



Disconnected Young Adults in New England: Understanding the Challenge

*Background Paper prepared for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation
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Synopsis:

The problem in New England is clear. There are too many people – particularly ethnic minorities, those from lower socio-economic groups, and subgroups – who have not been served well by our current education system and who are leaving school without the skills necessary to succeed in current and emerging careers. New England does not appear to have the necessary systems and supports in place to address the magnitude of the problem and cannot afford to ignore it.

Section I. Introduction

The purpose of this research, conducted in 2009, is to provide the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (NMEF) with the necessary information regarding Disconnected Young Adults (DYA).

The paper begins with a brief overview of the scope, scale and consequences of the current DYA challenge. As discussed in *Section 3: Who are the Disconnected Young Adults*, there are many definitions of who constitutes this population. Researchers and others use different names for this population. More common than DYA is “disconnected older youth,” or simply, “disconnected youth.” Throughout the literature one is also likely to find a variety of adjectives in lieu of “disconnected” such as “at-risk” and “vulnerable.”

This is not simply an issue of semantics, as the literature clearly describes important differences across the DYA population. The issues that a typical 16-year old high school dropout faces and the assets that he or she brings are quite different from those of an unemployed 26-year old with a high school diploma. In Section 3, the paper reviews these definitional issues and then presents data on characteristics of the DYA population nationally and in the six New England states, including data on specific subgroups of DYA, including high school dropouts, foster youth, those involved with the juvenile justice system, immigrants, and single teen mothers.

Section IV explores reasons young adults detach from the educational system and their subsequent experiences navigating education and training options. This section includes findings from two young adult focus groups commissioned by NMEF as part of this project. In Section V, we then examine the DYA landscape; what currently exists in the field/practice on the federal level and regionally in the six New England states. We also include an overview of four emerging innovative models to provide the reader with a greater understanding of current practice and possibilities for the future. Finally, in Section VI, we end by examining the public policy context and promising policy innovations that may make the education system more flexible and supportive of high risk and disconnected young adults.

Section II. Problem Statement

Depending on the definition used, researchers estimate there are 1.9 million to as many as 5.2 million “disconnected” young adults ages 16-24 in the United States. Nationally, they are more likely to be female or minority, and are twice as likely as connected peers to be poor (Congressional Research Service, 2009).

In New England, 10% or 142,000 young adults ages 18-24 are disconnected (Kids Count 2007). While fewer than in other regions, the numbers are still troubling – particularly when disaggregated by ethnic and socioeconomic group and for many of the region’s cities.

Researchers have identified at least three consequences of disconnection: the loss of lifetime earnings to individuals, the economic cost to society, and the potential weakening of our democracy. In terms of the first, the loss of lifetime earnings to the individual (and with it, typically less social stability) is large and growing. The difference in lifetime earnings between a high school dropout and someone with high school diploma is between \$250,000-500,000, depending on how the number is calculated, and as much as \$1 million for someone with a four-year degree.

The second area of impact is the economic cost to society based on insufficient supply of skilled workers for current and emerging jobs, the loss of tax revenue, and social investments in unemployment, welfare payments, and our criminal justice system. According to the American Youth Policy Forum's 2006 report, *Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth*:

- 75 percent of state prison inmates and 59 percent of federal inmates are high school dropouts.
- Dropouts contribute disproportionately to the unemployment rate. In 2001, 55 percent of young adult dropouts were employed, compared to 74 percent of high school graduates and 87 percent of college graduates.
- Dropouts contribute to state and federal tax coffers at about one-half the rate of high school graduates. Over a working lifetime, a dropout will contribute about \$60,000 less. The 23 million high school dropouts aged 18-67 will contribute roughly \$50 billion less annually in state and federal taxes.
- Studies suggest the United States would save \$41.8 billion in health care costs if the 600,000 young people who dropped out in 2004 were to complete one additional year of education.
- If 33 percent of dropouts graduated from high school, the federal government would save \$10.8 billion each year in food stamps, housing assistance, and temporary assistance for needy families.

In 2008, the Alliance for Excellent Education used 2003-04 9th grade enrollment, 2007-08 high school graduation, and income data to determine the impact New England dropouts will have on state tax revenues. As a whole, the region stands to lose tax receipts of more than \$12 million *this one cohort of youth alone* would have earned over their lifetime, had they graduated with their high school diploma (see Appendix 1).

The third major consequence of disconnection is the cost to our democracy of an ever-growing divide between educational have's and have not's. This is difficult to measure and is not covered in this paper. However, it is worth noting that Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts are the top three states nationwide to experience increases in the gap between the highest and lowest earners from the late 1980's to the mid 2000's (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2008).

By nearly every economic measure, New England is already paying a high price for disconnection among its young adults, and will pay even more in the future given projected increases in DYA demographics. There is an emerging consensus that the long-term requirement for success of all of our citizens, including DYA, is completion of at least *some* postsecondary education and training, though not necessarily a four year degree. In its 2008 report to the NMEF, *What it Will Take to Succeed in the 21st Century: How New Englanders are Faring*, Jobs for the Future concluded that:

Over the next decade, jobs requiring postsecondary training but not a Bachelor's degree will continue to comprise the largest part of New England's employment base. Despite growing demand for specialized skills, there is still a significant need for workers with moderate skills. Middle-skilled jobs—those requiring more

than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree—are projected to make up roughly half the labor market in the three northern-tier states through 2014, while less than a third of jobs will require four or more years of college....

The region’s educational institutions are not well-equipped to help all students graduate high school ready to succeed in college and to develop additional work related skills and knowledge valued in the labor market. Too many young people and working adults leave school academically underprepared for the new economy, particularly individuals from low-income and other traditionally underserved groups who have had weak education experiences.

Magnifying the problem is that New England’s economy, arguably more than any other region, is dependent on a highly trained workforce. This raises the stakes for whatever action or inaction takes place in coming years.

New England will rise and fall, as it has in past eras, on the ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and quality of its residents’ human capital. But making sure that the stock of skills and knowledge needed for economic vitality and growth are cultivated broadly and that gaps in preparedness of different segments of the population are redressed will require significant creativity and commitment from New England’s educational institutions and other stakeholders in the region’s future. (NMEF/Jobs for the Future, 2008)

The problem in New England is clear. There are too many people – particularly ethnic minorities, those from lower socio-economic groups, and subgroups – leaving school without the skills necessary to succeed in current and emerging careers. New England does not appear to have the necessary systems and supports in place to address the magnitude of the problem and cannot afford to ignore it.

Section III. Who are the Disconnected Young Adults

DEFINITIONS OF DYA

Disconnected young adults (DYA) have been defined in a variety of ways. All definitions include lack of enrollment in education coupled with unemployment - young adults who are not in school and not working. Despite this overlap, definitions of the DYA population can vary in the following ways (see also Appendix 2):

- Age range (16-19, 19-24, etc.): almost all definitions have a lower boundary of no less than 16 and no more than 24.
- Institutional status: based on the limitations of data sources, some definitions exclude young adults involved with certain institutions, including those in prison or college.
- Marital status: some definitions exclude married or ever-married young adults.
- Educational attainment: most definitions exclude those young adults with greater than a high school diploma or GED attainment.
- Length of disconnection: some definitions only include those young adults who have been disconnected for long periods of time (six months or a full calendar year) while others include any young adult who is disconnected at a point in time.

Because of these definitional issues, DYA population estimates also vary considerably. Using one of narrowest definitions, the Congressional Research Service estimated that 5.1% of 16-24 year olds were disconnected in 2008. This includes only unmarried, non-institutionalized young adults ages 16-24 not enrolled in school or employed *for all of 2007*. At the high end, the annual Kids Count Data Book count includes non-institutionalized young adults not enrolled in school or unemployed *at any point* in the year: 8% of 16-19 year olds and 15% of 18-24 year olds in 2007.

Looking broadly at the population, and including young adults who may only have been disconnected for short periods of time, the estimate of the size of the DYA population is approximately 14-15% of the 18-24 year-old age group or 4.4 million young adults (Congressional Research Service 2009, Kids Count 2008). At the heart of that statistic are the 5.1% of young adults who fall into the smallest, most strictly defined group. They represent the “hard core” of the disconnected population and the group most likely to stay disconnected into their late twenties and beyond (Wald and Martinez, 2003).

The number of disconnected young adults will likely increase significantly over the next 20 years because populations at greatest risk of disconnection are projected to increase in numbers and in total share of the U.S. population. Current projections forecast a 17% increase of DYA (19-24) from 2006 to 2030. By then Latinos – the largest and fastest growing ethnic subgroup – are projected to comprise 39% of the disconnected population ((Rosch et al, 2008). The DYA population will likely expand noticeably even in the very near term because rates of disconnection generally follow economic cycles and unemployment trends – historically, the rate peaks for several years past the end of recession (Congressional Research Service, 2009).

DEMOGRAPHICS OF DYA NATIONALLY

The following section provides more detailed demographic information about the nation’s disconnected young adults. Since DYA population estimates range from 5% to 15% of 16-24-year-olds, we provide, when possible, demographic characteristics derived from both the most restrictive and the broadest DYA definitions. Often, however, there is only one study, based on one definition, which examines a particular DYA characteristic. Supporting data for this information is provided in Appendix 3 – Demographics of DYA Nationally.

- **Gender:** According to most DYA definitions, there rate of disconnection is greater among females than males. This is likely due to higher rates of parenting among females: females ages 16-24 years old are 25 times more likely to be parenting than males and 15% of disconnected young adults reported caring for a child as the reason for being disconnected (CRS, 2009). Only one research group, which included incarcerated young adults in its count, found greater rates of disconnection among males.
- **Race & Ethnicity:** Young adults of color face significantly higher rates of disconnection than their white peers across all DYA definitions. Across all racial groups, women are more likely to be disconnected than men, from a high of 11.2% of non-Hispanic black women to a low of 3% of non-Hispanic white men (CRS, 2009). When women with children are excluded, 16-24 year old black and white men suffer slightly higher rates of disconnection than females of their race. Interestingly though, even Latina women without children are more likely to be disconnected than Latino men without children, 5.2% and 3.7%, respectively.
- **Age:** Disconnection rates peak at age 19 – younger youth are more likely to be attending high school – and then decline slowly through age 24 – older young adults are more likely to find work. Rates decline faster for women than men, primarily because men are far more likely to be incarcerated

(93% of incarcerated disconnected young adults are male and incarceration rates increase for each year out of the labor force) (Wald and Martinez, 2003; Rosch et al., 2008).

- **Education:** The two studies that looked at educational attainment and disconnection report similar findings. Many disconnected young adults lack a high school diploma or GED – 34.5% or 43% depending on DYA definitions used – and while these rates decline somewhat as young adults age, they remain high (30%). Both studies also found some educational activity beyond high school: in one study, 16.9% of DYA had some schooling beyond high school. In the other, which included incarcerated young adults, the number was only 1%. Virtually no DYA had a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- **Poverty:** Disconnected young adults were substantially more likely to be poor than their connected peers. Almost half (47%) of 16-24 year-olds who fell into the most restricted definition of disconnection were considered poor, compared to only 15% of their peers (CRS, 2009). In all likelihood, poverty is both a cause and effect of disconnection. Growing up poor is associated with lower high school graduation rates and higher teen pregnancy rates, two factors which correlate strongly with disconnection (CRS, 2009). Once disconnected, DYA are far more likely to live apart from parents and far less likely to receive financial and materials support from them (young adults today typically receive support long after age 18 – an estimated \$38,000 or \$2,200 annually - to help cover housing, tuition, and other expenses). Overall, almost three-quarters (71%) of disconnected young adults who live apart from both of their parent are poor, compared to about one-quarter (27%) of their connected peers.
- **Geography:** While disconnection rates vary regionally, most disconnected young adults live in central cities and rural areas. In many large urban cities, high schools populated almost entirely by minority students are losing more than half of their students between the 9th and 12th grades (Balfanz and Letgers, 2001 in Allen et al., 2004). Disconnected young adults are overrepresented in the South and underrepresented in New England, with more disconnected 18-24 year-olds in the South than in the West and North East combined (Wald and Martinez, 2003).

DYA IN NEW ENGLAND

According to the Casey Foundations Kids Count survey, 142,000 of New England’s young adults were disconnected in 2007.

Table 1: Number and Rate of Disconnected Young Adults 18-24, 2007

New England States	#, % 18-24 DYA, 2007
Connecticut	35,000 (11%)
Maine	17,000 (15%)
Massachusetts	64,000 (10%)
New Hampshire	11,000 (9%)
Rhode Island	10,000 (9%)
Vermont	5,000 (9%)
New England	142,000 (n/a)
Nationwide	4,396,000 (15%)

Source: Kids Count 2008

Below we provide a basic overview of DYA demographics and the policy, social and economic context of disconnection in each of the six New England states. They are presented in order from the greatest rates of disconnection to the lowest. It is important to note that state by state data on DYA and trends affecting

DYA is uneven, sparse, or non-existent. Very few sources look across the six states and sources within each state, if they exist, vary considerably in their approach (e.g., DYA definitions, geographic scope, etc.)

