

# **"The Department of Labor's Observations and Vision in Practice: Examples from Around the Country"**

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## Introduction

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The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, with support from the departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, and Education, developed a new strategic vision to serve the neediest youth in a demand-driven workforce system. In ETA's vision, WIA-funded youth programs will serve as a catalyst to connect these youth with quality secondary and postsecondary educational opportunities and high-growth and other employment opportunities.

ETA has identified strategic opportunities and approaches in four focus areas:

- Alternative education;
- Business demand in high-growth industries and occupations;
- Neediest youth; and
- Improved performance.

This paper profiles on-the-ground partnerships, programs, and practices that demonstrate ETA's new vision.

Three areas of inquiry were established that correspond to the strategic opportunities and approaches identified by ETA for serving the neediest youth:

- Communities where the local workforce system collaborates with the school district to meet the needs of under-performing and out-of-school youth;
- Programs that engage business in developing and implementing employment and educational opportunities in high-growth sectors of the economy; and
- Practices that help systems improve performance, particularly in literacy/numeracy, and through the use of data for managing and tracking program and participant improvement.

The paper begins with overarching field-based observations that emerged from the profile development work. It also presents a full set of the profiles in brief.

### ***Field-based Observations***

The field review uncovered encouraging examples of:

- Collaborations between local education and workforce systems directed at improving the quality and outcomes of alternative education;
- Schools and programs that engage employers in blending education and workforce development to offer older disconnected youth a second chance at education, workforce credentials, and good jobs; and
- Performance improvements for participants and programs through the use of data management and the development of new approaches and materials for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of out-of-school youth.

Observation 1. State and local policies play a key role in advancing quality alternative education and supporting cross-sector collaboration.

Alternative schools and programs in the communities profiled benefit from state and local policies that provide stable funding and promote collaboration across sectors. Such policies enable the alternative system to serve as a catalyst for coordinated workforce investment.

- Oregon state policy promotes the development of a wide range of alternative learning options. Statutes require school boards to maintain learning situations that are flexible with regard to environment, time, structure, and pedagogy. Statutes also mandate that alternatives receive a relatively high proportion of per-pupil funding.
- In Philadelphia, community providers of WIA youth programming must link the services they offer youth to education programs. WIA-funded services are defined as “companion programs,” and WIA providers wrap employment opportunities, educational support, and other supportive services around the school district’s alternative education programs.

Observation 2: Collaboration between workforce and education systems can lead to more strategic and targeted use of resources for alternative education, particularly if the alternative education programs are well-organized and supported.

In the cities examined, collaborations between youth workforce development and alternative education systems are opening doors to new possibilities for targeting resources and integrating services to meet the needs of out-of-school youth. These collaborations also benefit the K-12 system in its efforts to raise achievement levels of all youth. In Portland, Oregon; Boston,

Massachusetts; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, systemic collaboration between the workforce system and an organized and supported alternative education network is leveraging comprehensive workforce development and academic skill development services for out-of-school youth. The strategic use of limited resources allows the partnerships to provide the type of comprehensive programming that makes it more likely that out-of-school youth acquire the academic and career-related skills they need for economic self-sufficiency.

All three partnerships benefit from alternative education programming that is well-organized and supported through provider-driven networking and/or state and district policies that promote and sustain a coherent array of alternative learning options. This systemic approach to alternative education programming in these cities allows the partnerships to broker services across sites and impact a larger number of youth.

