Bringing Students Back to the Center

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING AND ENHANCING RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTERS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

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A Resource Guide for Implementing and Enhancing Re-Engagement Centers for Out-of-School Youth

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Leslie Rennie-Hill

Jenni Villano

Michelle Feist

Nettie Legters

with

Jean Thomases

Patrice Williams

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

Student Stories

Rosa loved high school, especially her Advanced Placement History and English classes; her teachers recognized her effort and intelligence. Then her mother became seriously ill and her autistic little sister needed someone to care for her. Rosa dropped out of her urban high school after her junior year: she felt personally proud to be assuming family responsibilities, yet she immediately felt the stigma of being a dropout. No longer an honor student, she felt like others saw her as a "loser."

This guide tells the stories of the exemplary re-engagement centers that provide opportunities and options to ensure disconnected youth can and do succeed.

Cycling between using drugs and rehab, Freddie's mother struggled as a single parent. Child Protective Services insisted Freddie live elsewhere: at 16 he moved out to his older sister's couch, and he kept moving month after month, "couch surfing" among his three older sisters who lived in three different towns on the outskirts of the city. At each different high school he faced new challenges that compounded his sense of discouragement and confusion: new textbooks and teachers; new kids to meet and win over; no way to earn credits. The guidance counselor told him he was too far behind and he might as well "just drop out and start his sophomore year over again in the fall." He dropped out.

Marcus entered high school afraid. Small, shy, and not a good reader, he worried about being bullied. He joined a gang and made some poor choices. Within a year he found himself in juvenile detention; school didn't matter as much as his legal problems. He wished he could start over but "what was done was done."

Angela planned to be a nurse. She loved school, especially biology and chemistry. Then she got pregnant in her junior year. Her teacher said, "I thought you were different, but I guess not. You'll drop out like the other girls." She didn't want to drop out. She wanted to be a good mom and a role model to her baby. Determined and discouraged, she didn't know what to do or where to go for help.

The familiar stories of Rosa, Freddie, Marcus, and Angela are true; their names are not. They represent many of the youth who drop out of high school, struggle to get a job, and move onward in life or even just survive in their communities. Their needs differ, and their re-entry into the education and workforce systems call for a level of personalization and support difficult to provide within a typical comprehensive high school structure.

For all of these youth a person from a re-engagement center reached out, established a trusting relationship, and supported them as they got back on track academically and found the extra supports they needed to manage life crises and school without giving up again. Rosa, Freddie, Marcus, and Angela found their way back to school; each is now succeeding in college after having earned a high school diploma.

This guide tells the stories of many youth like Rosa, Freddie, Marcus, and Angela and the important role that re-engagement centers play in providing opportunities and options to ensure disconnected youth can and do succeed.

While much is known about who drops out and why, there is still much to learn about successful re-engagement programs and strategies. Through re-engagement centers, education and community leaders are joining forces to help youth get back on track to a positive future. This guide describes effective re-engagement practices in communities that have stepped forward to meet the needs of these youth, to move them beyond the stigma associated with dropping out, and to help them reconnect with their dreams and aspirations.

Re-Engagement: The Call for Local Action

Over the past decade, sobering dropout data have led community and school leaders across the country to question with some urgency their own responsibilities to out-of-school youth. Nationally, 1.8 million young adults aged 16–21 are not enrolled in school or have not finished their high school education.[1] Nearly 400,000 students drop out of high school each year.[2] Despite recent gains, graduation rates are 79% or lower in over half the states, and significant attainment gaps persist for urban, minority, immigrant, and low-income youth.[3] African American and Hispanic students appear somewhat more successful than in the past, but large disparities in comparison to White and Asian students still exist. Urban areas demonstrate less success than suburban locations. Persistently, data confirm graduation gaps identifiable by race, ethnicity, immigrant status, family income, disabilities, and English proficiency.[4]

Moreover, national and local leaders across the country are focusing on this issue in response to heightened awareness of the costly economic impact on individuals and communities. Recent reports find:

- 6.7 million youth (aged 16 to 24) are out of school and not in the labor market.[5]
- The immediate taxpayer burden for disconnected youth is estimated at $13,900 per youth per year, and the immediate social burden at $37,450 per year (2011 dollars).[6]
- The earnings gap between those youth earning a college degree versus those earning only a high school diploma is greater than it has been in nearly 50 years; a person with only a high school diploma earns 62% of what is earned by a college graduate. Without even a high school diploma, the earnings gaps are even larger.[7]

Ignoring a high dropout rate is very costly for individuals and their communities. According to a 2012 report by labor economists, youth who have dropped out of high school or college "are not investing in their human capital or income. Their disconnection represents a significant loss of economic opportunity for the nation."[8] Students who have dropped out are reported to be disproportionately male and from minority groups, and such students are more likely to be unemployed, involved with the criminal justice system, suffering from mental or physical health conditions, teen parents, or burdened with substantial care-giving responsibilities for other family members. The report recommends targeted investments for disconnected youth and asserts, "Failure to harness their potential is an opportunity missed—for themselves and society." Such investments will contribute significantly to near- and long- term economic growth at the state and national levels.

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1   National League of Cities. *Municipal Action Guide – Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Re-engagement Centers.* December 2013.

2   http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1107REENGAGEDROPOUTS.PDF

3   America's Promise Alliance. *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge*

4   Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University and America's Promise Alliance. *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic.* 2012.

5   Retrieved January 16, 2014 from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528650.pdf

6   Retrieved January 16, 2014 from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528650.pdf

7   Retrieved February 13, 2014 from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/

8   Retrieved January 16, 2014 from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528650.pdf

Researchers have given significant attention to the reasons youth drop out. The research suggests that the rates of disconnection from school are a major contributing factor for why youth chose to leave school. Rumberger and Lim reviewed 25 years of research, and based on the synthesis of the data, the authors found that there are two types of characteristics that describe the reasons students drop out of school, institutional and individual characteristics, which include family, school, and community characteristics. The America's Promise Alliance and the Center for Promise conducted a series of interviews with out-of-school youth and concluded that disengaged students are often navigating toxic environments and face clusters of negative factors. They also emphasized the importance of (and sometimes lack of) relationships and connectedness in both the disengagement and re-engagement process.[9] Additionally, educators have joined with researchers and civic leaders to find ways to stem the dropout tide. The Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University has led efforts to create systems that offer early identification of problems and targeted responses aimed at preventing students from leaving school.[10]

The communities described in this guide have adopted a re-engagement center approach to actively reach out and reconnect out-of-school youth to educational opportunities. On the leading edge of a dynamic national trend, re-engagement centers share the common goal of assuring that all students complete high school or its equivalent and gain firmer footing as they transition to adulthood, earning a postsecondary degree or industry certification. While centers may adopt similar strategies, they differ in organizational structure and service design. This guide shares the variety of models that have emerged to fit local needs and resources.

