

# Connecting Boston's Youth and Young Adults: education, employment, community

Recommendations for Mayor Martin J. Walsh's Transition

Prepared By:

Opportunity Youth Collaborative

Youth Transitions Task Force

Multi-Cultural Dropout Outreach Collaborative

## WHERE WE ARE

National studies point to Boston as a leader in connecting its youth to education and employment, which is a tribute to the hard work of city, state, and community leaders over the last two decades. Strides have been made in dropout prevention and recovery, college completion, and youth employment.

- The annual dropout count has decreased by 38%, from 1,936 to 1,219, thanks to the Boston Public School (BPS) focus on dropout prevention and recovery, a new Re-Engagement Center, teacher-supervised on-line credit recovery, and key community-based interventions, such as alternative education and youth development programming. At the same time, the four-year graduation rate has increased from 58% to 66%, and the five-year rate from 65% to 71%.
- The BPS college enrollment rate has increased from 61% to 70%, while the college completion rate of BPS graduates has increased from 35% to 49% over the last decade.
- Every summer, 10,000 youth get a summer job in one of the biggest and most successful teen employment programs in the country. The City, State, non-profit organizations, and private sector employers have worked together to provide youth with different types of work settings and more developmental experiences within the programs.

Despite all these gains, there is more to be done, presenting an opportunity for the Walsh administration to make its mark. The dropout rate has plateaued—and even increased some over the last two years—after a dramatic four-year fall. There are still 12,000 “opportunity youth” living in Boston: disconnected youth and young adults, ages 16-24, who are neither working nor in school. This means that thousands of our young adults are not making the transition to self-sustaining adulthood—and even more are struggling with it.

This high rate of disengagement is part of a national trend in which the job market has changed structurally, favoring those with more education and training and accelerating the cycle of poverty. Today, jobs demand higher levels of education than they did thirty years ago; 70% of US jobs now require an Associate's degree or higher. With adults competing for entry-level jobs, employment rates for teens and young adults have decreased dramatically. Nationally, the rate of employment for 16-19 year olds has fallen from 45% in 1999 to 26% today, while employment for young adults ages 20-24 shrank from 72% to 62% in the same time period. In Massachusetts, teen summer employment rates have fallen from 67% to 33% since 1999. What's more, in the growing employment gap, the majority of Boston's disconnected youth (73%) are from the Black and Latino communities.

Usually, youth and adult recommendations are considered separately in the realm of policy. Because we are embracing the longer horizon, our recommendations for Mayor Walsh's administration span the education, youth development, postsecondary, and adult training systems. The following are our recommendations.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Dropout prevention for our high school students.

More individualized support and thoughtful programming can prevent youth from dropping out in the first place.

- We support the first two goals in Mayor Walsh’s High School Reform section of his education plan:
  - » Provide 9th and 10th grade academies with personalized support for new high school students to get on the path toward academic and social success;
  - » Create 11th and 12th grade school-to-career programming that provides enhanced exposure to career fields, along with strong academic preparation for college. We would recommend exposing 9th and 10th graders to career exploratory experiences as part of this design.

For implementation of these strategies, we recommend a phased-in approach focusing first on schools that do not have strong programmatic structures already in place. In addition, we recognize that students are interested in studying the history of the diverse cultures that make up our City.

- Use proven early indicators of dropout risk such as school absence, poor grades, or uneven behavior to identify students in need of targeted interventions.
- Provide resources for these targeted interventions to support students identified as at-risk of dropping out—during the school day, after school, and during the summer:
  - » Social-emotional supports to provide real-time assistance to off-track and at-risk students. Graduation coaches or case-managers are examples of proven interventions; community-based organizations (CBOs) with expertise in youth development can be contracted to provide this service. For the 9th and 10th grade students, the BPS at-risk funding weight could be leveraged to help fund these supports;
  - » Graduation and career planning to assess and track students’ academic status, as well as their progress on academic, career, and personal goals. Studies show that students with clear and well-researched career plans are more likely to persist in school through high school and college;
  - » Provide school-to-career programming to middle-grades students, so that they enter high school with some idea of career options.

## 2. Alternative education options for returning dropouts and off-track high school students.

A significant number of young people, including the hundreds of dropouts returning through the Re-Engagement Center each year and another 4,000 BPS students who are two years

or more behind academically, are too disconnected to benefit from the high school dropout prevention strategies outlined above. Many are 18 and over, and do not thrive in traditional high schools. They need options offering different approaches to teaching and learning. Our capacity for innovative recovery and acceleration options is well below need and demand.

