

# Pathways to Community College for an Out-of-School Youth

There are several established pathways that workforce programs can utilize to connect out-of-school youth, and those youth at-risk of dropping out of school, to post-secondary educational opportunities, especially in community and technical colleges.

## I. Obtain a state recognized high school diploma through a Local Education Agency (LEA)-Traditional academic, alternative education, or vocational programs

1. If a youth is within the state's compulsory age for publicly educational services, high school drop-outs/out-of-school youth have the option to re-enroll in their *traditional, local K-12 System*. The pathway is primarily academic in focus and the overall outcome would be a State Approved Diploma from their home school after all necessary credits are met.
2. *Alternative education programs* through an LEA provides an opportunity for youth who have not been successful in the traditional high school (whether they have dropped out or are at-risk for dropping out) with a "second-chance" to reconnect through a non-punitive educational approach that is more appropriate for them and that leads to a state recognized diploma. Many alternative education programs work in conjunction with the student's "home-school" to retain at-risk students, they also have a credit retrieval programs, and provide additional counseling, social, and human services.
3. *Career Academies* are described as a "school within a school," providing a small learning community where a cluster of students, stay with the same group of teachers for 2-4 years. Students are provided individualized flexible programs with broad-based career themes, such as health or information technology. Career Academies also receive input and support from community resources and local employers. Students have the opportunity to be placed in a full-time job with a cooperating employer during the summer following the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and/or a part-time job during the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. If an internship is not available for all students, there should be an option of an unpaid community service position. A college preparatory curriculum with a career theme enables students to see relationships among academic subjects and their application to a broad field of work.

Based on these opportunities, once the youth has acquired their high school diploma, or have the necessary credits to submit an application, they can apply directly to a local community college and apply for financial aid.

## II. Participate in a Dual Enrollment-

For those out-of-school students that re-enroll, and those at risk of dropping out improve their grades, there are dual enrollment programs offered by colleges in their area. Dual enrollment programs give a student, who has completed their freshman year of high school (public, non-

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public and home education) with an opportunity to get a jump start on a college education by providing the student an opportunity to complete a college degree while simultaneously earning a high school diploma. Students must have at least a 3.0 grade point average, provide successful assessment scores from either the ACT, SAT or CPT placement test, satisfy any course prerequisites, and receive approval of the high school principal or designee. Participating students are exempt from the payment of registration and laboratory fees and must earn at least a "C" in all college work attempted to remain in the program.

### III. Obtain a General Educational Development (GED)

Since the 1940's, the GED has been utilized as a tool to assist military veterans and high school drop-outs acquire a high school diploma equivalent and create a pathway to post-secondary education and employment without having to return to high school. Persons can prepare to take the GED by utilizing community colleges, local high schools, faith-based organizations, home study, or non-profit organizations. However, there are two specific programs that cater to out-of-school youth:

1. There are over 120 *Job Corps* campuses located throughout the United States, each offering educational training and a variety of vocational training programs. Job Corps is a federally funded program that provides youth with an opportunity to develop skills at no cost to the student; receive a monthly allowance; live on campus; learn a trade; obtain a high school diploma or GED; and receive assistance in getting a job or applying to post-secondary education such as community college.
2. *Youth Build* programs are funded by city and federal agencies, local and national foundations, corporate sponsors and community based non-profits. It is a full-time, ten-month program that serves youth, ages 18-20 years, who are unemployed and high-school drop outs. Students spend every other week on a construction site, learning important job skills as they rehabilitate abandoned housing for sale to low-income families. On alternate weeks they are in classrooms, working towards their GEDs, meeting with counselors, and attending workshops on life-skills, job-readiness and leadership development. Upon completing the program, the graduates are placed in full-time employment or continuing education in community colleges.

### IV. Enroll in Early & Middle College Program

Early and Middle College High Schools are secondary schools that collaborate with postsecondary institutions to offer students who have traditionally been underrepresented in postsecondary education, the opportunity to earn college credit at the same time as they earn a high school diploma. Currently there are 46 schools open in 19 states with 8,030 students. Early and Middle College programs differ from Dual Enrollment programs because the mission of these schools is to serve those youth who are typically labeled "at-risk" and

“underserved;” in turn increasing the number of first generation, low-income, English language learners, and students of color who attain two years of college credit and who have the opportunity to earn a baccalaureate degree. In addition, many of these programs co-exist on a college campus where these at-risk students are consistently exposed to “college-life.”

## **V.Utilize the Ability-to-Benefit Rule-**

The Department of Education provides the “Ability-to-Benefit” legislation which states that a student who is beyond the age of compulsory education (age 16, 17, or 18- depending on state), lacks a high school diploma or its equivalent, and has the ability to benefit from the education or training offered at an institution. Each community colleges set an admissions standard for Ability-to-Benefit Students: in order to for a student to be admitted on the basis of his or her ability to benefit, a student shall, prior to admission, complete a nationally recognized, standardized, or industry developed test which meets the guidelines established by DoEd and measures the applicant's aptitude to complete successfully the program or course to which he or she has applied; as well as a session of individual counseling which shall be in such a manner and of such type as appropriate to determine the applicant's ability to benefit.

## **VI.Participate in Employer- Based/On-the-Job-Training**

Employer-based/on-the-job-training is primarily for individuals who are offered an opportunity by their employer to participate in paid training, usually provided by an outside provider (community college, private trainer, etc.), to obtain the necessary trainings and skills upgrade to advance within the industry. These opportunities may also include an apprenticeship and mentorship. Most times if the employee is also in need of an educational upgrade, the employer may place them in a program that will allow them to obtain their high school diploma or GED during or after work hours. Furthermore, employers are linking employees to post-secondary educational opportunities through their training provider or providing fiscal support through scholarship, incentives, and tuition reimbursement.