The guide is designed to help school and community leaders address the challenges of dropout recovery and establish or strengthen their own re-engagement efforts. It was written to provide useful information to school and district level leaders, civic leaders, and state policy makers as well as other potential drivers and partners in re-engagement initiatives. It includes information on:

- Establishing the need for re-engagement support
- Understanding disconnected youth and their needs
- Defining a re-engagement center and its key functions
- Determining the range of existing models and their operation
- Assessing impact and measuring outcomes
- Planning for sustainability
- Identifying where to go for colleague consultation, resources, and tools

Interspersed throughout the guide are profiles of the ten studied sites. Each profile features distinctive practices reflecting the values and priorities of that site and are applicable to particular re-engagement center elements and/or practices discussed in adjacent sections of the guide. The profile descriptions offer potentially replicable examples for communities interested in starting or expanding a re-engagement center. Sites welcome further inquiry about their profiled practices.

Those managing re-engagement centers are continually learning as they seek to glean from others how to improve practice and results. The guide shares exemplary practices along with some essential questions leaders can keep asking for continuous improvement. The authors hope the guide can support and streamline local efforts to create or improve re-engagement efforts while enabling leaders to benefit from lessons learned.

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9   California Dropout Research Project. *Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research.* October 2008.

10   Civic Enterprises. *Building a Grad Nation.*

Informing the Guide

The primary source of information for the guide is an in-depth study of ten active re-engagement centers. This study was conducted by the Millennium Group, LLC and the Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center. The study focused on current practice and up-to-date learning from the field of re-engagement and dropout recovery. This process was guided by a technical working group (TWG) of organizational leaders concerned with the dropout problem and invested in youth school and career success (full list of TWG members appears on page 1). Through the TWG's range of perspectives the study team gained deeper understanding of issues relevant to the current dropout situation, especially the added advantages of community partnerships, the challenges created by the typical separation between conversations about middle and high school reform and those about dropout recovery efforts, the nonlinear path of student re-engagement as they continue to experience academic, career, and personal challenges, and the need for specific metrics to measure the impact of re-engagement strategies. The TWG described the essential roles a re-engagement center can play—roles that can be delivered in many ways and need not be limited to a particular "bricks and mortar" location.

After a literature review, scan of the field and individual interviews with TWG members, the study team identified a pool of potential re-engagement centers to research. Study sites were selected based on the priorities of geographic diversity, length of established operation, demonstrated student and program success, and variation of organizational models, and include centers operating across the country. The ten centers identified for phone calls or visits serve urban or rural areas in every region of the country, are geographically diverse, and offer a variety of organizational models. The five centers selected for site visits are all established centers—operating from between three and twelve years—that are tracking early indicators of student and program success.

The ten sites studied include:

- D2 Center | Directions. Diploma. Omaha, NE
- Colorado Youth for a Change. Denver, CO
- Re-Engage Dubuque. Dubuque, IA
- Newark Re-Engagement Center - Fast Track Success Academy. Newark, NJ
- College, Career, and Technology Academy. Rio Grande Valley, TX
- Los Angeles YouthSource Centers. Los Angeles, CA
- Fast Forward Center. Dayton, OH
- Multiple Pathways to Graduation Re-Engagement Center. Philadelphia, PA
- Boston Public Schools Re-Engagement Center. Boston, MA
- Reconnection Center. Portland, OR

Team members created sets of interview and focus group questions for re-engagement center program directors, staff, youth clients, partners, and school district personnel. Interviews included questions about youth served, start-up steps, center purpose and goals, service approach, internal organization, partners, funding, outcomes and impact, sustainability, and challenges and lessons learned. Document review, interview, and observation protocols developed for the study were shaped by a common set of research questions that practitioners interested in establishing a re-engagement center might ask:

- What strategies or approaches exist for reaching out to out-of-school youth and encouraging them to return to school? How are data and technology used in outreach efforts?
- Who uses re-engagement centers? What are the characteristics of youth currently served? Which youth seem hardest to reach and serve?
- Where do communities locate a re-engagement center, geographically and organizationally, to reach out-of-school youth?
- What core services and activities do re-engagement centers provide as they recruit out-of-school youth and aid them in resuming their educations? Are services and activities primarily academic, behavioral, career-focused, or a combination?
- What partnerships do centers create? How do centers connect with school systems and community-based service providers?
- What are the typical costs of a re-engagement center and how are they funded?
- How are re-engagement centers staffed to recruit and serve out-of-school youth?
- How do centers measure and track success? What impact do they claim to have had?

In the fall and early winter of 2013, an experienced team of researchers from The Millennium Group International, LLC (TMG) and Johns Hopkins University (JHU) collected and analyzed data from center websites and relevant publicly available documents, conducted in-depth phone interviews with the directors of five centers, and carried out day-long site visits in another five centers. Site visits included structured interviews with center directors, staff, youth clients, and school system and community-based partners.

The study team used a consensual qualitative review (CQR) approach involving analysis of site reports, interview transcripts, and relevant documents and artifacts during meetings and conference calls. Team members described each site in detail, identifying key themes, processes, strengths, and challenges that addressed the research questions. They then systematically identified core elements and drivers of re-engagement center practices that either appeared in common across sites or that differentiated sites in meaningful ways. The information from the study is the basis for the development of this guide.

Understanding and Identifying Disconnected Youth

Who are the dropouts needing a community's help? Many stereotypes exist about disconnected, disengaged youth. Understanding who the youth are—the data on the size and characteristics of the dropout populations, their schooling experiences and patterns, their immediate needs, and their varied stories—provides logical and heartfelt reasons to act. Taking the time to clarify youth needs and issues gives a community a common interest and purpose for action.

Identifying youth who have left high school without a diploma is the first step in meeting the needs of such students. Generally, communities take steps to identify young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are disconnected from school and community resources. Although state and district data systems are continually improving technologies to provide this information, it is still challenging to compile accurate numbers and names of students who have dropped out to avoid overestimated graduation rates and underestimated dropout rates.[1]

Communities in the lead on tracking out-of-school youth have initiated cohort studies and segmentation analyses of student academic progress and needs, using results to guide policy and program responses. Contracting with consultants, universities, or other partners, districts and/or cities have learned who drops out and at what point in their progress through the system, student age and credit attainment at time of disconnection, and attendance patterns prior to leaving the system.

Segmentation analysis, a process recommended by Jobs for the Future and employed early on by New York City and Boston as part of their multiple pathways initiatives, can clarify for a community the percentage of its out-of-school youth who are off-track for an on-time high school graduation in four years. Students "young and close" are those students typically deemed on-track. A segmentation analysis identifies all youth who are off-track by distinguishing three categories: "old and far" (overage and needing many credits/skills to graduate); "old and close" (overage yet close to earning a diploma within a year); or "young and far" (close enough in age to their peers to be able to succeed potentially in a new high school setting, with time to get back on track, and graduate in two to three years).[2]

> **"Your prior school experience is not equal to your identity or value."**
>
> *— Re-Engagement Center Director*

Being informed about other relevant factors leading to disengagement or "dropping out" can also prove invaluable to planners and practitioners, such as: social/emotional needs; homelessness; drug and alcohol involvement; foster care history; family issues; involvement in the justice system; length of time out of school; pregnancy or parenting; or employment demands.

