postsecondary education. These programs can be designed to meet the needs of English-speaking students at fifth- or sixth-grade reading levels or non-English speakers at the low-intermediate ESL level (Henle, Jenkins, and Smith 2005). Bridge programs also cover other areas viewed as essential for college success (for example, problem solving, working in teams, developing good study habits, and so on) and offer support services.

Career-pathway bridge programs. These programs typically cover "soft skills" (the personal qualities, habits, attitudes, and social graces that make someone a good employee), precollege academic skills, and specific job skills, ideally ones that are part of a career pathway.[8] Career-pathway bridges tailor and contextualize the basic-skills and English-language content to general workplace needs and to the knowledge and skills needed in a specific occupation. The creation of a good bridge program requires rewriting or creating curricula. Ideally, technical job content is integrated with basic skills and English language content, thereby increasing skill acquisition and shortening the time to completion. Bridge programs can entail dual-enrolling students in basic skills or remedial education and for-credit occupational coursework simultaneously, which can accelerate their educational advancement.

INNOVATION IN PROGRAM CONTENT AND DELIVERY

Several common elements have been shown to be successful across adult learning, dropout-recovery, and postsecondary systems. These innovations have been successful in increasing student-learning gains and strengthening connections to employers and local labor-market requirements. Contextualized instruction, modularized curricula, flexible scheduling and delivery modes, and compressed instruction will be important for building multiple pathways that blend secondary, postsecondary, adult education, and workforce resources. These practices are most successful when they are adapted to the learning style and level of young men of color, customized to the needs of employers, and structured to award credits and credentials that can be transferred to other institutions and valued in the labor market. Key innovations include:

Contextualized instruction. This entails customizing reading, writing, math, and English curricula to students' occupational goals to help them recognize the relevance of what they are learning to their life and career

goals. Course and program content can also be contextualized to particular occupations or sectors or to more general career-exploration content.

Chunked programs, modularized curricula, and embedded certificates. Career pathways can be structured as a series of "chunks" or compressed modules that enable the student to advance toward increased skills in a series of small and manageable steps. These modules can be chunks of existing credential programs that are broken into segments that combine existing courses in new ways. In some cases modules are tied to entry-level job skill requirements and different levels of industry-recognized credentials. Because student progression is often nonlinear, chunks and modules provide students the flexibility of moving up a career ladder to better-paying employment while continuing their education. This approach also provides an opportunity to create more flexible, individualized methods that better meet student needs. Chunked programs and modularized curricula make it easier for community-education providers and workforce systems to work with postsecondary institutions and employers to customize training and pipelines for specific industries and occupations.

Intensive instruction. Intensive instruction can include compressing a program or accelerating instruction. Compressed programs allow students to receive the same number of hours of instruction in fewer weeks by scheduling more class hours each week. Accelerated programs move through content at a faster pace, allowing the student to cover more material in fewer hours. Both approaches allow this population to move through coursework and achieve their goals more quickly, which saves the student money and is more likely to keep the student engaged.

Flexible scheduling and delivery modes. Distance learning and flexible scheduling also promote persistence in education and help keep students in school. Flexible scheduling can entail providing instruction in concentrated blocks on weekends or offering coursework on weeknights. This is particularly useful in designing educational components for young men as they concurrently pursue other work activities, participate in internships, or receive other training. It is also helpful for students who work during traditional hours or are balancing school with family responsibilities. Programs can combine traditional classroom time with distance learning to help students stay connected.

Cohorts or learning communities. Students in learning communities or cohorts take linked courses that have mutually reinforcing themes and assignments with a group of peers to provide mutual support and encouragement. Creating learning communities can also help students gain a deeper understanding of the interrelationship of content they are

studying because of the linked courses and promote increased interaction with teachers. A recent study of learning communities at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, found that three semesters after being placed in a learning community of twenty-five students each, students in the learning community moved more quickly through developmental English requirements, took and passed more courses, and earned more credits in their first semester. Two years later, they were also somewhat more likely to be enrolled in college (Scrivener et al. 2008).