- In Portland, supportive state policy, district infrastructure, and active alternative school providers have created a well-organized system of alternative education. The WIA youth center is staffed by four major alternative education providers, and five alternative schools serve as additional WIA service sites in the community – ensuring that WIA services are integrated with academic programming.
- Also in Portland students participating in Roosevelt High School’s partnership programs with Open Meadow Alternative Schools have made significant academic gains in literacy and math. These include gains of close to three grades in reading for incoming ninth-grade students identified as at-risk of academic failure who participated in a summer orientation program and 36 hours of follow-up tutoring, compared to less than a one grade-level gain for Roosevelt students overall.
- Boston has organized a Youth Services Provider Network that meets regularly to ensure that services are streamlined and coordinated. All 13 providers in the network collaborate to ensure that WIA youth receiving services in any network program can access “career explorations” that four of the programs provide in key Massachusetts industries. In addition, alternative providers use a common supplemental literacy/math curriculum – the Aztec curriculum – at both the WIA youth center and the alternative schools. Common use of the Aztec curriculum has resulted in a more strategic diagnostic and placement process and more concentrated support for youth with low literacy and numeracy skills. Because students are now more appropriately placed in either the WIA youth center or the alternative schools, depending on literacy skill levels, and academic support is coordinated, the alternative schools have seen improvements in program retention and close to a 50 percent increase in graduation rates.

Observation 3: Education programs that connect out-of-school youth to high-growth industries:

- Engage employers as the catalyst for building a demand-driven model to connect out-of-school youth to high growth industries;
- Have specific roles for employers in providing quality assurance and on-the-job training;

- Are characterized by structures that allow for relatively short initial training followed by advancement possibilities; and
- Are operated by a range of organizations with strong connections to business and education.

Programs that engage out-of-school youth in pathways to high-growth fields are operated and sponsored by a diverse array of organizations. While sponsorship is diverse, the mission across these programs is similar: employment opportunities for low-skilled, typically low-income individuals. Out-of-school youth constitute the majority of the population served by the programs profiled in this inquiry.

These programs also share similar characteristics: specific roles for employers; responsiveness to the market needs of the local economy; connections to the education sector; and structures that offer intensive, relatively short initial training for immediate skilled employment as well as further advancement and training in the form of postsecondary credentials or employer training programs.

- In Dayton, Ohio, ISUS designed its training programs in high-demand industries based on projected labor force shortages in high-demand industries characterized by clear ladders to high-wage employment. After identifying key industry areas of the local economy facing shortages within the next decade, the school worked with employers to develop training that leads to nationally recognized certification, and it integrated this training into its charter school for out-of-school youth.
- Drawing on its partnership with local employers and trade unions, Taller San Jose, a program of a community-based service center, offers training to out-of-school youth, over 90 percent of whom test at a fifth-grade math level and sixth-grade reading level. This training prepares them for employment in two local industries with high demand for skilled employees: the construction trades and information technology. Over 75 percent of the youth who co-enroll in an on-site diploma-granting alternative school complete their degrees. The school provides personalized instruction in a curriculum that meets all of the state's competency requirements. The staff encourages and supports graduates to pursue postsecondary credentials in their chosen industry as well.

At Taller San Jose, employer partnerships ensure the quality and credibility of the training through an advisory board that oversees the curriculum and certification requirements, assesses program outcomes, and serves as ambassador for the program in the community by building employer networks. Employers participating in the networks make annual commitments to place a specific number of Taller San Jose participants in full-time employment. Of the graduates, 86 percent are employed within 30 days of graduation. At six months after graduation, 93 percent are employed.

- Focus: HOPE in Detroit, Michigan, similarly engages industry professionals to serve as industry advisors, influence curriculum and certification decisions, provide sites for internship experiences, and employ graduates for its three employment programs: the Machinists Training Institute (MTI), the Center for Advanced Technologies (CAT), and the Information Technologies Center (ITC). Each program offers intensive, modular training

supported by employment partnerships that ensure marketable credentials and provide permanent employment placement for graduates.

- The MTI program, the “heart and soul” of Focus: HOPE according to program staff, features a carefully designed first-level module that respond to the dramatic decrease in the age of participants and retention and training concerns for the out-of-school youth population. The modular approach provides exposure to machinist/technology careers through an intensive training program and ameliorates the “cultural confusion” out-of-school youth can experience in a workplace environment
- Students in Focus: HOPE programs can earn college credits/degrees as well. Those who progress beyond the first module of the MTI program can earn up to 30 articulated college credits. Students in the CAT program, a partnership with six companies, an engineering society, and five universities, can earn both Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees. MTI graduates enter the workforce earning an average salary of \$11 per hour. CAT graduates who earn a B.S. degree enter with an average starting salary of \$55,000. CAT is also the largest producer of minority graduates in manufacturing engineering, according to the National Science Foundation.