Maine

The DYA problem is most severe in Maine, where 15% of the state's young adults are disconnected – on a par with the national rate and at least 4% higher than any other New England state. Behind that number are two other important statistics: Maine, like other New England states, has a low high school dropout rate; at 4%, it is the second lowest in the country. At the same time, Maine has experienced an increase in the proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds out-of-school and unemployed (1% per year from 2005 through 2007), the only New England state to do so. So, while high school outcomes are improving, dynamics after high school are resulting in a higher proportion of disconnected young adults.

Maine's high rate of disconnection is likely related to the state's changing economy and a youth "brain drain" trend. For some years now, Maine has been shifting away from natural resource extraction and manufacturing to a services economy, namely health, business, and professional services, which requires more skilled labor than in the past (Dawson et al., 2007).

At the same time, Maine, like other rural areas, is experiencing considerable out-migration of young people, particularly those with the most education and those seeking post-secondary education. Since 1980, Maine has lost 24.7% of its young adults aged 15-29 (Heminway, 2002). Regions in Maine with the lowest per capita income are facing the steepest out-migration of youth. In addition, many youth from the most educated families, children of baby-boomers who migrated into Maine in the 1970's and 1980s, are leaving Maine to attend college and are unlikely to return. In contrast, the majority of youth from lower-income backgrounds are either not attending, or dropping out of, Maine institutions of higher education (Heminway, 2002). Given the trends, a growing number of young adults who remain in the state are poorly matched for the skill requirements of Maine's changing economy.

Connecticut

Eleven percent (11%) of Connecticut 18- to 24-year-olds were disconnected in 2007. In 2006, 5% of its 16-19-year olds were out-of-school and unemployed, a 38% improvement since 2000. Despite the state's reputation for affluence, the state has experienced the greatest increase in income equality in the country (CBPP, 2008) and some major cities have been in decline for several years. Hartford has the second highest child poverty rate in the country for cities with over 100,000 in population, tied with Brownsville, Texas, at 47%. Waterbury, Bridgeport and New Britain also rank among the highest in the country for child poverty.

Since 1990, Connecticut has also experienced an exodus of young professionals, ages 18-34. Many young adults who stay lack the soft skills for the state's jobs. Educational attainment is projected to continue its sharp decline over the next decade as this brain drain trend continues. According to a 2007 Connecticut Kids Count report titled *Connecting the Dots: Growth, Work, and Prosperity*: "In order to stay competitive with other states and countries, Connecticut's leaders will need to correct the academic achievement gap, increase college graduation rates, and support current workers in their efforts to gain workplace skills" (Carroll, 2007). In 2006, only a fifth of Connecticut's Latino residents and a quarter of African American residents had attained at least an Associate's degree (half of white residents had) (CAHS, 2008).

Massachusetts

Massachusetts has almost 600,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, 10% of whom were estimated to be disconnected in 2007. The state's population of 16-24 year olds is increasing rapidly, led by large growth spurts in Boston's Latino and Asian communities (Boston Youth Council 2004).

Like Rhode Island and Connecticut, the locus of the disconnection challenge is in poor cities, among minority youth. Statewide, dropout rates have improved by 50% (Kids Count, 2008) and rank among the nation's lowest. Similarly, Massachusetts ranks alongside other New England states with a relatively low percent (5%) of 16-19 year olds not in school and not working. However, rates for these indicators jump sharply for the cities of Holyoke, Chelsea, Springfield, Fall River, New Bedford and Boston where graduation rates are half that (or less) of most other communities. In Boston, 7.5% of 16-24 year olds, nearly three quarters of whom are African American or Latino, are neither in school nor working. Even before the current economic crisis, youth unemployment in Boston and surrounding areas was at an all time high, a downturn attributed to limited growth in retail, a major employer of young adults, and a growing preference of managers to hire adult immigrants over teenagers (CLMS, 2004). The state must also confront what the Massachusetts Citizens for Children calls "Massachusetts' poverty paradox" that finds 12% of children still living in poverty – with 82,000 living in extreme poverty – despite the relative wealth of the state (MCC, 2008).

Rhode Island

Nine percent (9%) of Rhode Island young adults aged 18 to 24 were disconnected in 2007, a significant decrease from 14% reported in 2002. Parallel trends include a decrease in the percentage of 16-19 year olds not in school or working (6% in 2007, down 1% from the previous year) and an important decrease in high school dropouts (7% in 2006, a 30% improvement from the previous year) (Kids Count 2008). That said, Rhode Island's dropout rate is still the highest in New England and ranks 27th out of 50 nationally; it remains a key factor in the state's disconnection rate.

Rhode Island also suffers from a high rate of child poverty (17.5% in 2007) – higher than all other New England states and about the same as the national rate of 18%. As elsewhere, poverty is strongly linked to the likelihood of dropping out of school. Students in six core cities (cities with more than 15% of children living in poverty) are two and a half times more likely to drop out of high school than students in the remainder of the state (KC RI, 2009).

Low high school completion and high poverty rates are particularly problematic for young urban Latino Rhode Islanders, a rapidly growing demographic (up to 18% in 2007 from 14% in 2000). Most Latino youth are concentrated in three cities – Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence – and almost half (42%) come from families living in poverty – families with the lowest median income for Latinos across the country. Rhode Island's challenge with disconnected young adults is closely tied to these demographic dynamics.

Vermont

Nine (9%) of 18 to 24 year-olds in Vermont were disconnected in 2007. Overall, the number of 16-19 year olds not in school or working has decreased by more than 25% since 2000. Child poverty rates are relatively low and steady (11th lowest in the country), as are high school dropout rates and racial demographics. One notable trend affecting disconnected young adults in Vermont has been the state's tight rental housing market, the tightest in the U.S. in 2006, and its impact on youth aging out of foster care. Seventeen (17%) of homeless or near-homeless served by the state's transition living program in

2005 were youth aging out of the system, a trend we also see nationally (Voices for Vermont’s Children 2007). In 2007, the state passed new legislation to extend services to foster care youth until age 22, a policy advance which may also reduce the likelihood of disconnection.

New Hampshire

Nine percent (9%) of New Hampshire’s 18 to 24 year-olds are disconnected, with Vermont and Rhode Island the lowest DYA rate in New England. At 4%, New Hampshire also had the lowest rate of out-of-school unemployed 16-19 year olds in the country in 2006 (a 20% improvement since 2000). The child poverty rate is only about half the national average but has increased since 2000 by 3% (NH Kids Count 2008, Kids Count 2008).

New Hampshire’s economy is undergoing a shift from one in which there were many good-paying jobs to a “boutique” economy, where those with the highest skills are highly paid and little is available to the rest of the workforce. Since the 2001 recession, living-wage jobs are becoming scarcer and family incomes of all but the highest earners have stagnated (NH KC, 2008). These unforgiving economic conditions raise the stakes for young adults who are disconnected in New Hampshire. Kids Count New Hampshire recently identified 60,000 children living in 27 cities and towns scattered across rural and urban areas of the state who are performing significantly worse on an index of child well-being (teen birth rates, dropout rates, etc.).

OLDER DYA: MARGINAL ATTACHMENT IN THE LATE TWENTIES

This paper focuses on demographics and trends for DYA ages 16-24; however, it is fair to ask what is happening to New England young adults outside that range. A disconnected young adult at 24 may still face significant barriers to successfully engaging in work at the age of 25. How are New Englanders in their late twenties faring? Data on these older young adults (aged 25 to 29) is much sparser, but we get a glimpse by examining their participation in the labor market.

Table 2: Unemployed and Marginalized Workers Aged 25-29, 2008

New England States	2008 Official Unemployment Rate (U3) ¹	2008 Alternative Unemployment Rate (U6) ²
New Hampshire	3.30%	4.90%
Massachusetts	4.70%	6.10%
Connecticut	6.20%	8.10%
Vermont	6.20%	8.30%
Maine	7.40%	9.90%
Rhode Island	8.20%	9.70%
<i>United States</i>	<i>6.5%</i>	<i>n/a</i>

Source: BLS, 2009

In New England, the official 2008 unemployment rate for 25-29 year olds ranges from a low of 3.3% in New Hampshire to a high of 8.2% in Rhode Island. However, this rate does not include only marginally attached workers, e.g., underemployed, workers who have looked for a job in the past year but are not looking currently. This alternative unemployment measure shows much higher rates of disconnection among New England 25-29 year olds, particularly in Maine and Vermont.

¹ Total unemployed, as a percent of the civilian labor force (official unemployment rate) (BLS, 2009)

² Total unemployed, plus discouraged workers, plus conditionally interested workers, plus underemployed, as a percent of the civilian labor force plus all marginally attached workers. (BLS, 2009)

HIGH RISK GROUPS FEEDING NEW ENGLAND'S DYA POPULATION

Because it is difficult to get a close-up view of DYA in each New England state, given data limitations, it is important to understand which young people face the greatest risk for disconnection. Almost all disconnected young adults (90%) fell into one of following four groups when they were between the ages of 14-18. These four groups comprised only 6% of the age group in 2006.

- Unmarried teenage mothers;
- Adolescents (14-19 yr. olds) in the foster system;
- Youth deeply involved with the juvenile justice system;
- Native-born youth not enrolled in school who do not have a high school diploma

There is substantial overlap between these categories of at-risk youth, e.g., in Wald's study more than a third (37%) of youth in foster care had not received a high school diploma 12 to 18 months after emancipation and 35% of teen mothers were also high school dropouts. It is also important to remember that while almost all DYA came from these subgroups; however, not all members of these groups disconnect when they reach adulthood.

Table 3: Youth at-Risk of Disconnection (Aged 14-18) by Subgroup, 2006

	# of Youth 14-18	% of total population of at-risk 14-18 year-olds (1.3 M in 2006) ³
High School Dropouts (2006)	765,551	59%
Unmarried Teen Mothers (2006)	370,792	29%
Youth in Foster Care (2005)	368,792	28%
Incarcerated Youth (2006)	90,587	7%

Source: Rosch et al., 2008

Demographically, 53% of this highest-risk population is female because unmarried teenage mothers are included. Males are significantly overrepresented in each of the other three high-risk groups: foster youth, adjudicated youth and high school dropouts. Racially, nearly half (48%) are white, 25% African American, 21% Latino, and 6% other.

Looking across the New England states, there is significant variation in the degree to which each state harbors youth in the four highest risk subgroups. This section will discuss each high-risk subgroup, highlighting New England state vulnerabilities.

High School Dropouts

Nationally, this is the largest of the at-risk subgroups for 14-18 year-olds, accounting for 59% of all at-risk youth. In New England, all of the states, with the notable exception of Rhode Island, have only 4% of 16-19 year-olds who are high school dropouts (a national low). Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts each boast at least a 50% improvement in this indicator from 2000 to 2006. In contrast, Rhode Island ranks 27th nationally, with 7% of 16-19 year-olds high school dropouts. Dropout rates for the class of 2008 are substantially higher for certain subgroups in Rhode Island:

- 27% for English Language Learners;

³ This sums to more than 100% because of significant overlap between categories.

- 25% for students with disabilities;
- 25% for Hispanic students;
- 24% for low-income students.

While no other New England state suffers from similarly high dropout rates statewide, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire have cities with strikingly high rates. In Connecticut, New Britain is facing a 23.9% dropout rate; Bridgeport hovers at 22.4%. In Massachusetts, Boston's dropout rate is 32% over four years; statewide, dropout rates are highest for urban Latinos, African Americans and males. In New Hampshire, the 27 cities and towns high concentrations of at-risk youth have an average 20% cumulative dropout rate. Vermont has never had as big a problem. Burlington has even managed to cut its rate significantly and Vermont's innovative High School Completion Program, launched in 2007, will likely continue to improve dropout rates across the state.

Teen Mothers

Teen mothers constitute 29% of the population of youth at risk of disconnection nationwide. According to a 2004 Casey Foundation study, only one-third of teen mothers complete a diploma. Overall, teen mothers are relatively underrepresented in New England. New Hampshire has the lowest teen birth rate (the lowest in the country) and Rhode Island has the region's highest (12th lowest nationwide) with 10% of all babies born to mothers under the age of 20. The majority of teen births in Rhode Island occurred in the six core cities (child poverty above 15%); Latina women (15-19) have a teen birth rate more than three times the state average (RI Kids Count, 2009). And while Connecticut has a relatively low overall teen birth rate, extreme racial and ethnic disparities in the rates are cause for concern: Latina and African American women are seven and four times, respectively, more likely to give birth as teens than white women (CT Kids Count, 2008).