Tangible rewards for learning. Such rewards have been shown to help motivate students to excel and persist in their studies. One example of this approach is performance-based scholarships, which provide monetary rewards to students for persistence and good grades. In the Opening Doors demonstration program of MDRC (formerly Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation), two Louisiana community colleges offered college-ready low-income students who were also parents a one-thousand-dollar scholarship for each of two semesters, for a total of two thousand dollars if they maintained a 2.0 (C) grade point average and were enrolled in the community college at least half time. The scholarships augmented Pell Grants, federal need-based grant aid for tuition, fees, and living expenses to low-income students, and other financial aid (Brock and Richburg-Hayes 2006).

SUPPORTS TO ENSURE POSTSECONDARY RETENTION AND COMPLETION

Even if pathway interventions are successful in delivering academically prepared young men of color to postsecondary institutions, college retention and completion can still pose a challenge. Analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth shows that while 60 percent of African American and 66 percent of Hispanic former high school dropouts enrolled in college, only 11 percent of them attained a postsecondary degree (Almeida, Johnson, and Steinberg 2006).

There are a range of reasons why students don't complete their postsecondary studies, including lack of financial resources, underpreparation, and the difficulty of balancing work, family, and school. Financial aid plays a large role in ensuring that students can both attend and complete college. Research also shows that nontraditional students, including those who have delayed enrollment in college—as many young men of color have—are more likely to attend college once they are eligible for the federal Pell Grant program, which provides assistance with tuition, books, fees, and

living expenses for students attending college; this applies even for those attending less-than-half time (Seftor and Turner 2002). Students who leave college are less likely to have a scholarship or financial aid than those who complete (31 percent versus 57 percent) (Johnson and Rochkind 2010). An additional thousand dollars in aid increases college attendance by about four percentage points (Deming and Dynarski 2009). If more low-income young men of color are to complete postsecondary education and training, it will be necessary to provide adequate financial aid that not only fully covers tuition and books, but also living expenses including housing, food, and transportation.

Federal and state financial aid, in the form of grants and loans, is available to help low-income students attend postsecondary education and training. Many communities and states engage in public-awareness campaigns that educate low-income youth about the availability of Pell Grants and other forms of student aid that make college-going more realistic. Some communities have targeted young men of color, who are already lagging behind other demographic groups in college attendance and completion, through advertisements and outreach activities. Community-based organizations and other organizations offer help in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Although financial aid is vital in enabling low-income youth of color to attend college, student-support services are also an essential yet insufficiently funded component of increasing the retention and completion rates of youth who are at risk of dropping out. Developed and administered at local institutions, these supports can be categorized into three groups: academic supports; nonacademic supports; and material and financial resources.[9] Academic supports include academic guidance and counseling; tutoring, study groups, time management, and study-skills training; college-success courses, career counseling, and academic-resource labs (where students can access computers, reference books, online resources, career exploration tools, and so on); and testing accommodations for students who have learning disabilities. Nonacademic supports include personal guidance and counseling; advising and coaching (which may include intensive support by a coach who helps students manage both academic and nonacademic issues); and referral services to resources, including social services, health care, and peer mentoring. Material and financial support services include subsidies for transportation, books, and supplies; emergency funds for short-term crises; and assistance with food and clothing. A national study of Student Support Services, the small federal funding stream that provides financing for these types of resources, showed

that these services positively affect student grades, the number of credits earned, and educational persistence (U.S. Department of Education 1997).

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Several key federally funded systems should be playing a pivotal role in constructing multiple postsecondary pathways for young men of color. Yet they do not. At a minimum we recommend that through legislative and administrative changes in state plan requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), WIA Titles I and II, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and the Higher Education Act (HEA), the federal government should require states to be more explicit about how coordination and articulation will occur across systems to align structures, supports, and services to facilitate the reengagement and successful matriculation of the dropout population in pathways to postsecondary and labor-market success.

This section advances other recommendations on actions that can be taken at the federal, state, and local levels to facilitate synergies among key systems to accomplish the task of building career pathways to family-supporting jobs. We discuss how the various titles of the WIA, programs funded through HEA, and the ESEA can be strengthened to extend opportunity to disconnected youth populations to ensure that more of them reach their education and career goals. Although we do not discuss them in this chapter, other funding sources that states and communities should examine include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Employment and Training, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education program, among others.

The Workforce Investment Act

Title I: Youth and Adult Programs. If adopted, these recommendations could strengthen the workforce system's ability to contribute to the development of high-quality postsecondary pathways for young men of color. We recommend that federal agencies:

- Increase the targeting in both the youth and adult titles requiring local areas to direct more WIA resources to support training interventions for "high-needs" populations, including those who are low-income high school dropouts, ex-offenders, parenting teens, disabled, or in other disadvantaged situations.