- Double the number of alternative education placements from 1,300 to 2,600 over the next several years, and use creative partnerships with CBOs to reach this goal. Include a portfolio of different program models that offer career and vocational exposure as well as postsecondary preparation.
- Expand specialized support and instruction for specific populations that are underserved, such as homeless, expectant and parenting, and court-involved youth, as well as English Language Learners and students with learning disabilities.
- Increase the supply of high school equivalency (HSE—formerly known as the GED) programs that include college preparation and transition support into the first years of college. Studies show that programs with these elements are more effective, yet among hundreds of HSE prep seats in the city, only about 150 annually provide HSE programming with postsecondary preparation and bridging.

### 3. Outreach and follow-up support for dropouts.

Boston's re-engagement of dropouts has given hope to thousands of students, and diplomas to hundreds, in just a short time. It is a national model that other cities are emulating. Over the last two years, Boston has re-engaged 850+ dropouts, enrolled 450+, and graduated 100+ each year.

- Increase the City's capacity to reach out to dropouts and re-enroll them into school so that more youth and young adults might benefit. Increase re-engagement workers' capacity to follow and support re-enrolled dropouts, so that the City can more closely track and increase the first year success rate from 70% to 90%. The progress of recovered dropouts in the district is an important outcome for our system and our community, and also, a critical barometer of our district's effectiveness.
- Increase community awareness of the opportunities for returning to school. For example, Los Angeles has a mobile "Grad Van" that brings re-engagement services to neighborhood locations.

### 4. Postsecondary pathways.

Success Boston, a collaboration of the Mayor's Office, local colleges, employers, philanthropy, and local non-profits, has raised BPS graduates' six-year college completion rate from 35% to 49%. Approaches like transitional postsecondary coaching, increased college ownership of student success, and better pre-college preparation all contributed.

- Continue working with local postsecondary institutions and nonprofits to improve BPS graduates' college graduation rates through Success Boston.
- Partner with employers and local two-year and public colleges to build new vocational pathways leading to sustaining employment. Now that most jobs require at least an Associate's degree, vocational education needs to happen at the postsecondary level.

- Align high school curriculum and instruction with college placement requirements and increase dual enrollment opportunities to prepare students to start taking credit-bearing classes immediately upon enrollment in college.

## 5. Training pathways.

We support Mayor Walsh’s recommendation to expand occupational training programs for disconnected young adults ages 16-24. The 12,000 “opportunity youth” in Boston need strategies in the community to connect with the labor market. Boston’s training programs are in short supply for the adult population, and almost non-existent for young adults. We need to grow the training system and deliberately dedicate a share of it to young adults.

- Set aside city resources to train young adults, who often have a different pace of learning and different needs than older adult trainees.
- Provide more resources to build training programs in a variety of occupational fields, like the Boston Building Trades “Building Pathways” program, Year Up, and the Asian Civic Association’s Partnership for Automotive Career Education (PACE), at local community colleges and CBOs.
- Work with employers and existing programs to assure that training programs lead to skilled jobs that are in demand at local businesses.

## 6. Expanded employment options for high school students and disconnected youth.

Boston’s well-established job program is a model for the rest of the country and is the essential complement to a college and career oriented high school curriculum. Yet in today’s shrinking job market, thousands of youth do not make it into our programs. We also know that youth jobs prevent youth violence. A recent Boston study found that employed youth improved on 19 negative behaviors that correlate with youth violence. In contrast, unemployed youth regressed on the same number of risky and delinquent behaviors.

- Expand the summer jobs program to provide more quality jobs to Boston’s teenagers, particularly in Boston’s high demand career fields.
- Create a year-round part-time job program, so that youth can blend workplace and classroom learning as they start choosing career pathways.
- Extend a share of year-round employment opportunities to disconnected youth and young adults (ages 16-24) who are trying to re-connect to education and employment.

## 7. The next Superintendent.

We would like the next BPS superintendent to have a commitment to educating struggling students and returning dropouts. This individual should have a track record of supporting school innovation, creativity, and administrative flexibility in providing multiple pathways for these young people. Boston is fortunate to have stable interim district leadership in place, allowing Mayor Walsh and the School Committee sufficient time to conduct a thorough superintendent search which includes significant community input.