Youth in Foster Care

At 28%, youth (14-18) in foster care are about as large an at-risk DYA subgroup nationwide as teen mothers. Foster care youth still in care at age 18 – about 20,000 annually in the U.S. – face exceptional challenges as they “age out” of the system. Some benefit from state and federal programs that aid in the transition. However, several studies have found that within two to four years after leaving foster care, only half of these young adults are regularly employed, almost half have been arrested, a quarter have been homeless, and over half of the women had given birth (Wald and Martinez, 2003).

Vermont and Connecticut provide extended services to foster youth, until age 22 or 23 respectively, which likely provides a countervailing force against disconnection. In contrast, 731 young adults in Massachusetts aged out of foster care in 2004, without a permanent family placement. This accounts for 60% of all youth who aged out of care in New England, a disproportionate amount given the state's share of 18-24 year olds (46%). Latino and African American youth make up more than half of Massachusetts' DYS caseload (CLMS, Ethnic and Social Inequities in Indicators, 2004). Maine has the second highest number of youth to age out of care without a permanent placement. Nonetheless, in Maine, youth have had relatively high rates of success in completing high school and entering college. According to a 1999 study of Maine's foster youth, 57% completed high school and 24% entered college (4-7% higher than national averages).

Incarcerated Youth

While they make up only a small proportion (7%) of the group of 14-18 year-olds at highest risk of future disconnection nationwide, “they are at especially high risk of very long term disconnection, given

recidivism rates that are generally over fifty percent and the negative effects of incarceration on school completion and employment prospects” (Wald and Martinez, 2003). Throughout New England, rates of youth detention and incarceration are lower than the national average. Maine’s rate of detained and committed youth is lowest in the region, about one quarter of the national average (33/100,000 10-15 year olds in 2006). Connecticut has the region’s highest rate (114/100,000). Connecticut also has an extremely high ratio of youth of color to white youth in custody: 8:1 in 2006 compared to 5:1 in Massachusetts and 3:1 nationally.

Section IV. Reasons Why Young Adults Drop Out and Disconnect

Having examined the data for who constitutes the disconnected young adult population, this section looks at three key questions: (1) why do young adults become disconnected, (2) why do some re-engage, and (3) what plans do those who have reconnected have for their future and what are they doing about it? In order to more fully understand each of these issues, we examined the current research and conducted two focus groups with 23 disconnected young adults from the Boston area and rural Vermont in May 2009.

A significant amount of research has previously been conducted on why young people leave school before earning a high school diploma. The research clearly shows that there is no single reason that young people dropout, rather it is a mix of factors that differs by individual and often by subgroup. The reasons for dropping out can be loosely categorized as follows:

- academics (e.g. bored, fell too far behind),
- lack of connection to adults and peers, and
- life challenges (e.g. needed to work, got pregnant).

In *The Silent Epidemic*, a study conducted for the Gates Foundation (Civic Enterprises, 2006), youth who dropped out reported their reason for doing so was that:

- (47%) classes were not interesting,
- (43%) they had missed too many days and could not catch up
- (42%) they had spent time with people who were not interested in school,
- (38%) they had too much freedom and not enough rules, and
- (35%) they were failing in school.

The Massachusetts Department of Education reported parallel findings from a local study based on seven focus groups held in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the state, with current students and young adults who had dropped out of school (Student and Secondary Support Unit at the Massachusetts Department of Education, 2007).

The most commonly mentioned school-related issues by focus group members as to why they or someone they knew had dropped out were:

- Being generally “overwhelmed” by school;
- Falling behind on credits and struggling to keep up, often due to absenteeism; and/or
- Out-of-school suspensions; lack of perceived “help” from school staff;
- School staff recommendations to drop out and enter a GED or other alternative high school program or charter school;

“I think they [school administration] are trying to filter out students from the school.”

– MA DOE Focus Group Participant

- School environments that felt “restrictive;”
- Lack of respect from school staff; and
- Poor student-teacher relationships.

External factors contributing to leaving school were:

- Needing or wanting jobs/income;
- Skipping school with friends;
- Mental, emotional, or physical health problems;
- Lack of parental support;
- Drug or partying influences; and
- Family and personal problems.

“There are so many other things are going on besides school – school is not a priority.”

– MA DOE Focus Group Participant

NELLIE MAE EDUCATION FOUNDATION DYA FOCUS GROUPS

The following section summarizes findings from two young adults focus groups commissioned by NMEF for this project and conducted in Boston and Newport, Vermont, in May 2009. A total of 23 young adults, mostly high school dropouts, participated.

Participant Background

Boston Group: The group included 12 young adults (6 male, 6 female) from four non-profit education/job training programs based in Boston and Chelsea – see Attachment 1. Participants were selected by their respective programs and represented diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (42% Hispanic, 42% African American, 8% Asian, 8% White), a range of ages (17-26), and a variety of other demographic and social characteristics (immigrants, English language learners, juvenile offenders, foster care youth, parents). Two participants had earned their high school diploma, three their GED, and the remaining seven are working toward their GED as part of their current program. Most had been with their current program for at least one year.

Rural Vermont Group: The group included 11 young adults (7 female, 4 male) from the Community College of Vermont (CCV) and several surrounding non-profit organizations—see Attachment 2. Participants were selected by CCV in consultation with their non-profit partners. Of the 11 participants, there was only one Hispanic, with the remainder white. Three reported being involved at one time with the juvenile justice system, one was in foster care, and four were either young single mothers or pregnant and single. Three participants had earned a high school diploma, one was home schooled and passed the GED, and the other 7 had dropped out of high school. Most had been with their current program for at least one year.

Findings across Both Groups

- 1. The primary reason for leaving school was usually not directly related to academic performance.** *Boston Group:* A combination of family/personal factors and classroom pedagogy were the main reasons given. In addition to external factors like parental substance abuse, divorce, and homelessness, students had other priorities including work, parenthood, and “street life.” Many of the young adults reported that they had been “ok,” “good” or even “high honor” students before high school. All reported they felt bored in high school “most or all of the time.”

“My outside life wasn’t stable. Addict parents. Homelessness. I couldn’t focus. I couldn’t get my mind set... I was depressed.”

“Teachers need to find different ways to teach. It was boring. Too boring. I slept.”

Vermont Group: Seven of the 11 students left high school for one reason or another without getting their diploma. Many of the students said they were bored in school and that they felt the teachers in high school didn’t care. No student said that the work was too hard.

“They put me in the idiot class where I was bored and it was a huge waste of time.”

“When I was 12, I chose a book on being a lawyer as part of a career investigation project and my teacher told me to put it back and find something more realistic; school was so boring but college is much better.”

- 2. Grades 8-10 were critical transition years. They coincided with increased complexity and challenge in life outside school, employment options, and movement to distinctly less supportive school environments.** *Boston:* Several young adults dropped out as early as grade 9. Many made the final decision their junior year. Most began experiencing issues in grades 8-10 that would ultimately drive their decision to leave. Almost all felt the high school they left was largely or completely unsupportive (no or only 1-2 adults reached out to support them) and contrasted the environment with other more supportive middle and high schools they had attended.

“I was high honors in 7th grade. In 8th grade, everything went downhill. My parents separated. My mom was struggling, crying. We didn’t have money.”

“I was different. I had home and teacher support but my focus wasn’t there. It was on street life and work.”

Vermont: Only two students said that transition points were significant problems. However, many talked becoming disengaged and doing poorly in middle school

“The transition from elementary to middle school was tough—one day I was a child and the next year they expected me to be an adult.”

- 3. Adults did not recognize or respond effectively to telltale signs of dropout risk.**

Boston: While some participants felt their teachers and other adults tried to help (calling home, dropping off assignments, etc.), most felt the adults in their lives did not or could not respond effectively. They described parents too caught up in their own issues to communicate clear expectations about school and provide the push they needed, and educators and administrators operating in reactive mode – only after youth got in behavioral trouble. Adult reactions at home and in school were often ambivalent or counterproductive. Many felt that adult expectations of them were very low.

“Lots of kids are physically crying for help. Teachers and parents are not reading the signs or they don’t care....The school could have seen it.”

“My teacher said I might as well drop out and do my GED.”

Vermont: Nearly every participant believes that it would have helped them stay in school had they had a teacher or other adult to turn to. Of the 11, just two said that this was actually the case while in high school. One-half of the students report connecting after high school to a mentor and that it helped them (in one case, “it turned my life around.”). High school teachers and others appeared to some of the participants as not caring and to others as simply not having the time. Some contrasted this with their current program where teachers and other adults stay after class and in other ways make themselves accessible.

“They need to have smaller classes, or to combine teachers and use aides so that there is more individual attention.”

“Teachers need to be like mentors” (in response to how many had a teacher or adult that they could reach out to for help; only two said they did).

- 4. Young adults take a significant amount of time to navigate recovery options and find the program that best addresses their needs. Finding programs is not an issue.** *Boston:* On average, young adults in this group took 1-2 years and participated in at least 2 other GED or GED/job training programs before enrolling in their current program. Some young adults had trouble finding the right program (learning style, educational goals) or completed one training program but enrolled in another in order to develop additional job skills. Several said they simply needed the time and work experience to understand the value of education. Everyone in the group spent at least six months out of school before enrolling in a program. Almost all learned about program opportunities by word of mouth; no one learned about them from their high school or another program.

“It took me two years to figure this out.... I went to take the GED but I failed the ELA part so I gave up and worked another year...I felt like I was hitting a dead end [with jobs]. ...It took me time to realize I needed education to reach my goals.”

“I started a program. I lasted two days, then I got pregnant.”

Vermont: After dropping out of high school, none of the seven students re-connected to another program for at least six months. When they did, many said that they tried multiple programs before they found the one that helped them. Some students made a distinction between programs that seemed to focus on remediation or passing a test like the GED versus providing more comprehensive supports. While students who were attending some type of college program were very positive about their experience, at least one student reported leaving an area college because she did not like it and now succeeding at CCV because of its “supportive” atmosphere.

“At the Tutorial they just handed me work. At the ABE program they show that they care and can give me the type of help that I need.”

- 5. Young adults found multidimensional, multiservice programs more effective than standard, standalone GED programs.** *Boston:* A number of participants had negative experiences with the standard GED program. They like that their current program focuses on their longer term education and career goals and takes a comprehensive approach that includes the development of academic skills, job skills and specific certifications, life skills and personal development.

“I started a GED program but they told me I didn’t have to come because I had passed the MCAS. Then they wanted me to come to class for a year and do nothing.... I felt like I needed help preparing for college but they said ‘that’s not what our curriculum is.’”

“I don’t like school but I like this. I see myself as a different person. I have more skills. I see things I can do and improve (professionalism, writing, speaking).”

For Vermont, see previous finding.

- 6. Instructional methodology, instructor flexibility and accessibility, and personalized support matter.** *Boston:* When describing what made their current programs work, participants described caring instructors who use methods that fit their learning styles, blend structure (clear instructions, high expectations, incentives/disincentives) with flexibility (letting students decide how they can best accomplish a task) and support (one-on-one help when needed).

“They understand individual needs and design a way to meet those needs.”

“I like the rules and structure. It’s like a regular job...I thought I would fail .I talked to my case manager about how to deal...he motivated me...said, I see a good future for you...a good head on your shoulders.”

Vermont: Students described in detail being unengaged and uninterested in the way material was taught in high school. They contrasted this with their current learning experiences that they report as being highly engaging and connected to their interests. Many clearly see the link between what they are studying now and future interests. They talked extensively about enjoying the freedom to choose what and how they study.

“Why can’t the teachers adapt to different learning styles—I can’t learn by taking notes. I have to concentrate on listening but they wouldn’t let me.”

- 7. Young adults feel their current program will prepare them for the next steps they need to take to achieve their education, career and life goals.** *Boston:* Young adults seem happy with their current programs and feel that they are receiving the support they need. Several participants remarked on their program’s ability to connect them to other resources and services (transportation, food, and job and college research). Currently, areas where they feel least ready are: math skills, reading, writing, self-confidence, navigating financial aid. Again, most feel that their program can address these needs. Financial aid counseling was the only area several participants thought might be beyond the expertise of their program.

“I want to own my own business. [The program] is teaching me budgeting...different educational routes for business.”

“Our program has tons of connections. It’s easy to find information.”

Vermont: As in the Boston group, students seem happy with their current programs and feel that they are receiving the support they need. Every student but one had a clear plan for the future and said that they were receiving the information that they need to pursue it.

“At CCV they give us choices in learning and treat us like adults” (commenting on why are they succeeding now)

“We found teachers that care and a good curriculum”

- 8. Most young adults plan to attend college and feel they know the steps involved; however, a number of them are still working through considerations or reservations related to career choices, finances and the college learning environment.** *Boston:* Some participants are worried that college will be “like high school,” they will fail, or they will discover they simply don’t like the career they prepared for. Others are weighing financial considerations, e.g., how to pay for college, how much education they can afford and when versus their need for money now.