- Continue targeted funding to economically distressed communities via Youth Opportunity grants (or other innovations in funding streams) that focus on building comprehensive and integrated youth-delivery systems in communities of high youth distress.[10]
- Require that at least 50 percent of the funding for WIA Title I adult services be spent on training and training support for individuals in targeted "high-needs" categories. Allow an expanded venue for training, including classroom occupational training, on-the-job training, transitional jobs, customized training, as well as access to certificate training at postsecondary institutions using individual training vouchers.
- Create a separate funding stream to support summer and year-round subsidized work experience for youth ages fourteen to twenty-four. This can subsidize a broad range of work experience in the public and private sector, community conservation and service corps, and internships.
- Use incentive and technical-assistance funding to strengthen the ability of state and local workforce boards and youth councils to play a strategic convening role. Require that state and local boards, in their WIA plans, outline specifically how funds will be used to improve the labor-market situation of males of color and other population groups with disproportionately low employment and earnings rates in the local and regional labor-market area.

These recommendations focus on the state and local level:

- Fifteen percent of WIA funds that flow to states can be used at the governor's discretion to support special initiatives and provide technical assistance. States should set aside a portion of the governor's discretionary funding to incentivize the development of local pathway models to support populations including young men of color. State funding should also be used to leverage the expenditure of local WIA youth funds to create career pathways linked to growing areas of the state or regional economy.
- Local workforce boards can and should prioritize service to high-risk populations. Advocates should ask local boards to review their level of service to young men of color who are dropouts, offenders, and in other risk categories. The outcomes for these men should also be reviewed. Local workforce boards and youth councils should be asked to put this challenge in the forefront when making

decisions on priority of service and service strategies. They should be asked to identify how services in the one-stop centers—and how training funds for adults as well as youth—can be expanded and aligned with other funding to support the creation of pathway programs for high-risk groups.

Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. If more young men of color with low basic skills and limited English proficiency are to reach their educational and career goals, changes to AEFLA-funded programs are necessary. We recommend the following changes at the federal and state levels:

- Narrow the focus on adult education so that it better reflects the educational demands of the labor market. This can be achieved by redefining the goals of AEFLA-funded programs to increase the rate at which students achieve postsecondary and career success. This change would increase the compatibility of adult education with the needs and goals of youth in these programs and help ensure that they receive the services necessary for them to succeed in postsecondary education, training, and careers.
- Change the performance-measurement system for local programs to incentivize and encourage higher outcomes, particularly success in postsecondary education and training and careers. The current system is focused on completion of the GED and enrollment in postsecondary education or placement in a job. The GED goal is insufficient in the current economy and enrollment in school or placement in a job is meaningless if the student quickly drops out or is fired for inadequate skills. By reaching toward higher goals, and being held accountable for them, local adult education programs will better prepare students for the next step along the educational and career pathway.
- Provide additional funding for adult education and English literacy services, with a particular focus on increasing the intensity, duration, and quality of programs; better training for instructors; and developing innovative approaches to ensure that more students reach their educational goals faster.
- Incentivize and encourage more adult education programs to provide opportunities for their students to enroll dually or concurrently in postsecondary education and training, or develop programs that integrate basic skills and postsecondary education and training.

Higher Education Act

We make the following recommendations to improve access to and success in postsecondary education and training for young men of color:

- Increase the amount of Pell Grants to cover the unmet need of low-income students and to restore the Pell Grant's purchasing power, which has eroded over the past several years because of increasing college tuition and level-funded Pell Grants.
- Ensure that federal and state financial aid formulae reflect the needs of part-time and older students. Do not penalize those who are working to support themselves or their families.
- Expand funding for the Federal Work-Study Program so that more low-income young men of color can have access to these flexible jobs, which tend to be on-campus and thus make balancing work and school easier while providing valuable work experience.
- Direct state financial-aid dollars toward need-based grant programs instead of merit-based programs, which reward higher-income students for good high school academic performance instead of concentrating scarce state dollars with low-income students, where they are most needed.
- Provide federal and state funding to community and technical colleges to create comprehensive career-pathways programs in decent-paying industries, such as allied health, construction, and production.
- Increase federal and state funding for services that support student success. At the federal level such programs include Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and Student Success Grants. Under the Student Success Grant pilot that was included in the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act but was not funded, every student who receives a Pell Grant would also receive a fifteen-hundred-dollar Student Success Grant. This grant would offset the costs to the college of providing intensive supports to ensure that students succeed.[11]
- Incentivize and encourage states and institutions to ensure that more young men of color graduate from college with certificates, diplomas, and degrees. A greater focus on completion will change how colleges educate students and should lead to innovations in developmental, or remedial, education practices that produce better outcomes.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act