The National League of Cities (NLC) reports that re-engagement centers use whatever relevant data they can access to develop reasonable hypotheses about demand for services and referrals during the start-up phase of a community initiative and then readjust services over time to fit the emerging understanding of the needs of various segments of the dropout population.

1   M. Dynarski, L. Clarke, B. Cobb, J. Finn, R. Rumberger, and J. Smink. *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2008-4025), 2008. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from **http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc**

2   Jobs for the Future. *Back on Track Model.* Retrieved January 18, 2014 **http://www.jff.org/projects/current/education/back-track/1354**

"People [at other schools] would scream your failures but whisper your success. They'll let you know everything about what you do wrong, but the moment you do something right you don't hear nothing. That's different here though, because they praise you about everything you do right. Everything. And the moment you do something wrong, they say, 'But you was doing so good. You did this. You did this. Let's go back to it,' and they'll bring you back."

— *Student at a re-engagement center*

While strategic data analysis helps leaders define the scope and characteristics of a community's disconnected youth problem, re-engagement center staff emphasized how important it is that young people have a chance to tell their own stories to adult decision-makers in a safe and welcoming environment.

Some patterns of common experience emerge; other stories are unique. Centers studied report the out-of-school youth they serve often disconnect from a traditional high school where students can feel lost or unnoticed: why that disconnection happened must be understood. Out-of-school youth commonly share a self-perception of inadequacy, their self-confidence shaped by experiences of school disconnection labeled as their personal academic failure or inadequacy. Students receive implied messages, such as "You don't belong here." When their out-of-school situations are reinforced negatively by others' assumptions of their lack of intelligence and ability, youth who participated in focus groups at the re-engagement centers in the study reported feeling discouraged and isolated: they often know what they *can't* do, rather than what they *can* do.

The Shared Responsibility of Disengagement

When a student drops out of high school, people often want to identify who is at fault. Some place responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the youth; others point to the family, teachers, the school, or the broader community. Many conversations about high school dropouts begin unproductively with attempts to point fingers and assess blame—typically blame leveled at the student's failures and couched in adult frustration. But blame has no room in this equation; rather, a focus on who is disconnected and what they need to re-engage, grounded in present realities, focused on future success, leads to successful re-engagement strategies.

Once youth leave school, they typically face unforeseen realities: they eventually need to figure out how to get a job or support themselves, where to live, how to pay the bills, how to reconnect with some type of schooling or certification, and how to get the other supports they need to make it in the adult world. Some communities question whether the overall out-of-school youth problem should be the sole responsibility of youth or whether others bear some responsibility for sharing that load, giving youth the encouragement, resources, and skills that will empower them to succeed.

Communities, such as those highlighted in this guide, that are initiating successful re-engagement strategies are shifting the conversation away from a "blame and shame" attitude and embracing a proactive and systemic view. By examining their data and listening to the stories of out-of-school youth, they are developing a deeper understanding of *systemic* problems and policies that hinder student re-engagement (despite the well-intentioned efforts of many adults and young people) and increasing their understanding of how systemic improvements might be achieved.

8

Re-Engagement Centers
—An Evolving Approach

What exactly is a re-engagement center? The term re-engagement center can be used in reference to a variety of settings and services. While models differ, substantial agreement exists about the essential functions of re-engagement. Those functions can occur in a school, an office, another gathering space, or via virtual communication. When a community wants to increase its high school graduation rate, when it wants to assure every young person persists on a path to college and career, a re-engagement center can serve as a vital community resource for reaching out to and re-engaging disconnected youth.

For the purposes of this guide, the term "re-engagement center" means a site or entity that conducts active outreach to encourage out-of-school youth to return to school and assists such youth in resuming their education. A re-engagement center also may provide case management and other services to support youth after they return to school, such as to assist them in overcoming barriers that prevent them from regular attendance.

The National League of Cities (NLC) convenes a Re-Engagement Network composed of early adopters from urban and rural locations across the U.S. Some of the centers studied for the guide are members of the NLC network. NLC's working definition of a re-engagement center received wide acceptance among members of the network: "A staffed portal, operating at the citywide or school district level that provides a one-stop assessment and referral service to reconnect educationally disconnected youth and young adults with a best fit option to complete a HS credential." This definition implies a process to first find out-of-school youth and encourage them to give school another try.

Based on the investigation informing this study, re-engagement centers are defined by having certain essential functions:

1. **Outreach**
2. **Assessment**
3. **Referral**

Together the three functions comprise the core activities of a re-engagement center; they are present to some degree at each site studied. Each community draws upon its own unique mix of resources depending on available funding, access to data, availability of wraparound services, and other community or school system assets. Some centers can also offer opportunities for credit recovery or academic tutoring; others may offer career connections or other additional services. Nevertheless, every center conducts outreach and assessment and then initiates a supported referral for further schooling.

Outreach involves going to the out-of-school youth, entering their world, and persistently, repeatedly, authentically inviting them back with messages like this from one of the centers in the study: "We care too much to let you go. Si te fuiste de la escuela sin recibir tu diploma, llamamos o visitamos para ayudarte." Outreach takes many forms: texting, calling, making home visits, placing signs on buses, going to community centers, engaging social workers, playing pickup basketball, and many other means of communicating with youth in spaces where they are comfortable.

Assessment involves determining who a student is, what progress has been made toward earning a high school credential, and what is immediately needed to get back on track. The best possible analysis of academic achievement and readiness to enter or re-enter a school setting is essential. Some centers also assess

on a social/emotional scale; some employ social workers or other professionals to diagnose mental health or substance abuse issues requiring treatment; others include a career development assessment to potentially give incentive and spur motivation; others evaluate additional dimensions.

Referral involves making a best-fit match between a young person and a school, depending on available local options. Generally, youth are guided to plan for high school completion and maintain important connections to support services and resources. Models of referral vary in the degree of support offered in the handoff to an educational option.

The graphic below delineates the model with its incorporation of outreach, assessment, and referral.

A Model for Re-Engagement

Disconnected Youth
Out of School
Off-track for High
School Credential

OUTREACH

Re-Engagement Center
Essential Services:
Outreach, Assessment,
Referral, Other Optional
Services

SUPPORTIVE TRANSITION

Educational Pathways
- High School Diploma
- GED to College
- Internships & Apprenticeships
- Community College
- Industry Certification
- College/University

Key
Blue Arrows = Student Path
Beige Arrows = Adult Role

Linking Youth Back to the Educational Services

A re-engagement center links disconnected youth back to the system. It provides services based on its key functions: *outreach* to the pool of the community's out-of-school youth; *assessment* services; and *referral* to local education and training options where youth can complete a high school credential. The reality of outreach and transition is that the process is nonlinear, with frequent start-stop-restart patterns managed by center staff members as they work with youth facing trust issues, academic challenges, and demanding personal life situations.