“I feel like I shouldn’t have to go to school....like I should have a life experience degree. It could be a setback for me. I hated school....I’m afraid to learn that I’ll fail.”

“I’m afraid I won’t like it...I want to do something but may not be able to get it.”

Vermont: Similar to the Boston group, Vermont participants expressed some anxiety about whether or not they could afford to continue college until they reached their goals. Some worried about whether they will be able to overcome learning hurdles as the academic challenges increased.

Similarities and Differences between the Urban and Rural Groups

The experiences shared by the urban and rural DYA participants are remarkably similar. The most striking similarities are:

- Both groups report leaving school because they were either bored or did not believe that the adults in their school or at home cared, not because the work was too hard.
- Students did not feel that they were being taught in ways that best matched their individual learning styles.
- Both described external factors (“I wasn’t in a place to finish school at the time”) and internal factors (“school was so boring”) for why they left, but overwhelmingly said that had school been different they likely would have graduated.
- Nearly every student heard about their current program through word of mouth from a friend, parent, or other adult.
- In terms of re-connecting, many expressed the view that all “second chance” programs are not created equal; those providing comprehensive services and relevant hands-on learning work for DYA work. Drop-in centers or those that “feel like high school” do not.
- Students have ambitious plans for their futures but also have some financial concerns and self-doubts as to whether they will succeed.

Differences:

- Students in the rural group spoke more about being stereotyped by teachers and tracked into “dummy classes” than did the urban group.
- Teenage pregnancy appears to be a greater issue with the rural group.

“They stereotyped me—you’re a criminal so we are going to put you in this class”

“The peg you as such and such and then you can’t get out of that label”

“Don’t like being characterized as something; everyone knew that you were supposed to be dumb because you were in this class but I liked the teacher and wanted to prove to him that I was smart.” (From three participants in the VT group)

A Note on What Keeps DYA in “Second Chance” Programs

As the research and the data from the two focus groups in Boston and Vermont show, there is a high degree of movement of DYA from one program to another. In many cases this compounds the challenges young adults face as they not only have left school without a diploma but may enter and leave multiple “second chance” programs.

In 2002, Public Private Ventures summarized reasons why DYA stay in programs:

- Supportive relationships with trusted staff;
- Sense of belonging;
- Perception that their needs are being met.

The DYA in both focus groups confirmed this finding. Both groups were clear as to why they had left one or more second chance programs and were succeeding in their current program. Almost universally DYA described liking programs that provided interesting learning opportunities, in which they were treated like adults, and where they felt a sense of community.

Remaining Questions to Explore

While answering key issues, the Boston and Vermont focus groups raised the following questions for possible further investigation:

1. What is the interaction between internal affective/developmental issues that DYA face and the way school is organized?
2. What is the role of parents and families in students’ decisions to drop out and to re-connect?

Section V. Services Typically Delivered to Disconnected Young Adults and Who Delivers Them

Having explored the typical characteristics of DYA, including its diversity, this section examines the types of services typically delivered to this population. Services are provided by multiple sectors, with different funding sources, and often with competing outcomes that are not formally connected. The types of services offered are sometimes determined by subgroups such as pregnant and parenting teens, those involved with the juvenile justice or foster care systems, and immigrants.

A DYA SERVICES TAXONOMY

In Table 4 below, we present a taxonomy ordered by the degree of disconnection. Stage I represents the greatest disconnection and Stage VIII, the least. For the purposes of the taxonomy, we define the degree of disconnection by the most likely entry points for different types of DYA seeking to re-engage with some form of services. The taxonomy also implies the possible gap between current skills and those needed for long-term educational and career success based on where DYA are served.

One note is that within the field of DYA there is some confusion regarding how to label a DYA who is now re-engaged. For example, is a former dropout who is now in a public alternative high school and is close to earning a diploma a “disconnected young adult”? For the purposes of this paper and the taxonomy, we define disconnected young adults as those who have been disconnected one or more times regardless of whether they have reconnected to services. In other words, once disconnected, the young person remains disconnected until they progress to completing some postsecondary education and training.

To illustrate how the taxonomy is arranged, take the example of a 17-year old gang member who has dropped out of high school and has not received any education and training services. This young person would more likely re-enter a *Stage I (Initial Engagement)* program similar to Roca in Chelsea, MA. We placed this young person into the category of most disconnected because he or she is furthest from acquiring the skills necessary for career success (again, equated with completing at least one year of postsecondary education and training).

On the other hand, an unemployed, 26-year old high school graduate is more likely to re-enter in *Stage VIII (Postsecondary-Based Programs)*. He or she has completed high school, is likely to have relatively higher academic and career-related skills, and may have significant work experience. He or she arguably falls into the category of the least disconnected given that this student is much closer to completing some postsecondary education and training than young adults in other categories.

The taxonomy is constructed to describe a range of programs within these stages that cut across all subgroups. However, we have included examples of programs that are designed for specific subgroups. These are listed in parentheses. The four programs described later in the paper are ***bolded and italicized***.

Table 4: Taxonomy of Services for Disconnected Younger Adults

Stages of Re-Entry for DYA	Examples of Programs Serving DYA at each Stage	Description of DYA and Programs Serving them at each Stage
I. Initial Engagement	Youth Violence Reduction Program, Philadelphia (juvenile justice) <i>Roca, Chelsea, MA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DYA in this category have left school without earning a high school diploma, are not currently employed in a job that pays a living wage, but are considering joining an education and employment program (they may also be younger and having more recently disconnected) Programs in this category offer the opportunity for DYA to explore whether they want to commit to an education, training, or employment program
Transition between Stages	↑ ↓	DYA often move between engagement and disengagement, particularly at this stage of their development

II. Adult Basic Education/GED	Jobs Corps (national) Community Education Pathways to Success, New York City New Haven Adult education Program & Gateway Community College, CT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps students 16 and older, no longer in traditional high school, improve their academic and “career” skills and earn a high school diploma or GED • May include college transition programs but do not formally integrate preparing for the GED with earning significant college credits
III. GED Plus Models	Generic model developed by Commonwealth Corporation and adopted by the US Department of Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to the Early College model in that it fully integrates passing the GED and earning a significant number of college credits • Ideally located on a college campus
IV. Alternative Schools, including work-based learning models	Good Shepherd Model (New York City) <i>Opportunity High School</i> (under development by Our Piece of the Pie in Hartford, CT) New Futures School, Albuquerque, NM (<i>teen parents</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caters to students who have left the K-12 system or transferred from a more traditional high school where they did not succeed • Many of these students are over-aged and under-credited • Tend to place greater emphasis on youth development principles and provide more wrap-around support services than traditional schools • Often offer high school/college dual enrollment credits but do not have a formal postsecondary articulation like the early college model
V. High School & GED/Postsecondary Blends	Gateway to College Program (national) Early College High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurs the line between high school and postsecondary education and training • Students earn a significant number of college credit while still in the program with the goal of earning a two-year or four-year college degree
Transition between Stages		At this transition stage, students are moving from having earned a high school credential to the next stage of their education and career development. Research shows that relatively few are completing even one year of college and moving into good paying careers.
VI. Earned Regular High School Diploma or GED (but lack the necessary academic or self-motivational skills to succeed in postsecondary and career)	New England ABE-to-College Transition Project City Year, Boston, MA Tree House Coaching to College Program (foster youth, Seattle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic enhancements to enable students to enter postsecondary education/training or a job (e.g. sometimes called a “college prep” model) • Some focus on community service as a mechanism to provide training and develop leadership while providing post-program stipends to be used for further education
VII. Occupational and Postsecondary Blends	<i>Year Up</i> (national) Manufacturing Bridge Program, Chicago West Hills Community College Psychiatric Technician Program, Coalinga, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve young adults who have already earned a high school credential, or are committed to doing so <i>and</i> earning a postsecondary credential and/or specific career/technical skills • Variations within this category include “career pathways” strategies tailored to prepare students for specific jobs
VIII. Postsecondary-Based Programs	<i>Tacoma Community College (Immigrants)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve young adults who have entered postsecondary education but are in need of significant continued academic and other

		support
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COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

Many programs serving DYA rely on collaborations across multiple agencies or multiple sectors, such as three-way partnerships among community-based organizations, employers, and community colleges. Collaborations typically develop because programs believe there are specific services and support other organizations could (or must) provide in order to improve student outcomes. At times, building these connections and relationships has helped educators and youth workers identify important service gaps and to develop more comprehensive educational programming for disconnected youth. Vermont’s recently-legislated High School Completion Program (HSCP) is one such example (described in detail in Section VI), which has significantly increased collaboration between adult education providers and school districts.

At the federal level, an interagency initiative called Shared Youth Vision (SYV) has been working to improve agency collaboration directed at the “neediest” or most vulnerable youth since 2005. Nine federal agencies and 29 states are now involved. At a national level, the federal partnership has tried to model the collaboration they hope to expand locally, e.g. collaborative RFPs, resource sharing, multiagency strategic planning and training events, an interagency technical assistance “Solutions Desk,” etc. At the state level, SYV teams are developing stronger collaborative practices and resolving system and policy barriers that have impeded integrated service delivery. Examples:

- Improved interagency referral system (Kansas)
- Development of a universal referral and release of information authorization form (Mississippi)
- Comprehensive online service provider resource database and GIS locator system (Minnesota)
- Housing application preference points for youth aging out of foster care (Dubuque, Iowa)
- Integrated, multiagency service teams for incarcerated youth (Utah)
- Creation of a state level “Job Developer” position in order to leverage more employment opportunities for the neediest youth (Delaware)

Rhode Island, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and to a lesser degree Massachusetts, have all been involved in Shared Youth Vision. This past year, Rhode Island successfully piloted a new collaborative case management approach, linked to the state’s Youth Development Centers, that enables agencies serving high risk youth to work together to increase the amount and quality of services youth can access. In the first year, this approach increased service options youth accessed across systems by 75%.

FOUR INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR SERVING DISCONNECTED YOUTH

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation has constructed a *Transformative Practices Rubric* (see Appendix 4) to benchmark the characteristics of high quality education and training programs that might lead to dramatically better results for people in the K-12, adult basic education, and higher learning systems. In the remainder of this section we examine four innovative programs and highlight elements of each that seem to align well with the NMEF’s vision for transformation.

Roca (Chelsea, Massachusetts): Stage I Program

Youth needing services within Stage I are typically the most disconnected, often the most recently disconnected, and the youngest. Many are initially uninterested in re-engaging in education, training, and or employment programs or are unaware of the possibilities.

Founded in 1988, Roca is a community-based youth development organization committed to serving such DYAs. Roca’s population is among the most disenfranchised and disengaged young people ages 14-24 (street/court/gang involved; dropouts; young parents; and refugee and immigrants) in the Greater Boston area (including the communities of Chelsea, Revere, East Boston, and Charlestown, MA).

Roca builds relationships with the institutions in the lives of young people (criminal justice, child welfare, education, health, etc.) and helps them re-engage in society, moving them into educational, employment, and life skills programming.

Outreach is on-the-street, in places where young people hang out, in people’s homes, and at schools. Outreach is focused on engagement and deliberate work with young people to take tangible steps to change their lives. Staff are accessible 24 hours a day as needed. Waiting for many of these young people to come into Roca on their own is not a realistic expectation. Youth workers continue to meet them in the places where they are until they are ready to come to Roca and engage with the youth worker in structured programs. Once in Roca, services are provided in multiple locations at flexible times.

Roca employs a variety of staff experts in different arenas, including outreach, counseling, mental health, and academic and career educators. Its program is driven by competencies and individual performance goals for students in the arenas of developmental assets (e.g. resiliency), physical assets (access to medical services), academics (passing the five sections of the GED examination), and employability (getting and keeping a job). Given that Roca’s goal for students is self-reliance, nearly all of its curriculum and instruction is based on real-life applications measured by real life success and failure.

The Nellie Mae Education funded five programs in August 2008 under its Pathways to Higher Learning initiative. While Roca did not apply, we have used the table that the foundation used to summarize each proposal’s attributes to analyze Roca based on the Transformative Practices Rubric.

Table 5: ROCA’s Transformative Attributes

General Category	Roca Attributes
<i>Partnership Development & Community Engagement</i>	Collaboration with the juvenile justice system, local social service and health organizations, community leaders, and local employers to outreach to disconnected youth, provide wrap-around social and health services, and employment opportunities
<i>21st Century Learning Standards</i>	Emphasis on initial re-connection, obtaining a stable life situation, and development of 21 st century skills over the long-term
<i>Curriculum</i>	Curriculum linked to personal, academic, and career competencies
<i>Assessment Practice & Accountability</i>	Working towards basic skills proficiency and ultimately to pass the five GED examinations as well as the skills necessary to obtain and keep employment
<i>Variety of Educators</i>	Shared staffing structure that includes teachers, social workers, mental health works, and youth development specialists
<i>Variety of Learning Settings/Times for</i>	Extended-day, year-long program

<i>Learning</i>	Community-based internships
<i>Secondary/Postsecondary Blends</i>	Agreements with local community colleges help students enter a variety of remedial, certificate, and AA programs

Our Piece of the Pie (Hartford, Connecticut): Stage IV Program

Small high schools, including those designed for DYA who have either dropped out of high school or are highly at-risk of doing so, are spreading to many urban areas. In September 2009, Our Piece of the Pie, one of Hartford’s leading youth development agencies, will open OPPortunity High School (OHS), in partnership with the Hartford Public Schools. By combining youth development principles with a robust academic agenda, OHS intends to create an individualized pathway to higher learning for overage, under-credited youth.