# WHO WE ARE

## Coalitions for Connecting Boston's Youth and Young Adults

### **Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC)**

*Engaging disconnected youth & young adults, ages 16-24*

Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)  
 American Student Assistance (ASA)  
 Barr Foundation  
 Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology  
 Bird Street Community Center  
 Black Ministerial Alliance  
 Boston Asian Youth Essential Service  
 Boston Day and Evening Academy  
 Boston Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
 Boston Mayor's Office  
 Boston Opportunity Agenda  
 Boston Private Industry Council  
 Boston Public Schools  
 Boston Strive  
 Boston Youth Service Network (BYSN)  
 B-PEACE for Jorge  
 Bridge Over Troubled Waters  
 Brigham and Women's Hospital  
 Bunker Hill Community College  
 Center for Teen Empowerment  
 Charlestown High School Diploma Plus  
 Circle of Promise (City of Boston)  
 College and Career Readiness Unit, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)  
 College Bound Dorchester  
 Committee for Public Counsel Services  
 Commonwealth Corporation  
 Department of Youth Services (DYS)  
 Diamond Educators  
 Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation  
 Dorchester Youth Collaborative  
 Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)  
 ESAC Boston  
 Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
 Freedom House  
 Health Resources in Action  
 Higher Ground-Boston  
 Hull Life Saving Museum

Hyde Square Task Force  
 InnerCity Weightlifting  
 Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)  
 Jewish Vocational Service (JVS)  
 JFYNetWorks  
 Justice Resource Institute (JRI)  
 Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN)  
 Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services (City of Boston)  
 More than Words  
 New England Center for Arts and Technology (NECAT)  
 New Profit, Inc.  
 Partnerships Advancing Communities Together (PACT)  
 Promise Neighborhoods, US Department of Education  
 Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation  
 Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps  
 Roca, Inc.  
 Root Cause  
 Roxbury Community College  
 Roxbury Youthworks, Inc.  
 SkillWorks  
 Sociedad Latina  
 State Street Foundation  
 StreetSafe Boston  
 The Boston Foundation  
 The Hyams Foundation  
 The Work Place  
 Trinity Boston Foundation  
 United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley  
 Urban College of Boston  
 Whole Foods  
 X-Cel Education  
 Year Up  
 YouthBuild Boston  
 YouthBuild Just-A-Start  
 Youth on Board  
 Youth Options Unlimited Boston  
 Youth Violence Prevention (YVP) Funder Learning Collaborative

**Youth Transitions Task Force (YTTF)**

*Dropout prevention & recovery*

Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)  
 Apprentice Learning  
 Bird Street Community Center  
 Boston Adult Technical Academy  
 Boston After School & Beyond  
 Boston Centers for Youth & Families (BCYF)  
 Boston Day & Evening Academy  
 Boston Private Industry Council  
 Boston Public Schools  
 Boston Public Schools Re-Engagement Center  
 Boston Youth Service Network (BYSN)  
 Charlestown High School  
 College and Career Readiness Unit, Massachusetts  
 Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
 (DESE)  
 College Bound Dorchester  
 Committee for Public Counsel Services  
 Department of Youth Services (DYS)  
 Diplomas Now  
 Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)  
 Freedom House  
 GED Plus  
 Home for Little Wanderers  
 Justice Resource Institute (JRI)  
 KeySteps, Inc.  
 Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy  
 Mayor’s Office of Jobs and Community Services  
 (City of Boston)  
 Phillip Brooks House Association, Harvard University  
 The Hyams Foundation  
 The Work Place  
 United Way of Massachusetts Bay and  
 Merrimack Valley  
 Whittier Street Health Center  
 Youth Options Unlimited Boston

**Multi-Cultural Dropout Outreach Collaborative (MDOC)**

*Dropout prevention & recovery, English Language Learners*

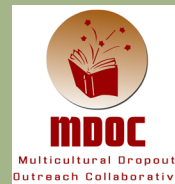
Freedom House  
 NAACP, Boston Branch  
 Office of City Councillor Charles Yancey  
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 Young Cape Verdean Club, Inc.



BOSTON PRIVATE INDUSTRY COUNCIL  
2 Oliver Street, Boston, MA 02109  
617-423-3755  
[www.bostonpic.org](http://www.bostonpic.org)



BOSTON OPPORTUNITY AGENDA  
420 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116  
617-338-1620  
[www.bostonopportunityagenda.org](http://www.bostonopportunityagenda.org)



MULTI-CULTURAL DROPOUT OUTREACH  
COLLABORATIVE  
5 Crawford Street, Dorchester, MA 02121  
617-445-2805  
[www.freedomhouse.com/Programs.html](http://www.freedomhouse.com/Programs.html)