The organizational model used in re-engagement centers nationally varies: some sites place a proportionally different emphasis among the various basic center functions; some incorporate a broader array of services. For example, of the ten centers studied, one site places a premium on extensive outreach to out-of-school youth and sustained case management where youth can rely on positive adult allies for help navigating the educational system. Another site focuses on assessment of a youth's academic progress and social-emotional needs and also provides opportunities for skill building likely to undergird a successful transition to a school.

The reality of outreach and transition is that the process is nonlinear, with frequent start-stop-restart patterns

No matter where re-engagement services are located, they serve the entire local high school system and cannot operate in isolation from that system. Re-engagement centers serve a community's youth, but they are not always considered officially a part of (or under the auspices of) a school district. In some situations, a center plays a central, connected role within the district, while in others it may operate on the margins. Clarifying a center's role, including its services and limitations, by maintaining a realistic awareness of what a center can and cannot accomplish for a district or community can be a continual challenge and may need further clarification as changes in needs and/or services occur over time.
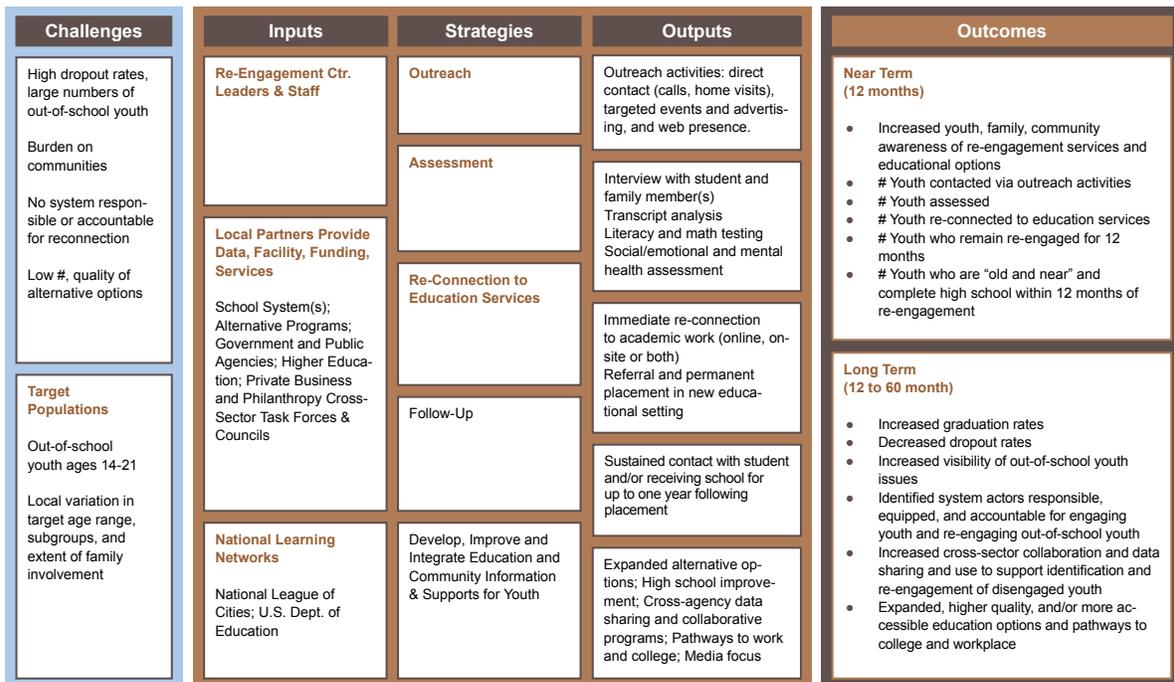
Logic Model

After outreach, assessment, and referral, the next step is to bring students back to the system—linking them securely back to educational services and supporting that transition. These steps express an underlying theory of action—that youth who are disconnected from formal education need direct access to caring adults who are dedicated to reengaging them and who have the knowledge, skills and resources to do so. An important corollary, derived from the literature review and scan of current programs informing this guide, is that those adults must themselves be institutionally linked to, and supported by, a community of partners who take collective responsibility for disengaged youth, and coordinated action to provide them with a pathway to high school graduation and adult success.

The graphic chart below offers a logic model that further specifies in summary form how reengagement centers are activating skilled adults and partnerships in a purposeful improvement system. A logic model is a visual representation of the resources, strategies, and activities that connect the need for a planned program with its desired results.[1] Traditionally used exclusively in evaluation research, logic models are increasingly recommended as a tool for program developers, partners, and other stakeholders to support shared understanding and collaborative planning, development, and ongoing decision-making about the "why, how, and to what end" of the program. A logic model also promotes clarity around data and metrics that will be used to assess program implementation and impact, positioning programs to collect information vital to sustainability and replication.

This general model for reengagement centers is offered as a starting point for readers interested in developing programs in their own sites. Each center studied in this guide faces similar challenges; reaches out to its target population of out-of-school youth; creates its unique mix of inputs, strategies, and outputs; and achieves its own set of short- and long-term outcomes.

Re-Engagement Logic Model

Challenges	Inputs	Strategies	Outputs	Outcomes
High dropout rates, large numbers of out-of-school youth Burden on communities No system responsible or accountable for reconnection Low #, quality of alternative options **Target Populations** Out-of-school youth ages 14-21 Local variation in target age range, subgroups, and extent of family involvement	**Re-Engagement Ctr. Leaders & Staff** **Local Partners Provide Data, Facility, Funding, Services** School System(s); Alternative Programs; Government and Public Agencies; Higher Education; Private Business and Philanthropy Cross-Sector Task Forces & Councils **National Learning Networks** National League of Cities; U.S. Dept. of Education	**Outreach** **Assessment** **Re-Connection to Education Services** Follow-Up Develop, Improve and Integrate Education and Community Information & Supports for Youth	Outreach activities: direct contact (calls, home visits), targeted events and advertising, and web presence. Interview with student and family member(s) Transcript analysis Literacy and math testing Social/emotional and mental health assessment Immediate re-connection to academic work (online, on-site or both) Referral and permanent placement in new educational setting Sustained contact with student and/or receiving school for up to one year following placement Expanded alternative options; High school improvement; Cross-agency data sharing and collaborative programs; Pathways to work and college; Media focus	**Near Term (12 months)** • Increased youth, family, community awareness of re-engagement services and educational options • # Youth contacted via outreach activities • # Youth assessed • # Youth re-connected to education services • # Youth who remain re-engaged for 12 months • # Youth who are "old and near" and complete high school within 12 months of re-engagement **Long Term (12 to 60 month)** • Increased graduation rates • Decreased dropout rates • Increased visibility of out-of-school youth issues • Identified system actors responsible, equipped, and accountable for engaging youth and re-engaging out-of-school youth • Increased cross-sector collaboration and data sharing and use to support identification and re-engagement of disengaged youth • Expanded, higher quality, and/or more accessible education options and pathways to college and workplace

1   W. K. Kellogg Foundation. W. K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide. January 2004. Retrieved December 11, 2014 from **http://www.smartgivers.org/uploads/logicmodelguidepdf.pdf**

Re-Engagement Centers In Action

The ten re-engagement centers in the study mirror the general characteristics noted in national literature and referenced earlier. Their histories and current practices represent a set of potential models, each with its own pluses and minuses. Adding illustrative detail where especially relevant, this section of the guide elaborates on the day-to-day operations of each re-engagement center's focus on a target population, start-up, and operation.