The OHS model will integrate a variety of teaching and learning models (classroom-based, small group, and one-on-one) with new forms of instructional technology. An expanded curriculum will emphasize 21st century skills while exposing students to a range of career competencies and experiential learning opportunities. In addition, OHS will embed intensive support services into its extended-day, year-round format.

At the heart of the OHS model is a staffing structure that includes both teachers and youth development specialists (YDS). With a student to YDS ratio of 25 to 1, students will receive a high degree of personal attention, including constant feedback on meeting benchmarks as established in the students’ individualized service plans.

OPP shares many similarities with the largest network of alternative high schools, the Alternative High School Initiative. AHSI was launched in 2003 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in response to the growing national trend of diminishing high school graduation rates. These schools are student-centered and strive to have youth voice, project-based learning and leadership development drive the learning process. All share a set of universal distinguishers or features that are evidence across their design:

- authentic learning, teaching, and performance assessment;
- personalized school culture;
- shared leadership and responsibility;
- supportive partnerships; and
- future focus for students.

The Nellie Mae Education funded OPP in August 2008 under its Pathways to Higher Learning initiative. It summarized each proposal’s attributes based on the Transformative Practices Rubric as shown for OPP in Table 6 below.

Table 6: OPP’s Transformative Attributes

General Outcome Category	OPP Outcome
<i>Partnership Development & Community Engagement</i>	Collaboration with Capital Workforce Partners who will play a major role in embedding career competencies into the OHS curriculum
<i>21st Century Learning Standards</i>	Emphasis on 21 st century skills

<i>Curriculum</i>	Curriculum linked to career competencies
<i>Assessment Practice & Accountability</i>	Working towards an accelerated credit system based on course competency rather than seat time
<i>Variety of Educators</i>	Shared staffing structure that includes teachers and youth development specialists
<i>Variety of Learning Settings/Times for Learning</i>	Extended-day, year-long program Community-based internships
Secondary/Postsecondary Blends	Through a partnership with Capital Community College, OPP will test out whether students who have opportunities to move beyond seat-time requirements will be more likely to test out of remedial courses

Year Up (Providence, Rhode Island): Stage VII Program

There are few programs in New England that connect DYA to occupational and postsecondary blended strategies. One such model is Year Up Providence. Programs in Stage VII offer intensive education, apprenticeships, and articulation agreements with colleges. They address both job skills (technical and professional) and higher education as necessary to provide a viable path to economic self-sufficiency.

Year Up is a one-year, intensive training program that provides urban young adults 18-24, with a unique combination of technical and professional skills, college credits, an educational stipend and corporate apprenticeship. It began in Boston and is now located in Atlanta, San Francisco, New York City, Providence, and Washington D.C. To date, Year Up reports the following outcomes for all of its participants:

- 100% placement of qualified students into apprenticeships
- 83% student retention
- 90% of apprentices meet or exceed apprenticeship partner expectations
- 87% of graduates placed in full or part-time positions within 4 months of graduation
- \$15/hr average wage at placement

Year Up is particularly strong on three dimensions of the NMEF Transformative Change Rubric. First, Year Up combines motivational, 21st century, and academic skills that are delivered through a variety of instructors (“variety of expert adults involved in appropriate roles”). Second, DYAs are taught on and off site, including at work sites (“variety of school and nonschool settings for learning”). Finally, Year Up’s curriculum is tailored to ensure that students are ready to be placed and to succeed at a job site upon completion of the program (“curriculum personalized, integrated with real world needs and developmental tasks”).

Table 7: Year Up’s Transformative Attributes

General Category	Year Up Attributes
<i>Partnership Development & Community Engagement</i>	Collaboration with employers in the information technology industry and other sectors and local colleges (Cambridge College for

	Year Up Boston)
<i>21st Century Learning Standards</i>	Emphasis on initial re-connection, obtaining a stable life situation, and development of 21 st century skills over the long-term
<i>Curriculum</i>	Curriculum linked to industry specific academic, technical, and 21 st century skills
<i>Assessment Practice & Accountability</i>	Working towards being hired by an IT or related company and maintaining employment. Before employment, students work under a structured point system, that if not met, leads to temporary termination from Year Up
<i>Variety of Educators</i>	Shared staffing structure that includes teachers and career specialists
<i>Variety of Learning Settings/Times for Learning</i>	Extended-day, year-long program Career exposures leading to employment
Secondary/Postsecondary Blends	Students earn college credits while in Year Up

Tacoma Community College (Tacoma, Washington): Stage VIII Program

Activities in the final stage of the taxonomy are critical in helping DYA achieve the goal of completing at least some postsecondary education and training. This has proven to be challenging for many DYA and the number completing even one year of postsecondary is extremely low. Dr. John Tyler, a professor at Brown University has placed the number of GED holders who complete at least one of postsecondary school at 12%.

With this as context, we examined Tacoma Community College in Washington where they recently integrated ABE, ESOL, and workforce programs to create pathways from low literacy into degree programs in several occupational areas. The new Dean of Workforce Education and the Director of Adult Education have developed a model for pathways that integrates contextualized ABE or ESOL with technical training in career paths.

These paths are designed as the first stage in advancement from basic skills to newly created certificates linked to higher wages and articulated to degree programs. Tacoma has implemented the model in early childhood education. Low-paid assistants with limited English speaking ability have been recruited from local child care centers—with the full support of their employers. They enter a program that integrates the curricula of ESOL and introductory early childhood education in an intensive, team-taught course (“variety of expert adults involved in appropriate roles”). At the completion of the program, graduates receive nine hours of credit toward a two-year degree and a certificate that entitles them to higher wages at local child care centers. The instructors, who originally were reluctant, now are the program’s champions.

The program provides counseling about degree programs, helps students with the application and financial aid process, and provides job placement and educational planning support. Classes are held in the evening so students can work during the day (“flexible times”). Students spend three hours each week on occupational content, nine hours on ESOL support, and ten hours in a practicum or work experience.

A major start-up cost was the development of an integrated ESOL and occupational curriculum based on the competencies required for a Childhood Development Associate certificate and articulated to credit-level degree programs. Another challenge was the cost of team teaching: double that of having one teacher per course. Currently, Tacoma is implementing the model in health care (“redesigned funding to reflect needs and achievement of students”). The idea is to link entry-level nurse assistants, including

those with very limited English, to higher-skilled and paying jobs (Jobs for the Future, Helping Low-Skilled Adults Succeed in College).

Table 8: Tacoma Community College Transformative Attributes

General Category	Tacoma Community College/Early Childhood Education Program Attributes
<i>Partnership Development & Community Engagement</i>	Partnerships with the Early Childhood Education employers
<i>21st Century Learning Standards</i>	Integrated curricula of ESOL and introductory early childhood education
<i>Curriculum</i>	Integrated ESOL and occupational curriculum based on the competencies required for a Childhood Development Associate certificate and articulated to credit-level degree programs
<i>Assessment Practice & Accountability</i>	Successful linkage of entry-level nurse assistants, including those with very limited English, to higher-skilled and paying jobs
<i>Variety of Educators</i>	Intensive, team-taught course
<i>Variety of Learning Settings/Times for Learning</i>	Classes are held in the evening so students can work during the day
Secondary/Postsecondary Blends	Designed as the first stage in advancement from basic skills to newly created certificates linked to higher wages and articulated to degree programs

Section VI. Public Policy and Disconnected Young Adults

Despite some excellent models, the landscape of services for DYA is complicated by multiple definitions, program offerings and service providers. Additionally, there appear to be too few connections between providers to enable DYA to easily reconnect and proceed through pathways that help them obtain the skills and credentials they need for future career success. Improving services for DYA will likely require significant changes in policies at the local, state, and federal levels. The following section details those most relevant to spurring reform.

FUNDING DYA EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training for most disconnected young adults is funded through several federal and state funding streams. The Government Accounting Office determined that \$3.7 billion was federally allocated in 2006 to more than 300 local programs dedicated to connecting these young adults to education and the workforce (GAO, 2008). The bulk of this funding is administered by four agencies: Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice. Each runs multiple programs serving disconnected young adults. However, in 2006, five programs accounted for 90% of the total federal funding for disconnected youth:

Table 9: Largest Five Federal Programs for Disconnected Young Adults

Program	Administering Federal Agency	2006 \$ on DYA
Job Corps	Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary	\$1.6B

Workforce Investment Act Youth Activities	Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration	\$941M
Adult Education Basic Grants to States	Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education	\$564M
Chafee Foster Care Independence Program	Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau	\$140M
Part E Developing, Testing, and Demonstrating Promising New Initiatives	Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention	\$106M
	Subtotal	\$3.3B (90% of Total)

Source: Government Accounting Office, 2008

This disconnected set of funding instruments serves to isolate the components of the education system serving DYA: for example, a youth dropping out of high school leaves behind public K-12 dollars and may enroll in a GED class at a community-based organization funded through WIA. After completing the course, a student wishing to enroll in community college is responsible for securing financial aid administered through the Higher Education Act. No one entity, or even pot of money, is dedicated to the comprehensive education of any young adult, something which is particularly problematic for disconnected youth who often jump from program to program.

Furthermore, the amount of money available to educate disconnected young adults is woefully inadequate to the size of the task and it is declining. The following research demonstrates this:

- Federal allocations to youth employment and training have declined by two-thirds since 1979, from approximately \$15 billion (inflation-adjusted) to only \$2.6 billion in 2000. (CLASP 2009)
- There is a critical lack of funding to high schools. The U.S. government provides \$11 billion in Title I funds for K-8 and \$12 billion in Pell Grants for college students yet only \$1 billion to high school students. (CLASP 2009)
- In 1998, \$1.6 billion was allocated through federal programs for out-of-school youth in comparison to the \$16 billion allocated to serve youth enrolled in college (Allen et al.).
- The Workforce Investment Act in 2006 made available \$2.3 billion to assist workers, only half of which was dedicated to skills training and education. This amounts to less than \$20 per worker per year. (Fremstead)
- Private foundation funding of programming for disconnected young adults has decreased in recent years. A study by Public/Private Ventures in 2002 of 40 foundations revealed that most are concentrating giving on very young children as opposed to young adults (PPV)

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 – the “stimulus” bill – offers some increases in funding. YouthBuild will benefit significantly (an increase of 64% for FY2010), with the Department of Labor stressing the transition of participants to community colleges and registered apprenticeships. The new \$125 million Career Pathways Innovation Fund will award grants to community colleges to expand career pathway programs in partnership with employers, the workforce investment system and other education and training providers. Another \$115 million is available for reintegration of ex-offenders, with \$88.5 million earmarked for youth offenders (a 7% increase).

Despite the fact that WIA youth activities were level-funded for FY2010, Congress extended the age eligibility for year-round education and training from 21 to 24 in order to make job training programs available to older disconnected young adults. At the same time, WIA was updated this year to offer a

Work Opportunity Tax Credit for employers who hire young adults who fit the Department of Labor’s definition of disconnection⁴ (CRS, 2009).

One strategy for addressing the issue of disparate federal funding streams is an approach in which the “money follows the learner.” Rather than allocating public money to programs for services they intend to deliver, each young person who leaves public school before achieving a high school diploma is entitled to use the remainder of the money that would have been allocated for his/her high school education for continuing education, until the age of 24.

In this case, local, state, and federal funds, such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) monies, would “follow” a student to an alternative program or set of programs that will further the student on his or her pathway to a post-secondary credential. In New England, where average per pupil spending is high and ranges from \$8,915 (New Hampshire) to \$11,773 (Connecticut), a significant amount of resources would follow DYA who leave the public school system (see Appendix 5).

Most alternative education programs within the traditional public K-12 system are indeed funded by state and local government Average Daily Attendance (ADA) monies (Martin and Brand, 2006). This per capita student allocation from the state and local governments may be an essential component to any future DYA system:

“The per capita aid that states provide to local school districts (what is often known as ‘average daily attendance’ or ‘average daily membership’) is both the most stable and the longest lasting source of funding for educating young people who have dropped out of high school or who are on the verge of doing so. In most states, funding is available for students until they reach age 21 or obtain a high school diploma.” (Martin and Brand, 2006)

Critics of this approach believe it will be too difficult to channel per pupil funding allocations, based on attendance, to DYA programs which may not even meet daily or even require attendance will be too difficult (CLASP, 2003).

