

Listening Session Summary: Focus on Education

Location: Boston, MA

Date: November 12, 2010

Approach

The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP) hosted a series of listening sessions across the country to gather input from stakeholders to inform the development of an overarching strategic plan for federal youth policy. In order to go in depth on specific issues, each listening session had a special focus topic, such as juvenile justice, housing, positive youth development, and others. Sessions lasted approximately four hours and were led by an experienced facilitator.

Participants

See Appendix A for participant information.

Questions and Responses

Summaries of participants' responses follow each of the questions below.

What is the single most important thing we could do to make a difference in the lives of youth, related to education?

Academic and vocational programming

- Accept, offer, and formalize **alternative pathways to success** through vocational training and alternative educational programming.
- Provide more **school-based guidance** to personalize attention and educational services for all.
- **Recognize concerns** regarding student learning earlier so that they can be addressed.
- Recognize that young people will work hard to achieve academic success if they receive **adequate support**.

Policies and funding

- **Invest in elementary education**, especially literacy and numeracy.
- Substantially **increase federal funding for education** and support programs for students.
- **Encourage greater community input** on federal education budget priorities.
- Discontinue funding for ineffective programming.
- Adopt a **more holistic approach** to education, with less narrow focus on just a few areas.
- Make policies and services aimed at young people more **developmentally appropriate**.
- **Eliminate "zero tolerance" policies** because they are ineffective or harmful, and disproportionately sanction minority youth and youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Change NCLB so that alternative outcomes for students are acceptable (e.g., GED).

Supports for youth

- **Reinstate support services** in schools that have been cut over the last few years.
- Develop robust **school-community partnerships** so that teachers can focus on academics and students can get other needs met in the community.
- Provide students with **more role models** in the area of education, especially for youth who do not have educational support at home.
- Train and empower school staff to **better protect children's safety** (e.g., recognizing and reporting child abuse).

- Better **educate adults** around providing educational support to youth in their lives.
- Ensure that young people's **basic needs** are met in their homes and communities (e.g., housing).
- Support young people's **health and wellness**, particularly as it pertains to depression.
- **Prevent adolescent parenthood**, and better support youth who do become parents.
- Engage parents.
- Improve **early intervention** programs.
- Make **technology** (e.g., computers) more accessible to all young people.

What are the needs of youth (up to the age of 24) related to education?

Within schools

- All young people need to **feel safe** at school.
- Many youth need extensive **social and emotional learning** supports at school.
- Youth need to develop **life skills**, especially good decision-making skills.
- Youth need to develop **executive functioning skills** (e.g., planning, attention, organization)
- Youth need to **feel that education is relevant** for them personally, related to their own goals.
- Youth need to learn the logistics of **functioning in an academic setting**.

Outside of schools

- Ensure that young people have **adequate housing and other external supports**—many stop education due to instability in housing or similar issues.
- Provide programming that helps young people **transition to employability** (e.g., YouthBuild).
- Help youth become **civically engaged** and understand the experiences of others.
- Provide youth with **support and encouragement** in education from community, family, guidance counselors, and others.
- Focus on making youth **feel like valued members of society**.
- **Empower youth** through service learning.
- Teach youth **interpersonal skills**, such as public speaking, handling interviews, etc.
- Provide youth with **adequate mental health services**, helping them fare better in school.
- Prevent and **address substance abuse** among youth.
- Provide young parents with **childcare and a stable income** so they can complete their education.

What are effective programs and strategies regarding education? Are there program or policy gaps?

Effective programs and strategies

- **Peer education** models are very effective for life skills education, and perhaps other subjects.
- Effective programs combine education, community-based employment training, and personal development (e.g., YouthBuild).
- **Summer learning** programs better prepare young people to be successful in the next grade.
- Programming that focuses on **mental health** screening, awareness, and/or support is cost effective because it significantly reduces the need for hospital-based mental health services.
- Youth benefit from a variety of **resources to address peer concerns** or to anonymously **receive support for issues such as bullying**.
- Students in high-need schools benefit from **collaborations among volunteer service providers** that improve instructional practices and offer support services.
- Students with disabilities benefit from better connections with available resources, and **improved advocacy** on their behalf.

- Youth benefit from programming that helps them successfully **transition to college** (e.g., Upward Bound, GEAR UP, Mentoring for Academic and College Success).
- The Casey Foundation’s Developing Healthy Relationships Initiative helps youth **improve relationship skills** with others (e.g., family, romantic partner, friends, co-workers).
- Youth benefit when organizations that serve them are **held accountable** for youth outcomes.
- **Data-driven public health models** have been effective when they include schools, communities, and public health agencies (e.g., Healthy Maine Partnerships).
- Programming becomes more effective and more cost-effective when **stakeholders collaborate** to share best practices and build a comprehensive system.
- Programming is more successful when it **engages all sectors of the community** (e.g., radKIDS).
- Youth with substance abuse issues benefit from having **multiple treatment options available**, and benefit from support to help them transition back to school after treatment.