No one re-engagement center is a clone of another. Depending on local assets and needs, each center studied faces slightly different challenges, employs different mixes of inputs and strategies, and realizes varying degrees of success. In this section we will address critical re-engagement center functions and charac-teristics, providing center profiles that illustrate them (see below). While the centers profiled incorporate, to larger or lesser degrees, all functions highlighted, the profiles are particularly strong in the aspect each illustrates.

The major functions and characteristics discussed include: 1) characteristics of youth served by re-engagement centers; 2) organizational models and operations; 3) target populations; 4) start-up activities; 5) re-engagement center services; 6) partnerships; 7) impact/outcomes; 8) funding; and 9) sustainability.

Who Are the Young People Served by Re-Engagement Centers?

What is known about the out-of-school youth that form the re-engagement center target population at the ten sites?

- Primarily, they are out-of-school youth aged 16 to 21. A few centers, however, serve youth younger than 16 if they have dropped out of school. Depending on state laws and school funding structure, some programs are available to youth up to age 26.
- Most youth who connect with the re-engagement centers were significantly off-track to meet the four-year graduation mark when they dropped out. Some centers are beginning to serve youth who are still officially in school but significantly off-track.
- School district and/or state policies define who is or is not considered an out-of-school youth, usually based on the length of confirmed disconnection from high school. Youth in some districts are considered officially disconnected after ten consecutive days out of school; others are labeled out-of-school youth after as much as one full year absent from school.
- Often these youth have personal challenges that have interfered with school, including those who are English language learners, pregnant or parenting, homeless, adjudicated, or LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning). While these characteristics do not necessarily preclude high school completion, youth with such issues at the study sites reported they need more supports and security than a traditional high school could offer.
- A few re-engagement centers target specific populations, such as pregnant and parenting, homeless, adju-dicated, LGBTQ, and/or with mental health needs. Some centers provide specific outreach and supports to these youth that include partnerships with community agencies that provide services and referrals.
- Some centers are developing strategies geared to particular racial, ethnic, or language groups that appear to be disproportionately represented in their communities' out-of-school youth populations.
- Adjudicated youth: policies and practices among schools and community agencies often conflict, which can present obstacles for youth. Strong case management aids students as they navigate the systems.

See Appendix for Table 1: Populations Served by Re-Engagement Centers.

Both **D2 Center | Directions. Diploma** located in Omaha, NE, and **Colorado Youth for a Change** (CYC) in Denver, CO, place a premium on their responsibility to meet out-of-school youth "where they are" and recognize their unique identities and needs. With different approaches, each site, profiled below, strives to reach all youth needing reconnection.

Both demonstrate a realistic focus on their target population - youth needing reconnection services in their communities. Both the Omaha and Colorado re-engagement efforts are shaped by their understanding of who the disconnected youth are and how best to reach them. The centers then structure their outreach and service delivery activities accordingly.

D2 CENTER | DIRECTIONS. DIPLOMA.
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

A Personal Guide for Each Youth

When designing the D2 Center, the directors understood the critical need to develop sustained, trustworthy relationships with young people from the moment they sign up with the D2 Center to work their way to their high school diploma.

The D2 Center in Omaha, NE, is a re-engagement program in its third year of operation. Chiefly funded by a private foundation, the D2 Center was initiated and managed by a nonprofit organization. The D2 Center, centrally located in downtown Omaha, is accessible to most students via public transportation. Currently in the process of formalizing the partnership with the school district, it remains an example of an external organization drawing attention to the needs of a community's dropout population.

When designing the D2 Center, the directors understood the critical need to develop sustained, trustworthy relationships with young people from the moment they sign up with the D2 Center to work their way to their high school diploma and established the role of Youth Academic Navigator (YAN), a pivotal position in the organization's services. For each young person enrolled at the D2 Center, their YAN is the support person. Each YAN carries a caseload of up to 40 youth. Serving as a case manager, the YAN meets regularly with students, attends school meetings, makes home visits, goes to court, and works with all partner organizations involved in supporting the students as they work to achieve a common goal: a high school diploma. The D2 Center also provides tutoring, a few elective credit classes, and a careers program that helps youth focus on next steps after earning a diploma.

D2 Center staff members emphasize: "One key point is the central importance of building relationships with this population and understanding that each student is unique. It is difficult to really grasp what they are going through. Staff must understand that they [youth] are struggling; they want to succeed but need assistance."

http://www.d2center.org/

COLORADO YOUTH FOR A CHANGE (CYC)
DENVER, COLORADO

Connecting with Some of the Hardest-to-Reach Youth

LGBTQ youth often face harassment at school and home, leading them to seek safety elsewhere. Unfortunately, this search also often causes them to drop out of school and become homeless. Twenty-eight percent of LGBTQ youth drop out of high school.

CYC was established in 2005 in response to the alarming increase in the number of students who have dropped out in Colorado. The agency serves six school districts in the general Denver area. CYC aims a special lens on some of the hardest-to-reach youth, recognizing that vulnerable populations, such as homeless and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are more likely to drop out than their peers.

The 2011–2012 dropout rate for Colorado homeless youth was 8.9 percent, almost triple the state's average rate (Colorado Department of Education). The education system can be confusing and overwhelming for homeless youth. System expectations to receive school and medical records, homeless youth needs for food, shelter, and transportation, and educators' unfamiliarity with navigating the enrollment process for homeless youth can build seemingly insurmountable barriers.

LGBTQ youth often face harassment at school and home, leading them to seek safety elsewhere. Unfortunately, this search also often causes them to drop out of school and become homeless. Twenty-eight percent of LGBTQ youth drop out of high school (Lamda Legal). According to Urban Peak, an agency serving homeless youth in Denver, 19 percent of youth served in their shelters self-identify as LGBTQ. The disparities these populations face are disproportionate to their peers. For LGBTQ youth, school is often fraught with challenges from bullying or an inability to connect with peers.