Observation 4. Educators and service providers have begun to adapt adolescent literacy and/or adult literacy/numeracy programs for out-of-school youth.

Older, out-of-school youth with low literacy and numeracy skills require remediation and improved basic and higher-order skills in order to achieve a diploma and move on to postsecondary education, advanced training, or employment. Educators have adapted curricula originally designed for younger adolescents or adults to more appropriately serve older, disconnected youth.

- Gateway to College at Portland Community College, which targets 16- to 20-year-old out-of-school youth, has adapted Portland Community College’s developmental math course to focus less on “brush up” of skills for adults who have been out of school for a few years, and more on teaching skills to young people who may have a wide range of experience in math. While the program requires an eighth-grade reading level, there are no math entry requirements, and students – who may have been out of school for as long as two years – enter with a wide range of math skill levels. In addition to building basic math skills, the curriculum for out-of-school youth incorporates study and college preparatory skills, and it enables youth to gradually and systematically take charge of their own learning. Eighty-eight percent of students showed progress toward college-level math proficiency by passing a Gateway to College math class and qualifying for a higher-level math course.
- The National Center on Education and the Economy adapted its Ramp-Up to Advanced Literacy program for use in alternative education programs by making the materials more flexible, streamlining the curriculum so that youth in short-term programs can make progress quickly, and adding more instruction and content to the teachers’ notes – recognizing that the capacity in the field is not that of the regular K-12 system. At the same time, NCEE kept the curriculum’s powerful emphasis on motivating and engaging learners and making links to real-world problems. Early reports on use of the curriculum have been

promising. One alternative education program serving primarily English language learners reported that all the students went up at least one level in ESL.

Observation 5. In order to ensure high performance, youth serving systems use data for management and program and participant improvement.

There are promising examples of communities that are using data to both drive improved program performance and ensure that all youth receive services to achieve secondary and postsecondary success.

- In Hartford, Connecticut, a collaboration between WIA youth programs and school district staff to identify and engage youth who are at-risk of dropping out has led to the development of Hartford Connects, a Web-based management and reporting system that a variety of partners are expanding to help improve educational and employment outcomes for youth. Hartford Connects links the Hartford Public Schools, city departments focused on youth, and about 25 community-based agencies, including WIA youth programs and community- and faith-based initiatives.

Although still in the early stages of development, the initiative is already improving access and coordination of services for re-engaging dropouts. Participating service providers meet monthly to review dropout information generated by the Hartford Public Schools MIS system and determine which agency has the best leverage to reach out to each individual youth, based on services, geographic location, and personal connections. While a primary focus is on re-engaging youth in high school, partners have identified alternative options for those young people who have indicated they are unwilling to return to a Hartford Public Schools high school. These options include a newly created Diploma Plus program, which offers a competency-based pathway to a high school diploma and postsecondary education and training, and a locally developed credit retrieval program that allows adjudicated youth who are behind in credits to accelerate their progress toward a high school diploma.

- In Portland, Oregon, Worksystems, Inc., which manages the city's workforce investment system, has significantly revised its performance management system to include the implementation of additional interim performance measures for assessing the progress of youth toward outcomes and providing enough information for managing program performance. The focus in designing these measures was to help ensure that all case managers have ongoing, workforce development-focused contact with youth, and that all populations – in-school, out-of-school, older, and younger youth – progress appropriately toward identified outcomes.

The revised and improved data management system allows the Portland WIA program manager to look at data daily, weekly, and monthly and to work intensively with programs to identify which youth are and are not being served, the barriers to service, and strategies that can be put in place to better engage those youth. This has played an instrumental role in the Portland WIA system's improvement in performance.