Some states do have policies that explicitly enable per capita education dollars to be put toward alternative education programs based outside of the school district. Such policies are rare, however – see *Four Innovative Policies* (p. 47) on efforts in Oregon and Washington. In addition, charter school legislation does allow community-based organizations to apply for a charter for their alternative education programs. This may be another avenue for programs to access a stable funding stream to serve disconnected young adults (Martin and Brand, 2006).

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Given their diversity, DYA service providers focus on an array of goals, short and long-term, driven by disparate constituencies and funders. ABE and ESL classes funded through the Workforce Investment Act, for example, often prioritize rapid reattachment to the labor force instead of preparation for post-secondary education (Harris and Ganzglass). There is no shared system of outcome measures and no strategy for governance that would unify scattered DYA programs into a more coordinated system.

⁴ DOL definition of disconnection for the WOTC: a young adult who is “16 to 25 on the hiring date; not regularly attending any secondary, technical, or post-secondary school during the six-month period preceding the hiring date; not regularly employed during the six-month period preceding the hiring date; and not readily employable by reason of lacking a sufficient number of skills.” (CRS, Fernandes and Gabe, 2009)

A 2003 Casey Foundation study of the factors that would reduce youth disconnection emphasized the nature of the challenge: “Systemic change necessitates the development of collaborative governing bodies. It requires considerable time and resources and sustained effort.” (Shore, R. 2003)

Jobs for the Future, based on its review of nontraditional programs for at-risk youth, recommends that localities create community-wide infrastructures that would support portfolios of educational opportunities – in and outside of schools. Specifically, Paul Hill proposes that communities establish Community Education Boards that would oversee the supply of educational opportunities for all young people as part of a radical change in public K-12 education in which the current system is “razed to the ground” and replaced by a “portfolio management system” (Hill, 2006).

Along these same lines, DYA researcher Norton Grubb, bemoans all the “little programs” public and private serving disconnected young adults. He has suggested the only way to ensure quality and accountability is to equip a public entity - the community college system – to manage educational programming for youth through age 24, outsourcing functions to community-based organizations as appropriate (Grubb, 2003).

Data issues – namely the lack of adequate, standardized data – also continue to plague school systems and other organizations tracking and supporting disconnected young adults. The “Compact on State High School Graduation Data,” signed into law in 2007, will hopefully standardize and improve data collection, reporting, and analysis at the state level. Among its provisions is the establishment of a standard, four-year graduation rate, to be implemented in all states by 2013. A precursor is the assignment of unique identification numbers to each student. With improvements in statewide identification systems, policy makers will be able to distinguish between dropouts and students who transfer to another school, district, or state; leave high school to enroll in a GED program; or who just take more than four years to graduate high school. It will also enable state systems to track DYA individually so that we can better track demographics, program paths, outcomes, and other critical DYA data.

AGE OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING AND AGE LIMITS FOR PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION

One policy area with important DYA implications is state legislation regarding compulsory schooling – or the age until which youth must attend school and the age at which young adults are no longer eligible for public secondary education. Raising the age may not keep young adults who would otherwise have dropped out from leaving school; rather it lays the foundation for establishing public responsibility and funding for DYA education.

The position of the National Education Association is that all children should be required to attend school until they graduate or reach the age of 21. Connecticut and New Hampshire require school attendance until the age of 18, Maine until 17, and the remainder of the New England states only until 16. New legislation under consideration in Massachusetts to improve graduation rates in the state would establish a commission to study raising the compulsory attendance to age 18 – if passed, the commission would make its recommendation in late 2009.

The flip side to raising the age of compulsory education is raising the age of eligibility for public education services. Young adults who return to school after dropping out with few credits and many life and educational challenges may not even have time to complete graduation requirements by the age of 21, when most states cut off funding for students attempting to complete high school education. Many alternative educators propose entitling all young adults who have not received a high school diploma to

educational services until the age of 25, especially important for English Language Learners or other groups facing special challenges (Martin and Brand, 2006).

POLICIES RELATING TO ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVIDERS

State policies which define the role of the school district with respect to alternative education providers provide a degree of support to young adults at greatest risk of disconnection. Martin and Brand highlight states with policies most supportive of DYA need for alternative education options: “California, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Oregon, and Wisconsin have legislation which details the process by which students at-risk of school failure will be identified and supported toward high school graduation. Legislation addresses how students will be identified, what supports must be put in place and how state education funds may support students in appropriate alternative education programs” (Martin and Brand, 2006). There are not, however, enough alternative education programs to meet the needs of the approximately 10% of the population of 16 to 24-year-olds who need them. As of 2001, only 39% of public school districts had at least one alternative education program and most of these are just disciplinary alternatives (Zweig, 2003).

NEW THINKING ABOUT CREDENTIALING FOR DISCONNECTED YOUNG ADULTS

Policies that allow curricular flexibility for programs serving disconnected young adults can go far toward improving their chances of achieving high school diplomas and transitioning to postsecondary education and training. Credits based on “seat time” are often unrealistic for out-of-school youth to attain. In Utah and Rhode Island, along with a handful of other states, state graduation requirements are now “performance-based” and will be assessed through a variety of methods including portfolio displays, examinations, and capstone projects. Alternative educators also note that assessments which measure “learning growth” (using pre- and post-testing) are much more appropriate and meaningful for disconnected young adults than the traditional point-in-time exams that measure achievement (Thakur and Henry, 2005 and AED, 2006).

At the college level, there is a huge proportion (as much as 46%) of enrollment that is not-for-credit. There is little data available about non-credit courses and little attention paid to transitions out of the “black hole” of remedial and other not-for-credit courses into the credit track. Researchers such as John Milam write about the “development of a ‘hidden college’ of non-credit course options that has flourished without a deliberative approach or sufficient attention to the needs of its adult learners.” According to surveys and interviews with colleges nationwide, as many as 40% are not collecting any data on their not-for-credit divisions (Pusser et al., 2007).

Examining the reasons for the lack of attention paid to the needs of not-for-credit students, Pusser et al. note that, “The policy community has long stereotyped adult learners, seeing them primarily as displaced workers and homemakers seeking to enter the job market, a group in need of relatively short-duration job training... As a result, most state policy attention and resources have coalesced around vocational retraining programs, contract education and non-credit-bearing programs that provide short-term job skills and employment” (Pusser et al., 2007).

Degree mapping, where colleges sequence the courses required for each program of study and the estimated time to credential, have the power to significantly aid disconnected young adults who do manage to enroll in postsecondary education succeed (Pusser et al., 2007). Policies at community colleges to chunk courses and award smaller credentials will also help disconnected young adults use their limited time in community colleges to their greatest advantage.

Most disconnected young adults who enroll in postsecondary education and training require some type of remediation before they are able to undertake college-level work. In fact, a 2006 study by Columbia's Community College Research Center found that 40% of community college students needed, but may not receive, remedial help with reading and writing, and 60% needed remedial math courses (CAHS, 2008). Developmental education is usually located in the not-for-credit division of community colleges. At the same time, few disconnected young adults can afford to enroll full-time in college due to the need to work and care for family members.

Another priority is reforming federal financial aid policies to reflect the non-credit, part-time enrollment of many DYAs. Both part-time and not-for-credit enrollment renders students ineligible for many state and federal financial aid programs. Policymakers could look to Oregon, Maryland, and Texas, among a handful of other states, which fund financial aid for non-credit courses at the same rate as credit courses (CAHS, 2008). As Pusser et al. comment, "Federal subsidies are linked to the credit hour; non-credit-bearing course hours are generally not eligible. Adults would be best served by federal aid policies that support credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing programs alike" (Pusser et al., 2007).

FOUR INNOVATIVE POLICIES TO SUPPORT DISCONNECTED YOUTH

This section concludes with four brief examples of innovative policies that support the reconnection of disconnected young adults. They range from innovations in funding the education of disconnected youth to cross-sector partnerships that offer alternatives to public secondary education.

Oregon and Washington: Money Following the Learner

A few states are pioneering reforms to the education system based on the "money following learner" approach. Oregon, Wisconsin, Vermont and Minnesota are at the vanguard of finding ways for public education dollars to follow the learner to alternative education settings (Harris and Ganzglass; Martin and Brand). In both Oregon and Wisconsin, public education dollars flow through the youth's original school district to alternative education settings, including community-based providers, in the amount of the costs of the alternative educational programming or 80% of the ADA allocation, whichever cost is lower. The school district continues to receive 100% of the per capita allocation for each student for whom they have found an alternative education placement. In Oregon, all private contractors providing educational services to at-risk youth must meet the state's common curriculum goals, requirements for academic content, and state testing requirements (Martin and Brand, 2006; Martin and Halperin, 2006).

Vermont's High School Completion Program

Vermont's High School Completion Program (HSCP), established under state Act 176 in 2006, is an innovative program whereby public education monies are redirected toward alternative education programs for high school dropouts or those self-identified as at-risk of dropping out. The HSCP is administered in partnership between local school districts and the statewide adult education and literacy contractor (Vermont Adult Learning).

The program enables any high school drop-out aged 16-22, as well as high school students simply dissatisfied with public high school offerings, to develop an individualized graduation plan comprised of educational services provided by a range of providers, from CBOs, to local community colleges, to public school districts, and receive a high school diploma upon completion of the plan. All kinds of learning opportunities including tutoring, courses, workshops, work-based and service learning projects, mentoring and internships that focus on secondary-level academic and technical/occupational skill

development can be included in a graduation education plan. Since the starting point of the graduation plan is the skill level of the student, completion of a well-written graduation plan should result in a high school diploma and the skills necessary to succeed in a post-secondary educational experience.

Each student in the HSCP is assigned to a school district that is responsible for working with the student and Vermont Adult Learning to complete the five-page graduation plan. Monies flow from the state Department of Education to the education providers through the designated school district based upon reimbursement rates set by the department. There is currently no per student cap on the amount of money reimbursable for the HSCP. (Program Guidelines, 2006)

The HSCP began serving youth in fiscal year 2007. The program enrolled 175 disconnected young adults this first year. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of these students completed their plans on-schedule and received their high school diploma within the year. Most of the remaining students are expected to finish in the first half of FY08, demonstrating that the HSCP is serving students who can achieve skills commensurate with a high school diploma in one to two years (HSCP Progress Report, 2008).

The total cost of serving 175 disconnected young adults in year one of the HSCP was \$922,878, for an average per pupil cost of \$5,274. This is less than half of Vermont's 2003-2004 average per pupil expenditures (\$10,630) (NEA, 2004). Almost two-thirds (65%) of the HSCP money went to adult education providers and the remaining funds were split evenly between school districts and other providers. According to the first year HSCP progress report, the program should eventually become self-supporting and reimbursement funds should be sufficient to maintain the necessary infrastructure (HSCP Progress Report, 2008).

High School Reform in Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, a reform effort is underway to make performance, rather than time, the central focus in high school education. Political and education leaders, as well as teachers, have bought into the reform effort. The Rhode Island High School Diploma System now requires graduates to show proficiency in standards-based content and applied learning skills through two separate performance assessments. The system assesses students through a variety of tools, including performance-based assessments and portfolios, and provides supports to help all students succeed.

In addition to 20 Carnegie units in Language Arts, Math, Science, students must complete an exhibition, graduation portfolio, or a certificate of initial mastery demonstrating independent learning through applied skills. According to Roy Seitsinger, Director of the Office of Middle and High School Reform and Adult Education at the Rhode Island Department of Education, “[It’s a] multiple-measure system and exams only count for up to 10 percent of a student’s graduation by proficiency packet. . . In this kind of system, a student who does not do well on assessments can demonstrate proficiency through practical exhibition of skills.” (AYPF Dropout Recovery Discussion Group Summary, 2006).

High School-Community College Partnerships for At-Risk Youth in North Carolina

In North Carolina, under the Innovative Education Initiatives Act, there is a state-funded grant program to support partnerships between high schools and community colleges that will serve youth at-risk of dropping out of high school. Partnerships apply for funding to create cooperative, innovative programs for the target population including high schools or technical centers on the campuses of community colleges.

Section VII. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this paper is to provide the Nellie Mae Education Foundation with information regarding DYA. The research in this paper highlights the key issues and challenges facing the DYA and the programs that serve them. It highlights the individual and societal cost of the problem and the potential cost of doing nothing.

The field of DYA is complicated and involves multiple players, funding sources, and sometimes contradictory policy. Given that all available data show that the DYA population is a significant and growing segment of our future workforce, it is incumbent upon policy makers and funders to increase attention on potential interventions. There is no disagreement that the DYA population needs to acquire significantly higher skills in order to succeed individually and to contribute to our economy and democracy. The question is how do we tackle this problem?