Acknowledging the disproportionate dropout rates for these populations, CYC's Most Vulnerable Populations (MVP) program targets homeless and LGBTQ youth. Through the MVP program, the Homeless Outreach Specialist and LGBTQ Services Coordinator assist youth to reconnect and re-enroll in school. They also work to create change within schools and the community and help students advocate for themselves and better navigate their own educational options. In addition, the MVP Specialists collaborate with community partners and serve on committees that address issues affecting both homeless and LGBTQ youth. CYC has created two additional positions to support these youth; these staff members work together regularly to effectively leverage resources. Over the past year, the program has served 1,769 total youth, expanded its work with most vulnerable populations to include adjudicated girls, and successfully enrolled 677 students back into school.

www.youthforachange.org

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Start-Up Activities
—Initial Planning and Data Analysis

The development, design, and implementation of a re-engagement center require deliberate efforts to determine both the need and the response—that is, to identify the disconnected youth and the available options within the system.
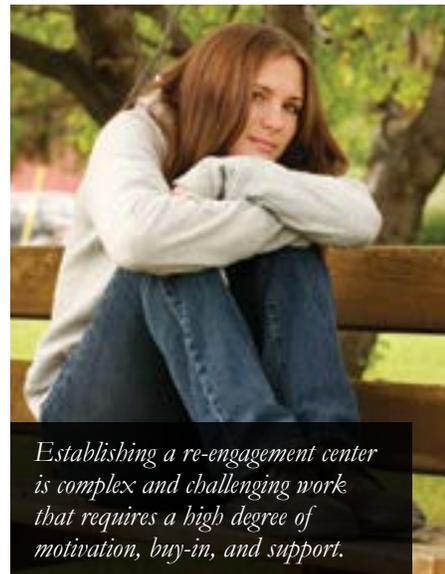
Establishing a re-engagement center is complex and challenging work that requires a high degree of motivation, buy-in, and support from a variety of stakeholders. A common feature of successful programs is that they coalesce around strong reasons to act. When cities, school districts, and community colleges identify leaders who care about this issue, launching a re-engagement center project can be the single most important thing to do to address the dropout issue.

As school and community leaders make the case for local action to serve out-of-school youth, it is important to consider the size and scope of the challenge as well as the perspectives of youth, the community, and the systems providing education, training, and supports. Most communities begin by addressing the following basic questions:

- What is the size of our out-of-school youth problem?
- Where does our community stand in relation to national and state statistics?
- What are other communities like ours doing to re-engage and support youth?
- Who is graduating and moving on to get a postsecondary credential and who is not?
- What are the social and moral implications for our community?
- What are the cost/benefits of addressing the issue versus letting it continue?

Establishing a re-engagement center is complex and challenging work that requires a high degree of motivation, buy-in, and support.

See Appendix for Table 2: Start-up Activities.

Dubuque IA leaders credit the strength of the relationships and common purpose among the partners for the successful start-up of Re-Engage Dubuque. They offer a clear example of effective collaborations that established the platform for a strong launch from the start. In the center profile that follows, data analysis clearly informs the need for the center and the populations served.

RE-ENGAGE DUBUQUE
DUBUQUE, IOWA

Individuals and Relationships Making it Work

Through the program's strong partnerships, the re-engagement coaches have a direct line of communication with the public school system that employs them and have access to its student database.

Re-Engage Dubuque is a new site in its second year of operation. It serves the small, Midwestern city with just under 60,000 residents, an unemployment rate below 5 percent, an 87 percent graduation rate, and a history of generational poverty. The site is a stand-out because of its strong community support, local collaborations, and "whatever it takes" attitude. It is a joint venture between Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC), Dubuque Community Schools, and Project Hope (a city initiative designed to dissolve disparity and ensure equity in employment and economic opportunities). The Re-Engage Dubuque team recognizes that without a high school diploma a young person has few options to find work that will put him or her above the poverty line.

Although the center has offices at NICC, little time is spent there. The model consists of two dynamic Re-Engagement Coaches who work in the field recruiting youth who have dropped out and helping those who have re-engaged to remove obstacles that stand in the way of earning a high school diploma or GED. The coaches help individual students develop a personalized plan for completing a high school diploma or GED and exploring options for further study. During the first year, the Dubuque Community School District had 135 students who had dropped out; the number decreased to 98 after the first year of operation, encouraging the center and its partners to believe that their strategies are working. According to one of the Re-Engagement Coaches, Tom, "It doesn't feel like a factory that's just putting people through the cogs of a wheel. It's about that individual student and his or her reasons for not succeeding—(we do) everything we possibly can do to get around those barriers. I think it is absolutely about the relationship."

The site was strategic about how it focused its attention in these early efforts. For example, the state of Iowa officially certifies the number of students who have dropped out each December. If youth are not reenrolled by October 1 following the year they dropped out, they are counted officially as out-of-school youth. Tom concentrated on finding youth who dropped out and getting them reenrolled before October 1. The high schools also got involved due to the amount of publicity around the opening of the re-engagement program. They began to refer kids they knew needed the help and assisted the program with the use of their databases. It became a combined effort to lower the cities number of students who have dropped out.

Through the program's partnerships, the re-engagement coaches also have access to a number of resources from the community college and Project HOPE.

Tom, an experienced Youth Coach and Navy veteran, and fellow coach Temwa, are able to use their counseling skills as well as their youthfulness to meet the youth where they are. They attribute their success to relationship building and understanding the youth experience.

Through the program's strong partnerships, the re-engagement coaches have a direct line of communication with the public school system that employs them and have access to its student database. They also have access to a number of resources from the community college and Project HOPE, which enhance their overall program offerings. Their success and strategic public relations have also gained them mayoral support.

http://www.dubuque.k12.ia.us/re-engage/index.html

Determine Community Need

To understand the programming and supports necessary to re-engage out-of-school youth, program leaders must first identify the youth who have exited the educational system. Who are they? Why did they step away from their education? Nationally, the availability and use of data varies among school districts.

All sites studied initially defined the size of their out-of-school youth problem by obtaining an estimate of the number of youth who have dropped in its community and if possible described their demographics. Some also identified the number of youth younger than 25 years old who are unemployed and not in school. From these scans of the environment, re-engagement centers developed reasonable hypotheses about demand for services and referrals at start-up and then readjusted their services as the needs of the out-of-school youth population were better known.

Data analysts in districts, universities, and research organizations increasingly conduct segmentation analyses to understand this population (see page 7). These data provide critical information about exited student demographics and academic history, including credit status, attendance, and behavior, and will help determine the most effective recovery strategies and placement options for specific populations. A segmentation analysis of the out-of-school youth population requires the cooperation of the local school district(s) and is best undertaken as part of a school system segmentation analysis tracking a cohort of students from middle school or high school entry to either graduation or disconnection from school. This type of study can pinpoint who drops out and when. Once a community understands the specific age and distance to graduation of youth when they drop out, they can plan programming and new school development accordingly.

Once the disconnected youth have been identified, the critical question remains, "To what educational option will they reconnect?" An extensive inventory of available quality educational options—including district, charter, and community-based alternative schools; community college programming; career and technical training; and other options—guides a planning team as it determines its approach and services. What is available and what is needed? Many larger, urban districts have multiple resources for student recovery, while smaller cities find few options other than the schools the youth previously attended.