## **PROFILES IN BRIEF**

### ***Cross-Sector Collaboration: Portland, Oregon***

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Portland's youth workforce investment system leverages the city's comprehensive "second chance" system of alternative schools for out-of-school youth by co-locating services and integrating resources with alternative schools and programs. The workforce system has begun to move toward a "systems view" of resource utilization, going beyond disparate funding configurations and institutional, organizational, and program interests.

The development of a youth workforce investment system integrated with the existing alternative schools is made possible by a powerful network of alternative providers that are: grounded in the community; have a track record of reaching youth who have dropped out of school; and can provide youth with career development and career ladder programming. Workforce Investment Act contract services are built upon an extensive network of alternative programs reaching the population of young people targeted by WIA. Moreover, alternative schools with youth workforce development programming have begun collaborating with district comprehensive high schools in the provision of supplemental services that help students to meet No Child Left Behind criteria.

Portland has organizations, frameworks, and strategies in place that support the attainment of quality in alternative schools and programs and ensure access to programming for youth in need of services. For example, Portland Public Schools has a service contract with alternative schools and programs that requires them to establish measurable, specific Annual Student Performance Objectives in three areas: student attendance and retention; student conduct; and academic achievement. Portland also benefits from a strong state policy framework that promotes the development of a wide range of alternative learning options. With this framework, alternative schools can be developed and operate with significant autonomy and a relatively high proportion of Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding (which translates into per-pupil funding). In addition, the Coalition of Metro Area Community-Based Schools, a network of Portland's contract alternative schools, advocates for schools and services for out-of-school youth, plans collaborative programming, and shares curricula.

The overall result of the strong state policy framework, district infrastructure and accountability mechanism, network of alternative providers, and WIA investment in alternative schools is a broad array of alternative schools and programs that have begun to influence how Portland's large, comprehensive high schools operate. Over the last two years, the alternative schools have begun developing collaborative relationships with the district's comprehensive high schools to assist those schools to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress goals, resulting in documented, positive outcomes for students in both retention and academic growth.

## ***Cross-Sector Collaboration: Boston, Massachusetts***

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The workforce investment system in Boston has developed a strong partnership with alternative education providers. The partnership strengthens the work of both providers and the workforce system by:

- Building a network among providers as a springboard for improving practices and systemizing services for out-of-school youth, resulting in the use of a common supplemental literacy/math curriculum and improved retention and graduation rates in alternative schools/programs; and
- Ensuring that WIA dollars fund a coherent matrix of specific, career-related services in conjunction with alternative education programming.

Boston's Youth Services Provider Network has grown into a critical group of both WIA-funded and non-WIA-funded providers. Network members meet monthly to share best practices and plan collaborative programming and collaborative funding opportunities. The network has undertaken two collaborative efforts to systematize programming and improve the quality and quantity of services for out-of-school youth.

In 2002, the alternative providers began developing "career explorations," or extended explorations of careers in high-growth sectors. The network of alternative education providers is the locus for referrals of students for these opportunities, ensuring that WIA youth receiving services in any program in the network can access career exploration that four of the programs provide in key Massachusetts industries.

In addition, the network has researched and implemented the use of a common supplemental literacy and math curriculum and assessment program that would allow programs to do a precise diagnostic of their students' literacy/math skills. Common implementation of this curriculum has resulted in a retooling of the process for entry into alternative education settings from the WIA youth center; it has also led to improved retention and graduation rates. In 2003-2004, the first of full implementation of the Aztec curriculum at both the WIA youth center and the alternative schools and the first year of the revised intake policy, retention levels in alternative sites increased and graduation rates increased almost 50 percent. In 2003-2004, the alternative schools awarded 61 diplomas, up from 42 the year before.