In 2010 the U.S. Congress will start engaging in discussions related to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In recent years there has been increased focus on high school reform and graduation accountability. Reauthorized ESEA legislation will undoubtedly encompass provisions that will affect state- and district-level accountability for delivering each cohort of ninth graders to graduation. ESEA reauthorization provides an opportunity to expand the role of the school system in dropout recovery and creating multiple pathways. Ways in which ESEA reauthorization can support the development of multiple pathways that can lead to successful education and labor-market outcomes for young men of color include:

- Requiring states and districts to report on graduation rates, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, and to outline the policies, programs, and processes that will be used to close the gaps.
- Elevating high school reform within ESEA and designating resources to be accessed by states and targeted to "high-need" districts to support the implementation of multiple pathways for high-risk in-school and out-of-school youth.
- Requiring the engagement of community partners, employers, and other youth-serving systems in the development of strategic plans associated with ESEA-related expenditure on high school redesign and improvement activities.
- Allowing community-based organizations and institutions of higher education with a proven track record of working with struggling students and dropouts to receive ESEA Title I funds to provide family, community, and education support services necessary to retain students in school or on pathways leading to a high school credential.

CONCLUSION

Building postsecondary pathways to good jobs for low-income young men of color will require stretching the paradigms of secondary, postsecondary, workforce, and adult education systems, as well as greater collaboration among these systems. Aligning systems and programming across funding streams, building partnerships, and creating new pathways are complex endeavors. But there are many innovative approaches that have shown

promise and can be implemented and taken to scale. Integrating academic instruction with skills training, work experience, support, career exposure, and counseling can put these youths back on track. It will require a communitywide effort to change the landscape on education and labor-market outcomes for young men of color in economically distressed communities. This is a time when leadership and forward thinking on the part of the federal government, governors, mayors, college officials, community leaders, workforce leaders, and employers could dramatically alter the landscape of how we prepare these young men for the skilled opportunities of the future. It will require individual players within communities to come together as never before. This is the challenge and the opportunity.

NOTES

1. Title I (adults, dislocated workers, and youth); Title II (adult education and literacy); Title III (Wagner-Peyser employment service); Title IV (vocational rehabilitation); and Title V (general provisions for states).

2. These figures are based on data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Household Data. Table A-16. Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population 16–24 Years of Age by School Enrollment, Sex, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity." Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C., February 2010.

3. In some states the mandatory school attendance age ends at sixteen years old.

4. Authors' calculation based on data from the National Reporting System, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

5. A student is ineligible for federal financial aid if the drug conviction occurred while the student was receiving federal financial aid. The period of ineligibility depends on the number and type of offenses. The student can regain eligibility by meeting certain requirements, including completing a rehabilitation program.

6. These states include Kentucky, Oregon, Virginia, and Wisconsin, among others.

7. This is the definition used by the Oregon Career Pathways Initiative. Available online at http://worksourceoregon.org/index.php/career-pathways.

8. Not all job skills are part of a career pathway because not all jobs lend themselves to advancing along a career ladder.

9. These categories were established by the Breaking Through Initiative, as outlined in *Jobs for the Future: The Breaking through Practice Guide* (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2010).

10. Youth Opportunity grants were introduced in the original WIA legislation in 1998 as the vehicle to enable high-poverty communities to build youth delivery-system capacity to address youth challenge at a scale and make a difference in the education and labor-market outcomes for the community's youth as a whole. These grants were highly successful in building delivery capacity in these communities. However, the level of appropriations was insufficient to allow the continuance of such grants. More than ninety thousand mostly minority youths were

enrolled in programs in thirty-six communities; 48 percent of these youths were out of school. The Youth Opportunity communities were particularly successful in making educational connections, postsecondary connections, and short- and long-term placements for these youths.

11. More than fifty new programs were included in the Higher Education Act reauthorization, but only a handful were funded because of the current federal budget constraints.

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