Additional Start-up Tasks

The initial start-up of any educational program is a daunting task. A center to re-engage out-of-school youth presents particular challenges. In addition to the above-mentioned need for a firm understanding of the student population and the available options, the sites identified many additional start-up tasks:

- **Stakeholder buy-in:** Multiple sites described the efforts that were necessary for the key stakeholders to accept and embrace the idea of a re-engagement center. Certainly, the primary tools are the data: dropout data, comparison data (comparing dropout data from year to year among different students, charting racial, gender, socio-economic differences), cost/benefit analyses, and other kinds of data serving to define the problem. Also effective is the identification of high-level advocates with the ability to rally others and get the "political will" behind the efforts. Mayors, county officials, superintendents and school boards, college presidents, local community and faith-based leaders, and others provided the support to many of the sites resulting in a smoother and stronger implementation.

- **Partnerships for programming:** The need for partnerships cannot be over-emphasized. One program director stated that the main mistake made in the start-up of that re-engagement center was the lack of partnerships. The identification of organizations and individuals that will provide programming opportunities, student support, funding, and other resources alongside the center is a critical component to the planning and opening of a center. These partnerships will help "sell" the program locally and raise initial funds. Colleges and workforce programs can provide opportunities for college and career readiness and transitions.

- **Funding:** Identifying financing for start-up costs and the ongoing operational budget was a significant challenge for most sites. Various mixes of partnerships among city and government programs, grants, philanthropy, and fundraising provided a large amount of the initial start-up funds for most of the sites. Private funders met the entire start-up costs for one center. School-district-sponsored sites also used monies from the schools' general funds. With the greater visibility and proven value of existing re-engagement centers across the country, funding may be more available for those wanting to design or replicate a re-engagement center in their communities.

- **Relationships with school districts:** "Partner with key district people and be sure there is senior leadership advocacy." These words of advice from a program director reflect the need expressed by the majority of sites. School districts help provide the data for identifying the youth in need of re-engagement as well as critical information necessary for assessing the academic and social/emotional needs of such youth. This is an ongoing challenge for two of the sites that have very little, if any, relationship with their respective school districts. Additionally, one program director who initiated a district-sponsored center emphasized the need for complete buy-in from the superintendent and cabinet to provide the funding, resources, and support necessary for sustainability. A program that is a combined effort of the city and school district described the benefits of forging a true partnership for the youth.

- **Location:** Determining the location for a re-engagement center and the delivery of re-engagement services is a critical function of the founding partners. Disengaged youth with a school failure history, negative expectations about what it means to return to school, automatic distrust of school or adult staff, safety concerns, transportation needs, or other academic or social/emotional issues may decide to re-engage or not depending on the location of a re-engagement center as well as the attitude and approach of its staff. Whether sited at a public school location or in the community, protections for safety, easy access, and neutrality—including clear separation from the high school setting the student chose to leave—were noted as critical by almost all of the sites.

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- **Staffing and hiring the right people:** Decisions on staffing design depend on the re-engagement model, the defined roles, and the size of the center. Across the sites, staff includes a program director; re-engagement or outreach specialists who identify the youth, assess needs, and explore options; and clerical staff to assist with records and data. Sites with educational programming may also include teachers, counselors, and other personnel.

  Regardless of the model, the consistent message from every site emphasized the importance of the relationships between the adults and the youth. Staff must believe in the mission of the program and in the future for the "opportunity youth" with whom they work. Successful center staff members hold high expectations, providing each re-engaging student with a strong connection or a pathway to high school completion, college, and/or a career. A few re-engagement centers prioritize hiring individuals who have overcome obstacles in their own education, demonstrating resiliency as they faced failure and got back on track.

- **Sustainability planning:** State school funding is the primary funding resource for centers sponsored by school districts. Three sites are funded only by school districts; three have joint funding from the school district and city or workforce development departments; one has contracts with multiple districts and also conducts fundraising efforts; and the remaining three have no funding from school districts, operating with the support of county, foundation, or private funders.

  Whatever the initial funding configuration, sites recommend that a re-engagement center begin early on to explore ways to expand funding streams to allow increased flexibility in service delivery. Longer operating sites recommend instituting credible procedures to document center activities and impact from the point when a center opens. For community leaders to move from an initial urgency about the problem of disconnected youth to a long-term strategy of support for those youth most marginalized or with greatest needs, persuasive data reports that make an ongoing case for sustaining and funding center efforts are essential.

Colorado Youth for a Change, profiled on the next page, conceptualized a re-engagement center nontraditionally by emphasizing its functions rather than defining it as a "bricks and mortar" building or static location. CYC's unique multi-site approach offers another example of meeting students "where they are," even when location is a major issue.

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COLORADO YOUTH FOR A CHANGE
DENVER, COLORADO

Viewing Re-Engagement as a Function Rather Than a Location

CYC's delivery model shows that a re-engagement center can be more than a brick-and-mortar structure, and services can be offered in flexible, economic ways that enhance what is available for youth.

Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) was established in 2005 in response to the alarming increase in the number of dropouts in Colorado. Building off of its early work with Denver Public Schools, CYC now serves nine school districts and continues to grow. CYC views re-engagement of out-of-school youth as a service or function that can be provided in a variety of different settings—a designated building leased with the purpose of reengaging youth, in shared spaces with school districts, or in community settings such as restaurants, libraries, or recreation centers.

Each of these different options has its individual pros and cons. While there are advantages to one designated re-engagement center space, it can also be expensive in terms of leasing costs, maintenance, and continued staffing at another setting, pulling scarce re-engagement resources away from services to youth. The demands to sustain funding for a building over time can jeopardize a program's future.

CYC's delivery model shows that a re-engagement center can move beyond a traditional building, and services can be offered in flexible, economic ways that enhance space available for youth. CYC's willingness to meet a dropout almost anywhere, any time shows youth that the CYC public advertising campaign inviting dropouts back is *for real* (Denver wants you! We want you! Call or text us now at ….).

www.youthforachange.org

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Re-Engagement Center Organizational Models And Ongoing Operations

As re-engagement centers move from start-up activities to ongoing operations, their organizational designs shape their activities and their level of direct influence on the system. Across the ten sites studied, the scope of their plans, their access to youth achievement and attendance data, the formality of their relationships with educational options, and the reach of partners involved appeared to shape the work more than the size of the city. For example, an urban center operating externally from the school system fits the small-scale description, whereas a smaller semi-rural community serving fewer numbers of youth more intensively fits the medium-scale description. In the case of differentiation by scale, one is not considered better than the other, as the description reflects the assets available in its community context and the specific goals of the center.

See Appendix for Table 3: Re-Engagement Center Scale.

Re-Engagement Services

See Appendix for Table 4: Re-Engagement Center Services Offered.

Direct Services

The ancillary services provided by any re-engagement center must support the overarching purpose: to identify and re-engage out-of-school youth and provide them with a sustained connection to a quality educational pathway leading to high school completion and ultimately college or a career certification. All ten sites in the study provide some outreach, varying assessments, and reconnection with an educational pathway. Within and beyond these responsibilities, centers differ on what services they provide.

- **Wraparound services.** All centers recognize the physical and emotional needs of their students. Outreach specialists provided pictures of youth who have been emotionally scarred by their life and school experiences, yet hopeful for the opportunities a re-engagement center can provide. At this time, less than half of the sites in the study have on-site counselors; most often, those with on-site counselors are the sites that have a school or educational program. Other centers have partnerships with mental health and drug abuse agencies or refer to county programs. Consistently, however, program staff members are hoping to add a mental health component to their program.