Program or policy gaps

- Loss of funding for programming has **decreased opportunities** for young people.
- There is tremendous **overlap in efforts to serve the same youth**, but a **lack of shared language, eligibility requirements, or performance measures**.
- The current school funding system results in **disproportionate access to educational resources**.
- While federal policy has increased funding for teen pregnancy prevention overall, some funding is still provided for **abstinence-only education** despite substantial evidence that it is ineffective.
- **Punitive policies** make it difficult for young people to improve their lives after they have made mistakes (e.g., no financial aid for school if a young person has a drug conviction), and such policies are disproportionately applied to African-American and Latino males.
- Youth who have been in **trouble with the law** are unaware that they are allowed to work in legitimate businesses.
- The groups that fold into SAMSHA have **conflicting goals, and lack clarity** in their priorities.
- Some states or areas lack **comprehensive vocational programs** such as JobCorps or YouthBuild.

Do specific populations of youth have disproportionately poor outcomes related to the topics we have addressed? What are some ways to best serve these populations?

Populations with disproportionately poor outcomes

- Youth in foster care.
- Youth in juvenile justice systems.
- Youth living in poverty.
- Youth who are homeless on their own, or who are part of a homeless family.
- Young people of color.
- Youth who are in gangs or who are at risk to be recruited into gangs.
- Youth who have special needs or special health needs.
- Youth with mental health issues (because they often lack stability needed to benefit from services).
- Youth who are citizens but are children of undocumented parents (parents are afraid to connect with service providers and institutions so their children are underserved).
- Youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexuality.

Best ways to serve these populations

- **Address inequalities** in access to educational resources for youth living in poor communities.
- Ensure that **teachers are a good match** for the student population they are assigned to teach.
- Offer **out-of-school youth programming** (e.g., arts, sports, etc.) to get them re-engaged in education.

- Provide **stable educational programs** for youth in unstable situations (e.g., foster care, juvenile justice, homeless, unaccompanied).
- Use a **comprehensive and focused approach** to address issues in the worst-performing schools.
- Make schools take more responsibility for really **educating students with special needs**, and ensure that such students receive the services they are entitled to according to policy.
- Address **school attendance and behavioral issues** outside of the juvenile justice system.
- Allow **youth involved in the juvenile justice system** to live in their communities, and not in locked facilities.
- Provide youth with more **mentoring from both peers and adults**, inside and outside of schools.
- Provide programming specifically designed to benefit **young men who are ethnic minorities**.
- Provide education around **risk behaviors** (e.g., substance use, sexual activity) starting earlier.
- Collaborate and provide liaisons to **better support unaccompanied youth and homeless youth** to remain in a stable situation within the educational system.
- Focus on **early intervention**.
- Provide programming to **build language proficiency** among all young children living in communities with poor educational outcomes.
- Provide young people with **afterschool programs** that target their interests (e.g., music, art, etc.).
- Provide education during the **summer months**.

What programs really make a difference in the lives of youth? How do you know this?

- **Alternative education programs** help youth to become re-engaged with education, and to connect with caring adults.
- Youth benefit from programs that **prepare them for employment** with internships, mentoring, social and emotional learning, and development of soft skills (e.g., Year Up, YouthBuild).
- Young people are safer when adults are better able to **prevent and recognize child abuse**.
- **Community service programs** help youth develop skills and connect to their communities.
- **Faith communities** can engage in effective collaboration with government agencies and others to provide youth services.
- **Youth-administered programs** (e.g., Youth in Action) empower youth to drive social change.
- **Wrap-around and holistic approaches** provide youth with needed continuity of services.
- Communities benefit when **youth advise policymakers** and administrators of their concerns.
- Adults need **training and support** to effectively serve youth.
- Young adults in the **foster care system** need ongoing supports to complete their education.
- Fewer youth need special help later if there are **early, universal preventive strategies** to identify and assist struggling students.

What are the barriers to collaborating on youth outcomes, and how can these barriers be removed?

Barriers to collaboration

- A multitude of funding streams discourages collaboration between organizations.
- Not all stakeholders are aware that they are stakeholders (e.g., business owners, police, etc.).
- Not all stakeholders see the benefit of collaboration.