## ***Cross-Sector Collaboration: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania***

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The Philadelphia youth partnership sponsored by the workforce investment system holds a fundamental principle that education reform and youth workforce development are intrinsically connected. From its inception, its role has been aligning systems and diverse youth-related funding streams to support the educational and career success of Philadelphia youth. It focuses on identifying leverage points and strategies for how the workforce system can best support the twin goals of educational attainment and career advancement, especially for disconnected youth.

Key among the strategies for aligning services for out-of-school youth is the support of “companion programs” that wrap WIA-funded employment opportunities, educational support, and social support around alternative education programs. By supporting programs that augment core education and employment programs, the system stretches scarce resources and increases the likelihood that out-of-school youth acquire the academic and career-related skills they need for economic self-sufficiency. Community providers of WIA programming are required to link the services and support they offer youth to education programs.

With positive results, WIA-funded companion programs supported youth enrolled in the Twilight Schools, district-operated alternative schools for older out-of-school youth with 10 to 12 credits. In some cases, Twilight Schools with companion programs demonstrated more than a 50 percent increase in graduation rates for youth involved in wraparound services. Twilight Schools were recently reorganized to also serve younger youth with fewer credits and renamed Educational Options. WIA-funded providers continue to offer companion programs to youth at six of the seventeen Educational Options sites.

As part of its intensive focus on out-of-school youth, the youth partnership has also committed to creating a cross-sector delivery system that reconnects out-of-school youth to educational and employment opportunities leading to economic self-sufficiency and satisfying adulthood. The council is exploring options for building on the WIA youth centers to create an infrastructure that will provide multiple entry points for out-of-school youth to an array of education, career, and support services.

## ***Pathways to Credentials for Out-of-School Youth:*** **Taller San Jose Tech, Santa Ana, California**

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In keeping with its commitment to build the community, Taller San Jose Tech (Taller San Jose) targets its education and training program toward the most challenging population in the disenfranchised Santa Ana community: out-of-school youth. Over 90 percent of Taller San Jose participants have dropped out of high school. Many of the youth have histories of gang involvement and/or incarceration, and most of them are parents. In addition, these youth are limited by academic deficiencies. While the average program participant is 18 years old and living with adult responsibilities, the average student has elementary-level skills. On average, Taller San Jose participants have fifth-grade math and sixth-grade reading levels.

To build a program that meets the needs of these constituencies, Taller San Jose's founders developed a program that addresses the needs of employers and individuals who need educational and employment training. Programs were developed around several features that are key to the success of the program:

- Industries selected for training emerged from mapping the local economy to identify high-demand industries and occupations that required a relatively short training time initially but offered advancement opportunities with additional training.
- Intensive employment training in construction trades and information technology provides youth with industry-recognized training and marketable credentials and positions the youth for continuing education/training in the industry and postsecondary institutions.
- Academic coursework engages youth through experiential learning and prepares them for high school credentials as well as postsecondary education/training.
- Staff develop a system of personalized supports for each youth, resulting in positive social benefits for the youth and their communities.

Multiple partnerships help ensure the quality and credibility of the training. An Advisory Board of industry employers oversees the curriculum and certification requirements, assesses program outcomes, and assists with fundraising efforts. Local employers (board members and non-members) make annual commitments to place a specific number of Taller San Jose Tech participants in full-time jobs. Trade unions provide participants with job referrals, information about union membership, and access to apprenticeship and other union-sponsored training programs. And other employers and community organizations partner with Taller San Jose to provide training and placement for youth who are interested in fields other than construction trades or IT, such as health care.

This distinctive program has yielded impressive academic and employment outcomes for participants. Consistently, 75 percent of the youth enrolled in the program graduate with a high school diploma or GED, and 93 percent secure permanent employment within six months of graduation.

## ***Pathways to Credentials for Out-of-School Youth:*** **Focus: HOPE, Detroit, Michigan**

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To serve its mission of working toward racial and economic justice, Focus: HOPE trains low-skilled individuals for high-skilled employment in manufacturing and, more recently, information technologies. Annually, this organization serves approximately 960 individuals through its training and employment programs, most of whom are out-of-school youth.