While we believe that this paper provides the NMEF with critical information, it is just a start. Further research, including more in-depth investigations of specific programs and discussions with the DYA themselves would likely yield additional insights into this challenging issue.

We thank the Nellie Mae Education Foundation for the opportunity to conduct this research. We also want to acknowledge the individuals and programs who so generously gave their time to help us better understand the issues. Finally, a special acknowledgement to the 23 DYA focus group participants who so inspired us with their stories and courage. Thank you.

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Appendices

1. Estimated Additional Lifetime Taxable Income if HS Students Graduated – By State
2. Multiple Definitions of Disconnection and Population Size Estimates
3. DYA Demographics – National Data
4. NMEF DYA Focus Group Reports: Boston and Vermont (May 2009)
5. Per Pupil Spending in New England

Appendix 1

Estimated Additional Lifetime Taxable Income If High School Dropouts Graduated With Their Class in 2006-2007

	State's 9 th Graders (2003-2004)	Estimated Graduation Rate (2006- 2007)	Estimated Number of Dropouts for the Class of 2007	Total Lifetime Additional Income if Dropouts Graduated
Connecticut	48,643	79.8%	9,826	\$2,554,730
Maine	16,891	76.2%	4,020	\$1,045,215
Massachusetts	83,759	73.2%	22,447	\$ 5,836,327
New Hampshire	18,286	76.0%	4,389	\$1,141,046
Rhode Island	14,188	70.6%	4,171	\$1,084,530
Vermont	8,422	81.0%	1,600	\$416,046
New England	190,189	75.6%	46,453	\$12,077,894
United States	4,190,237	69.9%	1,265,016	\$328,904,058,340

Source: High Cost of High School Dropouts Issue Brief, Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008

Appendix 2: Multiple Definitions of Disconnection and Population Size Estimates

Date	Author	%/# of DYA	Definition
2006	DOE, NCES	7.6%	16-19 not in school and unemployed, non-institutionalized, point in time
2006	Kids Count	8% of 16-19 (1.4 M) 15% of 18-24 (4.3 M)	16-19, 18-24 not in school and unemployed, non-institutionalized, point in time
2001	Sum, A. et al., Northeastern U.	14.8% 16-24 (5.2M)	16-24, not in school and unemployed, non-institutionalized, monthly averages
2000	Jekielek, S. and Brown, B.	14.2% 18-24 (3.8 M)	18-24 not in school and unemployed, no more than HS/GED, point in time
2006	Rosch, J. et al., Public Impact	8.7% 19-24 (2.1 M)	19-24, never-married, not in school and unemployed, no more than a HS diploma, have not been employed for more than 26 weeks in the last year OR 19-24 who are incarcerated
2008	Fernandes, A. and Gabe, T., Congressional Research Service	5.1% 16-24 (1.9M)	16-24, unmarried, non-institutionalized, not in school and unemployed for all of 2007 AND at a point in time in 2008.

Source: CRS 2009 and Rosch et al. 2008

Appendix 3: National DYA Demographics

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Disconnected Young Adults

	CRS, 2008 (5.1% disconnection)	Jekielek et al., 2000 (14.2% disconnection)
White	44%	42%
African American	25%	24%
Latino	23%	29%
Other	8%	5%

Educational Attainment of Disconnected Young Adults

	Rosch et. al, (8.7% disconnection) (19-24) (2006)	CRS, (5.1% disconnection) (19-24) (2008)	General Population (19-24) (as reported in Rosch et al., 2008)
Less than HS	43%	34.5%	13%
GED	13%	48.6% (HS/GED)	3%
High School	43%	(see above)	28%
Some College	1%	16.9% (some schooling beyond HS)	44%
BA	0%	N/A	12%

Source: Rosch et al., 2008 and CRS, 2009

Appendix 4

Report on NMEF Young Adult Focus Group on Dropout & Recovery Boston - May 7, 2009

Boston Focus Group Participants:

<i>Program</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Racial/Ethnic</i>	<i>GED / HS Diploma Status</i>
ROCA	Female	18	Hispanic (Honduran) / Italian	Working on GED
ROCA	Female	23	Hispanic (Puerto Rican)	Received HS diploma
ROCA	Female	20	White	Received GED
Year Up	Female	24	African American	Received GED
Year Up	Male	22	Hispanic	Received GED
Year Up	Male	24	Asian (Bhutanese)	Received HS diploma
YouthBuild	Female	18	African American	In GED program
YouthBuild	Male	20	Hispanic	In GED program
YouthBuild	Female	24	African American	In GED program
JFYNetworks	Male	18	Hispanic	In GED program
JFYNetworks	Male	17	African American	In GED program
JFYNetworks	Male	26	African American	In GED program

African American	41.7%
Hispanic	41.7%
Asian	8.3%
White	8.3%

Findings by Phase

Dropping Out

- Almost everyone reported that personal and family factors were the main reason they dropped out, e.g., unstable family environments, parental substance abuse, court-involvement, pregnancy, lack of parental support. 3-4 – primarily males – reported financial reasons (desire or need to earn money).
- Year participants dropped out:
 - g. 9 3
 - g. 10 3
 - g. 11 6
- 100% of youth reported they were bored with school “all or most of the time.”
- Many youth described issues that seemed to emerge or gain force in grades 8-10, e.g., transition to bigger school environment, family crises, job opportunities, divorce, homelessness, parental substance abuse.
- Many youth wish they had more support from home. At the same time, many felt invisible in their high school – that the high school environment was largely or completely unsupportive (no

adult or only 1-2 adults to intervene and support them, etc.). Only when they acted out behaviorally did people respond and then it was often with ambivalence or mixed messages (GED vs. stay in school, low expectations for participation or their abilities, e.g., do your work vs. just show up at school and do nothing, wouldn't give a recommendation for a job training program)

- Many youth felt that the pedagogy of their high school classrooms was a bad fit for their learning style – they were bored, not enough hands-on, etc.
- Some youth felt that their positive attributes and qualities went unnoticed.
- While not every participant would have responded to stronger support and intervention methods, many said they would have. There are things adults in school or at home could have done that would have stopped them. 1-2 students felt that only they could have pushed and motivated themselves (internal vs. external factors).
- When asked about reactions to their decision to drop out, 6 youth reported that their parents were disappointed (“my mom was disappointed...didn't raise me for this” “my dad was mad but relieved when I got my GED”). For some, dropping out had consequences for family life: foster care placement, transition to the other parent's house in another state, negative impact on what had been a good relationship between mother and son.

Recovery

- Youth took a significant amount of time (1-2 years, 2+ programs) to navigate dropout recovery options in order to find a program that works for them.

○ youth back within a program within 6 months	0
○ youth who were out of school or a program for 1 or more years	5
○ youth enrolled in 1 program only	5
○ youth enrolled in 2 programs	1
○ youth enrolled in more than 2 programs:	6
- Several participants reported that they needed that time to see the value, e.g., only after working for several years did they see education as necessary for career and economic advancement.
- Almost all participants heard about recovery options by word of mouth. Sources included:

○ Friend:	6
○ Parent/family member:	3
○ Neighborhood organization student involved with when younger:	1
○ Google:	1 (keyword search: “hands on GED programs”)
○ School:	0
○ Another program:	0
- Youth put a high value on multi-service “one stop” programs that can respond to multiple needs, e.g., GED, career skill development, college search, job readiness, personal growth, financial support - even if support is provided by way of referral.
- Youth feel that instructors in their current programs are better. They are able to “break things down into steps,” provide extra support when needed, and actively convey that they care about and believe in their students. Several participants commented that they like the structure and discipline of their programs. They also like that the program offers classes that are relevant to their career goals and hands-on learning opportunities.
- Several participants like that their program provides a strong community/network of support (instructors, peer-to-peer, connections to other organizations) and gave examples of how program staff or other students help with issues and challenges that come up (need for money, transportation, etc.). They feel their program is a place where “we have each other's back.”
- Youth liked that their programs focus on life “beyond MCAS.” They felt their high school was too focused on passing the MCAS and not on a diploma, graduation, and their future.
- Many participants had been less successful in standalone GED programs (floated in and out, never completed, didn't like because it was “too much like high school”)

- 6-7 youth reported having another supportive person in their life, other than program staff (a former principal, sister, and friends). Nearly all participants reported feeling this kind of support from within their program.
- One student commented that she is “doing better” than many of her friends that received their HS diploma.

Future Plans, Readiness and Ongoing Support

- All participants had some future goal, beyond than program or GED completion. 10 of 12 said they plan to go to college. Most identified 1-2 possible fields of study. Three hope to own their own small business (2 of these were women with children). While most youth plan to go to college, there is some hesitancy and/or fear that they won’t like it, will fail, won’t be able to afford it, will owe too much money, and pick the wrong major and it will be a waste, etc.
- Several youth are weighing multiple career paths (fire fighter vs. architectural design, landscaping vs. graphic design, lawyer vs. daycare owner). Reasons that might lead them to choose one over the other included their financial situation (cost, need for money now), their dislike of school, and the amount of time it would take.
- Finances are a concern. Several youth mentioned the need to earn money now. One was recently laid off and wondering how that would affect her ability to enroll in college.
- 6-7 youth said they felt they understood the steps needed to get to college. 3-4 said they did not. Areas where they need help include: FAFSA and financial aid, more skill development (math, writing), researching job and educational options (trade schools). Most felt their program could provide this support or help them find it elsewhere. 1-2 youth felt that their program may not have the expertise or capacity to provide financial aid counseling and support.
- Youth varied in how ready they feel to achieve their college and career goals. Number who reported feeling ready in each area:
 - Reading 6-7
 - Writing 6-7
 - Math 3
 - Computers/tech 8-10
 - Problem solving 8-10
 - Working with others 8-10
 - Finding information 12
 - Self confidence 6-7
 - Performing under pressure 8-10

Cross Program Collaboration

- Youth reported that their current programs are meeting their needs or already have referral networks they tap to do so (“easy to find connections and resources”).

Participant Quotes

- *My outside life wasn’t stable. Addict parents. Homelessness. I couldn’t focus. I couldn’t get my mind set... I was depressed.*
- *All I could think about was money...I had no parent support, no fresh clothes, no money for lunch...so I chose work.*
- *Teachers let me do whatever I wanted. Nobody really made me work. They didn’t care... I just sat all day. I would have worked if someone had asked.*
- *They had a curriculum they needed to teach instead of teaching to individual students.*
- *Teachers need to find different ways to teach. It was boring. Too boring. I slept.*
- *I dropped out because I hated the type of work. I need hands-on.*

- *I was high honors in 7th grade. In 8th grade, everything went downhill. My parents separated. My mom was struggling, crying. We didn't have money.*
- *I was older and I wanted more things.*
- *I was different. I had home and teacher support but my focus wasn't there. It was on street life and work.*
- *I loved middle school but I got pregnant and then was in a shelter. Teachers didn't understand that. It was too much burden. I couldn't do it.*
- *Lots of kids are physically crying for help. Teachers and parents are not reading the signs or they don't care....The school could have seen it. No one ever came and said 'look at your attendance, your grades....I stayed back because of attendance. Teachers put me down.'*
- *They didn't care...I just needed math help. They said 'we have lots of kids who need help' and weren't willing to support me.*
- *I got help when I got in trouble. When I acted out, I got help.*
- *If the assistant principal had seen the positive side of me.... I was good at MCAS. I just had to finish one more year.*
- *My teacher said I might as well drop out and do my GED.*
- *I went to a bunch of different places... I had to stop one after I left the shelter. One was the same experience as high school...at another, I wasn't determined enough....Now I know I want to go to college. I'm committed.*
- *It took me two years to figure this out.... I went to take the GED but I failed the ELA part so I gave up and worked another year...I felt like I was hitting a dead end [with jobs]. ..It took me time to realize I needed education to reach my goals.*
- *I started a program. I lasted two days, and then I got pregnant.*
- *I just got tired of lots of hours with little pay. I have always wanted more.*
- *I started a GED program but they told me I didn't have come because I had passed the MCAS. Then they wanted me to come to class for a year and do nothing.... I felt like I needed help preparing for college but they said 'that's not what our curriculum is.'*
- *I'm doing better than some of the people I know who got diplomas.*
- *In high school, teachers cared too much about MCAS and not about a diploma or graduation...about your future.*
- *At my first GED program, I didn't have to do anything except walk in....I'm more comfortable here. There's more support.*
- *This third program works because they have courses that interest me. I want to attend. I want to master it.*
- *They show they care. It's not just their mission; it's your mission...it's about personal growth.*
- *I don't like school but I like this. I see myself as a different person. I have more skills. I see things I can do and improve (professionalism, writing, speaking).*
- *I love [her current program's] teachers. If you don't know something, they break things down.....step by step. They have patience. I had teachers like that in elementary and middle school but not in high school.*
- *You need someone who cares about your future, someone who takes on the curriculum but twists it with their own unique techniques.*
- *They have patience and a positive vibe. It's not just 'do your work.' I feel like they care.*
- *They understand individual needs and design a way to meet those needs.*

- *I like the rules and structure. It's like a regular job...I thought I would fail .I talked to my case manager about how to deal...he motivated me...said 'I see a good future for you...a good head on your shoulders.'*
- *When you first go in, they ask about your interests and needs and refer you to programs that can help.*
- *I need to meet a lot of certifications....they're teaching me what I need.*
- *My school stuff is basically done...the program is helping with colleges, the FAFSA, and job research.*
- *Our program group is really close. We give each other money, rides. We have each other's back.*
- *I want to own my own business. [The program] is teaching me budgeting...different educational routes for business.*
- *Our program has tons of connections. It's easy to find information.*
- *I feel like I shouldn't have to go to school....like I should have a life experience degree. It could be a setback for me. I hated school....I'm afraid to learn that I'll fail.*
- *I'm afraid I won't like it...I want to do something but I won't be able to get it.*
- *I want to go to college for architectural design. I want to be a firefighter....I would do firefighter so I can get the money. I'd work part-time then do college.*
- *I want to learn to run a business, maybe open a day care place. If that doesn't work, a lawyer. But it takes too long and I need money now. It's too much money and too much school.*

Appendix 4 Continued
Report on NMEF Young Adult Focus Group on Dropout & Recovery
Newport, VT, May 15, 2009

Student quotes not included in the main narrative

“I was in a gang but a guy who used to be in a gang became my mentor and really helped me.”