How barriers can be removed

- **Require diverse agencies to collaborate** on planning to receive funding and to address an issue.
- Improve collaboration among **existing programs** rather than adding new programs.
- Ensure that collaborative efforts **have a purpose** and produce measureable results.

- Agencies need more awareness of **what other agencies do**.
- Youth-serving organizations need to develop a **common language and common standards**.
- Develop more comprehensive **data management systems** to improve continuity of services (such as HUD has done with their Homeless Management Information System).
- Include **youth voices** in collaborative efforts intended to benefit youth.

What types of initiatives could promote collaboration and improve outcomes for youth?

- Develop a comprehensive approach to **using available data** from across sectors to monitor progress toward improving youth outcomes.
- Increase **national service** options so that young adults can deliver more services to youth.
- Increase **communication between school nurses and other school staff** and pediatricians, because nurses are often the most aware of the concerns or needs of a specific child.
- Provide all youth with **more information regarding programs** available to them.
- Develop linkages between youth-serving organizations to increase **continuity of services**.
- Create **financial incentives** to improve child outcomes (e.g., provider receives a flat rate to serve a child, so early intervention and prevention become cost effective).
- **Take funding away** from a school or other organization that is failing to serve a young person and give it to another agency so that it can meet that young person's needs.
- Increase funding for **youth programming** in education and other sectors.
- Create a more **respectful and caring climate** in schools and other educational programs.
- Develop a system so that all students receive **individual attention** to their progress and needs.

What can be done for all youth (not just those directly benefiting from programs) in order to use resources effectively?

- **Tailor programs** to fit the specific needs of the youth that they serve in their community.
- Develop a set of **children's rights** for all children in the United States, giving all children the right to housing, adequate nutrition, etc.
- Provide **universal preventive interventions** for children.
- Make better use of **technology** to reach young people.
- Help **parents and other adults** become better able to support youth.
- Expand our definition of education to **include social and emotional learning**.
- Treat all young people with **respect**, listen to what they have to say, and be honest with them.
- Hold **high expectations** for all youth.
- Improve **safety** inside and outside of schools, and make youth feel responsible for safety.
- Give youth opportunities to **showcase their special skills**.

What are your ideas for federal policy to improve the coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of programs affecting youth?

- **Extend the response time for grant applications** to 12 weeks. The current, shorter timeframe is insufficient to evaluate whether and how to respond, and to develop new collaborations if they will work better than existing ones.
- Give agencies more options regarding how they can **demonstrate successful outcomes**.
- Fund **non-educational systems** to work on improving educational outcomes.
- Enact federal policies that **promote collaborations** to improve service delivery and outcomes.
- **Develop common metrics** that can be used across states.

- Ensure that **policies are written clearly** and succinctly.
- Think of **young adults as a separate population** with their own set of needs.
- **Remove policies** that prohibit young people who have made mistakes from moving forward positively with their lives (e.g., denial of financial aid for education).
- Create policies to **integrate social and emotional learning** into educational systems.
- Support states to **develop cross-agency strategic plans** for youth services.
- **Change Title IV policies** that introduced financial disincentives for states to get youth out of foster care and into permanent families.
- Change funding so that **agencies gain from providing services cost-effectively** rather than being penalized (with loss of funds) for doing so.
- Provide more funding for states to **bring promising practices to scale**.
- **Eliminate funding** for ineffective programming (e.g., abstinence-only).
- Require **youth involvement** at all levels of youth-serving organizations.
- Provide incentives for youth-serving organizations to **engage with schools**.

This work was originally produced by the American Institutes for Research in support of the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs through a contract from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of HHS, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, or the other departments and agencies represented on the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS from Region I (Boston, MA)

Participating organizations*:

- YouthBuild/ Just a Start
- radKIDS Personal Empowerment Safety Education
- Boston Public Health Commission
- Home for Little Wanderers
- Revere CARES/MGH
- Bridgespan Group
- USDOL/ETA
- Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board
- JBS International
- Department of Children and Families
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services
- Phoenix House Academy of Springfield
- PACE/YouthBuild
- Youth Advocacy Department
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- South Shore Workforce Investment Board
- Abt Associates
- Barrett Honors College, Arizona State University
- No Secrets No Shame, LLC
- New Hampshire Department of Education
- Commonwealth Corporation
- US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

- Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership
- Somerville Public Schools
- Northeastern University/Harvard School of Public Health
- Office of the Child Advocate
- Salvation Army
- Massachusetts Campus Compact
- New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors
- Aging Out Task Force
- Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts
- YouthCare
- Brookview House, Inc.
- Project RIGHT, Inc.
- Rosie's Place

**Note: Participant information is only provided for participants who registered for the session and may not represent all organizations that were present.*