Individuals must enter the program with a high school diploma or GED, but many lack actual high school-level math and reading competency. In order to enter one of the training programs, these individuals must successfully complete the First Step/FAST TRACK programs, which are designed to increase math and reading skills by at least two grade levels during the duration of the four- to seven-week program.

Key features promote the longevity and success of Focus: HOPE in fulfilling its mission to educate and train individuals for skilled employment in high-demand manufacturing and information technology industries:

- Employer partners support curriculum design/implementation, inform the credential preparation, and provide permanent employment and internships for program participants.
- Focus: HOPE operates in the marketplace as a supplier of goods and services for local industries, which enhances the learning and work experience of students while generating revenue and strengthening the industry reputation and relationships for the organization.
- The training and education programs are intensive, discrete modules that serve as career ladders to skilled employment and education advancement for low-skilled and primarily underrepresented minorities.
- As an innovative “employment as school” education model, Focus: HOPE acculturates youth to employment and life-long learning.

Focus: HOPE has served this population with demonstrated success. Between 60 and 75 percent of Focus: HOPE participants graduate from their respective programs. In a state economy slow to join the national recovery, the majority of graduates obtain permanent employment in manufacturing, engineering, or information technology. Focus: HOPE makes it possible for out-of school youth to gain access to high-demand industries and to have the skills to advance in these industries as well.

***Pathways to Credentials for Out-of-School  
Youth:  
Improved Solutions for Urban Systems  
(ISUS),  
Dayton, Ohio***

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In response to employer demand, ISUS combines employment and education in a charter school setting so that students earn a high school diploma and college credits, while progressing toward nationally recognized certification for occupations in high-demand industries. ISUS offers out-of-school youth the opportunity to gain employment training and education through industry-focused charter schools in the areas of construction, information technology, and manufacturing technology.

These schools serve over 300 youth annually. For the youth served, the opportunities available at ISUS schools represent a chance to redirect tragic trajectories. These innovative schools target youth between the ages of 16 and 22, most of whom are high school dropouts, overage for grade level, and lack basic skills; many are referred by the juvenile court. Despite dismal experiences with schooling and disconnection from their communities, the youth prosper at ISUS. Most of the youth (60 percent) graduate with a high school diploma, and 85 percent secure employment immediately following graduation. A recent survey revealed that 48 percent of graduates earned college credits while in high school.

ISUS schools integrate industry-certified, high-skills training with academics, youth development, and community service. Employer partnerships support every aspect of ISUS, and several key features make this program illustrative of employer-sponsored, educationally grounded programs that prepare out-of school youth for skilled employment in high-demand occupations:

- Through mutually beneficial employer partnerships, employers support curriculum design, certification training, and employment placement, while ISUS serves as a “supplier” of goods and services for the construction, manufacturing, and information technology industries.
- An innovative blend of education and employment training engages youth with negative school experiences through relevant, hands-on curriculum.
- Infrastructure for scale and replication offers the potential to serve an increasing number of youth and impact a range of local industries.
- Significant community service enables youth to contribute to the economic development of their communities: ISUS students refurbish computers for impoverished youth and rebuild abandoned housing.

## ***Increasing Out-of-School Youth's Numeracy Skills:*** **Gateway to College's Math 20 Course**

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Gateway to College at Portland Community College enables high school dropouts to simultaneously work toward a high school diploma and earn credits toward an Associate's degree. With rigorous academic expectations at its core, the program is designed to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of its students.

Gateway to College has significantly revised the college's standard developmental math course in order to meet the wide range of needs of its out-of-school youth. (The program has no math skill requirements for entry.) The Gateway to College math course differs from the original course in that it:

- Covers a wide range of material (because students enter the program having dropped out of school at varying grades and hence come with a range of skill deficits);
- Incorporates study and college-preparation skills; and
- Encourages students to gradually and systematically take charge of their own learning by moving from teacher-directed to constructivist teaching on a daily basis in classes.