“My mother was upset when I dropped out of high school but she’s an alcoholic and has her own problems so there wasn’t much that she could do.”

(From a former teacher) “I don’t care if you pass, it’s your future not mine.”

“Obama asked every American to get more education and that really caught my attention, if this black guy who took so much crap can become president why can’t I work to succeed” (in explaining why she went back to school).

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Student One is eighteen years old, grew up in Vermont, and dropped out of high school when he was a sophomore. He is planning on going back to and is working with Lake Region Union High School (LRUHS) to try and get his diploma. He has had many small jobs since dropping high school, ranging from working on a farm to having his own lawn mowing business.

Student Two is twenty-three years old and works full time as an administrative assistant as well as being a single parent to her 20 month old daughter. She completed high school in three and a half years and graduated from North Country Union High School (NCUHS) in 2004 and is now currently attending Community College of Vermont (CCV).

Student Three, at 26 years of age, is married and has a two year old child. She works part time milking cows and goes to CCV part time. She graduated United Christian Academy (UCA) in 2002.

Student Four is also eighteen and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. He was kicked out of high school in his sophomore year. He was involved with gang activity which contributed to his leaving high school as well as many of his bad choices. He moved to Vermont because his family is here. He is now working through CCV with the Adult Diploma Program to get his high school diploma.

Student Five grew up in Rhode Island and is twenty-four years old. She left high school as soon as she could at age 13 or 14 without graduating because she didn’t like any of it. She is a real estate agent and is now a student at CCV and likes it. She is very interested in world issues.

Student Six has always lived in Newport and has a 20 month old son. She moved to Massachusetts but returned to Vermont shortly after. She dropped out of NCUHS when she was 16, went to Tutorial but dropped out soon after, and is now working with Adult Basic Education (ABE).

Student Seven is seventeen years old and got in trouble for not going to school when she was fourteen and ended up in foster care. She worked with the Parent Child Center (PCC), dropped out of high school, and is now getting her GED with ABE.

Student Eight has always lived around Newport, Vermont. She got pregnant when she was fifteen and dropped out of high school at the end of her sophomore year when she was sixteen. She is currently working with the PCC.

Student Nine is seventeen and dropped out of high school this year (2009). She is working with the PCC and wants to someday go to the city.

Student Ten is full time administrative assistant at CCV and is twenty-two years old. She graduated UCA in 2004. She didn't like high school or really care about her education until she started attending college at CCV. She intends to someday earn a Bachelor's degree.

Student Eleven is twenty four and took the long way through high school, having two years as a senior at NCUHS. After high school he joined the Marine Corps so he could avoid college. When he finished with the Marine Corps he realized that college was important and started taking classes at CCV. He will soon be attending Champlain College to get his Bachelor's.

What reasons or factors made you leave high school?

Student Seven said partying was an issue. She'd stay out late and not want to go to school in the morning. When she tried to make up the work the school would not pass her because she had missed half of the year. When she was in middle school she attended only when she wanted to and got kicked out a lot. The teacher's aides would give her the answers so she didn't have to pay attention. When she got to high school she was not interested in it. When she dropped high school her family was irritated, but otherwise didn't have much to say.

Student Four said his family was struggling. His mom was both an alcoholic and a drug addict. He got picked on in school a lot because the other kids knew his home situation and he didn't have nice things. He was violent in school even though he knew it was not the right thing to do. He got suspended for fighting multiple times. He said the teachers did not care and he did not think school was worth it. He was bored in school and even though he had good grades, he didn't feel anything was new. He went to the streets to sell drugs so he could make money to feed his brother and sister. This is where he got involved with a gang. He said his mother hated him not being in school but wasn't in a position to change it. He got arrested for not going to school and part of his probation was that he was made to go to school. However, many gang members went to the same school and he got kicked out for supposedly running the gang in the school. Eventually he met a mentor who had experienced many of the same things that Student Four had and the made him realize that school was okay and this is when he began to work at it. He says his family situation is much better now and he is getting his high school diploma.

Student Five said she was in the lower "idiot" classes and was picked on because of it. She was very bored in class and thought it a waste of time and had better things to do. She said she always found a way to make money and liked living "under the radar". Teachers demanded that she decide what she wanted to be when she grew up and she hated that. When she chose to be a lawyer for a project the teacher told her it was unrealistic. She left school soon after. She has traveled to many third world countries and said the kids there are really educated. This impressed her and together with her admiration of Barak Obama she decided to work at school and is now taking classes at CCV and likes it.

What could have made the classes/high school better?

Student Two thought high school had too many students per teacher. At CCV the classes are smaller and she feels more understood. CCV makes learning easier, she said. CCV has better resources and the teachers are more willing to sit down with a student and explain something if it isn't clear. Said she

squeaked by in high school. She hated it and didn't want to challenge herself, but at CCV she wants to challenge herself because she knows that she can get help if she needs it.

Student Eleven said he also likes the size of the classes at CCV and feels that the teachers actually care about teaching and not just the money. The teachers also adapt to different learning styles at CCV.

Student Ten said she was a very audio learner. In high school the teachers would always tell her to take notes. Teachers at CCV allow her to learn her way. She said that UCA was a good school but didn't feel like all the students were equal. If one of the basketball players turned a paper in late it was okay, but if she turned in a paper late it was not. She feels students at CCV are treated more equally, but the teachers still have high expectations.

Student Three says that kids were categorized in high school. She said that if you were in a "lower" class, you were lower than the other students, but teachers at CCV will reach out to help if the student needs assistants.

Was there anything about high school you liked?

Student Three said she like sports in high school.

Student Two said she liked the diversity of activities like dance, forestry, auto shop, etc.

What would you change about high school?

Student Seven said that there were too many rules in high school and would want fewer rules.

Student Two said she'd want smaller classes. She didn't think that there were enough teachers and were too many police around the school.

Student Three said that the teachers' attitudes were bad and that they didn't want to help.

Student Eleven said that teachers should be more like mentors and there needs to be more faculty and smaller classes. He also said that schools need better after-school programs. Many of the programs were too late in the day and parents could not take students to the programs. He said it was easier to talk to teachers at CCV after class; in high school it was too rushed and there was no time to ask a teacher questions.

What was the transition point that made you drop out?

Student Ten said that junior high was really bad. Nobody was willing to help they just disciplined the students and that the kids were supposed to grow from kids to adults instantly. She was going to go to Lyndon State College (LSC) but found the transition from a small private school to LSC difficult. She felt like no one cared at LSC either. She feels that people are there for her and do care at CCV.

Student Four said stereotyping was a big issue. If you dressed a certain way you were judged and that there was far too much of that. "If no one cared then why should I? He met his mentor when he was sixteen, but before that he said no one cared.

Student Five agreed that stereotyping was a problem for her too. She said that by the time you get to high school they already have you pigeonholed as one thing and you can't really change.

Student One said that he got kicked out of high school a lot and had many misdemeanors. He fought in school. He got into drugs and did not have anyone to talk to. After his first criminal charge his mother did not care and his father was very controlling, beating him and his mother. He said that he was able to get into rehab and finally got himself clean.

Why did you reconnect to a program after you dropped out?

Student One says that he tried to do school again but transportation was an issue and prevented his attendance.

Student Seven said that when she was lived in Massachusetts both of her parents were sick. She started to go to PCC and lived with her dad who encouraged her, but she said she still didn't really care. About six months ago she finally decided to get on track and is now working at getting her GED. One of the teachers at the PCC made her start to think about her life and education. She feels that what she went through helped her to grow up.

Student Eight liked school and probably would have stayed in school if she hadn't gotten pregnant. She also works with the PCC.

Student Six said she did Tutorial at first but wasn't really there for schooling. At the ABE people cared and helped her.

Student Four said that when he tried to get his GED in Georgia no one really helped him; they expected him to figure it out on his own.

What makes a good program after high school?

The students said teachers and staff who care with an environment that is more open, relaxed, and fun; a place that is easy going and where they can grow academically.

Student Five feels that at CCV she can take what she wants and is not forced to take classes that she does not care about. She can choose her own curriculum.

How could more people be brought in to your programs?

Student Eleven said that at CCV there are not enough weekend courses. Many people work and would be more available for weekend courses. He said that reaching out to high school students more to help with the transition from high school to college and help them to learn how important it is. People who have gotten degrees and should go back to high schools to take with the students, he suggested.

Student Two said that her Dad was really great and further education after high school was not pushed on her. However, she went on to say that extra education after high school is so important and students need to understand it. She hopes that they will have it explained more to them in the future. She also said that kids need better connections to adults. She wants to set an example for her daughter.

What are you thinking about for the future and how do you think you are preparing for it?

Student Eleven said that he eventually wants to get his M.B.A. in international business and open his own businesses, especially non-profits around the world. He'd like to get into politics and maybe run for president some day. He feels that he still needs to learn more about the numbers and fiscal responsibility of running his own business.

Student Ten said that she was a quiet person until she started working at CCV where she really learned people skills. She loves it and is hoping to move up the ladder and continue to work at CCV. She hopes to get a Bachelor's in early childhood education with a focus on special needs and would like to become an instructor.

Student Six said that she wants to be an accountant and that ABE will help her to get an internship and is really encouraging her.

Student Five wants to become more familiar with reading and writing. She'd also like to learn Arabic and be a mediator between cultures so she can help with world issues. She said that she stills needs to get more acclimated with structured learning.

Student One said that he'd like to get a good job and be a good father to his child and maybe work with stereo systems, but says that he really isn't sure yet. He wants to get his high school diploma first.

Student Eight also wants to get her high school diploma.

Student Nine says that she's really taking it one step at a time.

What fears do you have?

Student Two says that being able to get it all done school, work, parenting, traveling. She doesn't want to set herself up for failure. Having big goals is good but it's hard when you have to work and raise kids too. Money is always an issue, as well.

All of the students want to complete at least two years of college eventually. Most said that money would be an issue.

If there was one place for you to receive all services for your education and training what would it be?

Student Two said that it is really a step by step thing. Right now at CCV she is getting all she needs, but if she were to go to a bigger college then she'd have to find all the services she is using now all over again.

Student Five would like to see CCV team up with the North Country Career Center (NCCC) so that they could offer more resources and classes like horticulture or small engine repair.

Breakdown of VT Focus Groups Participants

<i>Program</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Racial/Ethnic</i>	<i>GED / HS Diploma Status</i>
LRUHS	Male	18	White	Working to get diploma
CCV	Female	23	White	Received HS diploma
CCV	Female	26	White	Received HS diploma
ADP	Male	18	Hispanic	Working to get diploma
CCV	Female	24	White	No HS diploma
ABE	Female	17	White	Working to get diploma
ABE	Female	17	White	In GED program
PCC	Female	16	White	No HS diploma
PCC	Female	17	White	No HS diploma

CCV	Male	22	White	Received HS diploma
CCV	Male	24	White	Received HS diploma
			Total	11
			African American	0%
			Hispanic	9.1 %
			Asian	0%
			White	90.9%

Appendix 5

Average Per Pupil Spending in New England, 2003-2004

State	2003-4 Average Per Pupil Spending	Rank Nationwide (1 is highest, 50 is lowest)
Connecticut	\$11,773	3
Maine	\$10,145	9
Massachusetts	\$10,772	5
New Hampshire	\$8,915	17
Rhode Island	\$10,258	8
Vermont	\$10,630	6
Nationwide	\$8,019	n/a

Source: NEA, 2004

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