Throughout the course, students have opportunities to write (e.g., describing how they got to a solution, writing out in words a problem provided to them orally or in numbers). In addition, while the program builds the skills needed for college-level work, it also takes individual needs into consideration. Those who need more time and instruction than is possible in their classes receive additional tutoring. Also, instructors exhibit an understanding attitude regarding the varying challenges that this population encounters, while at the same time maintaining high expectations for all students.

One powerful reason for the math course's success is the array of supports available to students. Students have access to Student Resource Specialists, weekly tutors, a two-hour "academic lab" for intensive skill-building one day each week, and the services of both a Manager of Student Retention and Support and a Manager of Curriculum and Instruction.

Of students who entered in 2001-2002, 60 percent successfully completed the program's college preparatory courses in one term; 88 percent showed progress toward college-level math proficiency by passing a Gateway to College math class and qualifying for a higher-level math course in one term.

***Increasing Out-of-School Youth's Literacy Skills:***  
**National Center on Education and the Economy's**  
**Literacy Course for Alternative Education**

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The National Center on Education and the Economy's Alternative Education Initiative focuses on helping out-of-school youth gain the literacy and numeracy skills they need in order to meet the same academic standards as students in the K-12 system. Over the past five years, working in conjunction with teachers in alternative settings, the initiative has developed a Literacy Course for Alternative Education, an adaptation for out-of-school youth of the Ramp-Up to Advanced Literacy curriculum that NCEE has used in its America's Choice K-12 schools.

Prior to developing or adapting any materials for alternative education, NCEE collaborated with a small but diverse set of alternative education providers, including GED programs, alternative diploma programs, and Job Corps Centers. The initial focus was on professional development in literacy and mathematics that would enable these providers to determine the background and skills of teachers in alternative education settings, what their needs were, the skills of their students, the kinds of materials they were using, and the kinds of training the teachers received.

Based on this information, NCEE drafted its Literacy Course for Alternative Education, based on Ramp-Up. The materials draw on classroom management and instructional strategies for Readers' and Writers' Workshop. Each lesson includes a whole group mini-lesson, a structured work period, independent reading, read-aloud/think-aloud, and a group reflection/debriefing. The document contains five units: one on setting up the workshop, plus four curriculum units focused on writing genres and authors. This course is aimed at providing structured practice and explicitly teaching students the strategies proficient readers use to make sense of what they are reading.

Preliminary results are encouraging. One alternative school that has piloted the materials pre- and post-tested its second language learners on a combination of L-SATs (language and comprehension) and the state's MCAS (those parts related to comprehension). All the students went up at least one level in ESL after a year of exposure to Reader's and Writer's Workshop through NCEE's Literacy Course for Alternative Education. More results are forthcoming: a third-party evaluation of the Ramp-Up course has begun.



## ***Building a Data-Based Management System: Hartford, Connecticut***

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Hartford's Future Workforce Investment System is a collaborative effort of the Mayor's Office, Capital Workforce Partners (which houses the region's Workforce Investment Board), Hartford Public Schools, and Hartford's Department of Health and Human Services. The goal is to address the needs of out-of-school youth through a dynamic, Web-based management system that also coordinates services.

The Future Workforce Investment System identifies youth who are at risk of dropping out of school and engages them in services. FWIS links the Hartford Public Schools, city departments focused on youth, and about 25 community-based agencies, including WIA youth programs and community- and faith-based initiatives. When the system is fully operational, the database will be open to all authorized users, across agencies, and it will provide basic information such as demographics, previous school history, employment history, occupational skills training history, and parental information.

The system, called Hartford Connects, allows for:

- Real-time tracking of youth eligible for and enrolled in participating programs;
- Improved coordination of services and the tracking of success and completion measures; and
- The provision of a range of information about youth in order to identify issues and trends that support the development of programs to meet real needs.

The system is designed to encourage collaboration across agencies, while allowing each agency flexibility in how it serves youth and uses the database. The ultimate goal of the system, according to its organizers, is to improve the quality of services received by Hartford's youth, so that more young people finish high school, go to and finish college, get a living-wage job, and engage in long-term, career-focused employment.

## ***Using Data for Management and Program Improvement: Portland, Oregon***

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Worksystems, Inc., (WSI), which manages the workforce investment system in Portland, Oregon, and WIA service providers undertook a fundamental transformation of their WIA youth system in early 2003. The process included the implementation of additional interim performance measures for assessing the progress of youth toward outcomes and providing information for managing program performance. The focus in designing these measures was to help ensure that all case managers have ongoing, workforce development-focused contact with youth, and that in-school, out-of-school, older, and younger youth progress appropriately toward identified outcomes.

Primary changes to the data management system included:

- Increasing the goals for numbers of youth to be provided with a minimum level of service;
- Measuring service levels monthly rather than annually; and
- Creating additional performance measures to drive appropriate services for subpopulations of youth.

The first change responded directly to the need to show marked improvement in outcomes in a system that had failed to produce positively for its youth. Working with its provider network, WSI doubled, and in some cases tripled, its goals for the numbers of youth entering any of seven specific pre-placement activities designed to prepare youth for long-term success.

The second change – measuring performance monthly rather than annually – allowed WSI to do “just in time” management of youth participation. WSI worked with programs to set monthly service goals, and it targeted an 80 percent service rate as its standard.

The third change – creating additional performance measures – was accomplished through considerable negotiation and experimentation with the network of eight WIA providers. The additional measures include: the percentage of all youth receiving remedial services; the percentage of out-of-school youth either receiving remedial services or in a GED program; the percentage of out-of-school youth in short-term, unsubsidized employment; GED completions; and monthly contact rate.

## **APPENDIX**

# **Process for Selection of Partnerships, Programs, and Practices**

The first area of inquiry addresses communities that have developed a systemic approach to serving out-of-school youth and that have leveraged the workforce investment system. The process for selecting these profiles drew upon several bodies of work. First, key leaders in the fields of education, youth development, and youth employment were surveyed, including directors of national policy institutes related to youth education and youth transitions to adulthood, national intermediary organizations that operate networks of programs for dropouts, and funders. Second, DOL staff and members of the Youth Transition Funders Group, a consortium of private foundations seeking to impact the dropout crisis, were asked for their recommendations of leading communities in this regard.

Final site selection was determined by the extent to which recommended communities were using strategic approaches identified by the new youth vision: fostering a system of high-quality alternative education that is held accountable for moving students to state standards; providing supplemental education services; and/or developing cross sector collaboration and flexible funding to ensure high-quality programming.

The second area of inquiry targets programs, partnerships, and practices that engage business in providing employment and educational opportunities for out-of-school youth in high-growth fields. Sites were identified from two national databases created through national competitions. Consultants to “bridge” programs and national employer networks, including partners in the Workforce Innovations Network initiative, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Manufacturers, proved to be helpful resources. Employer members of the National Association of Workforce Boards were also interviewed.

Working with the national databases, entries were narrowed according to the guidelines of the DOL Task Order: programs connecting out-of-school youth to education opportunities and employment in high-demand fields. Preliminary interviews were conducted to surface programs with significant employer involvement in training youth for and hiring youth into high-growth employment fields. In-depth interviews and selected site visits rounded out the information gathering for these profiles.

The third area of inquiry targets programs, partnerships, and practices that help systems to improve performance, particularly in literacy and numeracy outcomes, and to use data for management and program improvement. Adolescent literacy projects were reviewed that are showing some success in educating youth who have dropped out of school or those at risk of dropping out. In addition, recommendations were made by DOL staff, and interviews were conducted with leaders in the field of workforce development to identify local workforce areas that have identified and used interim measures to track the progress of programs for out-of-school youth.

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