  Most centers identify many physical needs of the youth during the outreach and assessment phase. Two centers have social workers available to connect youth with health, housing, food, and clothing resources. In most other sites outreach and intake specialists are well connected to support agencies. This is an integral part of most re-engagement processes.

- **Instruction.** Addressing the educational needs of off-track, disconnected youth takes many forms. Every site strives for the most immediate re-engagement possible, whether it is enrollment in an educational pathway or on-site credit recovery, academic instruction, or transitional programming. A formal connection to the school district can facilitate the development of academic work plans; without easy access through a formal school district connection, developing an academic work plan becomes more challenging.

  Three categories of instruction are associated with re-engagement centers:
  - Sites that provide minimal assessments leading to a quick placement or referral generally provide no on-site instruction.
  - Sites that provide extensive academic assessments leading to referrals to a select group of pathways often have a waiting period when credit recovery or core instruction occurs.
  - Sites associated with an educational pathway on-site provide extensive instruction leading to the attainment of a high school credential and often a connection to post-secondary options.

Following transcript and academic skill analyses, centers may identify a need for credit recovery or literacy/numeracy skill development. Most programs not housed on a school campus provide these through online programs or a blended approach using both technology and some level of direct instruction. Flexible operating hours are necessary to meet the needs of students who are working or parenting. Centers reported that students who have previous background in core content areas, yet received no credit for the courses, are generally able to pass the online courses expeditiously. For this reason, students waiting for reconnection to a pathway could still make progress earning their graduation credits. This immediate re-engagement helps prevent students from disconnecting again.

When strong linkages exist between a re-engagement center and the larger high school system, the sites studied find it easier to effectively guide youth to meet graduation requirements, including connecting with postsecondary options through dual credit and career certifications. Nurturing a young person's dreams for the future beyond high school can be a very important component of the re-engagement process. Confirming that a student can earn college credit while simultaneously working toward a high school diploma can increase a student's drive and persistence. Without re-engagement center access to student data, without system options for credit retrieval and acceleration, without on-going support for a student that re-enters a community high school or other education option, a referral back into the high school system is unlikely to succeed. The re-engagement center profiled on the next page recently adjusted the program to provide a long-term (10 weeks) youth development approach to readiness training for reconnecting youth consisting of assessments, academics, and transitions.

NEWARK RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER - FAST TRACK SUCCESS ACADEMY
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

Determining Readiness to Reconnect and Ensuring Back-On-Track Success

The Newark Re-Engagement Center, which serves the students of Newark Public Schools, has started to implement a structured re-engagement process that occurs over two to three months and focuses on establishing a high level of readiness and success for students going back into the system.

The Newark Re-Engagement Center, which began in 2008, has recently reviewed and expanded the process that it uses to assess the readiness of students to re-engage. The re-engagement center (REC), which serves the students of Newark Public Schools, has started to implement a structured re-engagement process that occurs over two to three months and focuses on establishing a high level of readiness and success for students going back into the system. Through the structured phases below, students are able to academically advance at least one grade level before they transfer to their high school placement.

Assessment Phase (2 weeks)

The overwhelming majority of young people entering the REC have faced significant difficulties in their previous school setting. The assessment phase is used as the first opportunity to show the different approach of the REC. It consists of an intake meeting with a Behavior Specialist and a two-week orientation called "Mental Toughness" (modeled after Youth Build). This includes community building, goal setting, academic assessment, and a social and emotional learning assessment. As the students move into the next phases, they continue to participate in both group and one-on-one counseling and meet with the Behavior Specialist regularly to measure personal progress.

Development Phase (6 weeks)

The REC offers individualized and relevant academic programming that will further prepare students to re-engage. The Development Phase consists of a six-week program that focuses on project-based learning that helps build leadership skills in young people as they navigate through project deadlines, conflict resolution, and teamwork. The program has a reading and math remediation component with targeted instruction. In order to return to high school, students must complete Independent Development Plans (IDPs) and attain the academic equivalent of one grade level. Finally, the students participate in both group and one-on-one counseling and meet with the behavior specialist regularly to measure personal progress.

According to one REC student, "They help me mature here, so when I actually step out the doors into life, I'll be ready."

Transition Phase (2 weeks)

The Transition Phase equips young people with the information needed to make well-informed decisions about their next placement and resources to self-advocate. It consists of the *exit interviews* where students meet with a panel of faculty and staff from the REC who assess their readiness to transition to their next location based on attendance, academic and personal growth, current grades, and similar factors. The students also do school site visits that allow them to assess the culture, climate, and academic programming of the schools they will attend. After evaluating the schools, each young person will meet with a Behavior Specialist to develop a list of schools in order of preference.

The REC is still in the process of collecting the data that will assess the success of students who have gone through this extensive process. They acknowledge that some students who complete all of the phases above are still not ready to transition, and some can move on more quickly. All decisions are individualized and customized to the student. According to one REC student, "They help me mature here, so when I actually step out the doors into life, I'll be ready."

http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/fta

Follow-up Services

Once a student has reconnected and enrolled in an educational pathway, what is the role of the re-engagement center? Re-engagement specialists support youth with appointments, forms, and interviews throughout the enrollment process. It is critical for youth with previous negative experiences of failure or broken trust to recognize that the re-engagement system will value them and continue to support their efforts. When there is a context of trust, the handoff is more positive. When the center's staff has a relationship with the receiving school, the student can better predict what to expect from the people there.

Every center emphasizes the importance of developing close, trusting relationships with the youth. In most sites, designated staff members provide targeted follow-up and/or case management with youth for a given length of time—most often one year—so that the same staff member continues his or her relationship with the youth after re-engagement. Follow-up services include mentoring and frequent communication, connection with receiving schools, attendance and academic monitoring, future planning, and others depending on student need.

Not every center has the capacity for extensive follow-up. Some sites provide periodic contacts with students and receiving schools. One effective strategy used by many centers is connecting with students through texts, tweets, and social media. During the follow-up, if a student is at risk of disengagement, the center's staff will meet with the student and the school to examine appropriate interventions. If necessary, the student may return to the re-engagement center and examine other options.

In areas with few educational options, follow-up services are significantly more challenging when a student's only option for reconnection is the previous school. One center in a rural area addresses this issue with direct support to the student. The case manager works closely with school administrators, counselors, and teachers to form a web of communication and support for the student, including the above-mentioned mentoring and progress checks. The case manager is available to intervene when necessary if the youth begins to falter toward disconnection. The available support options are known and readily accessible since the case manager lives in the community.

Many youth who come to re-engagement centers are older with few credits toward graduation. This "old and far" population presents challenges in identifying an educational placement. Pathways with dual credit and career connections with community colleges are potential options. Program directors are hesitant to place youth in GED programs. However, when a GED program has a connection with a community college and/or other postsecondary option, it may provide an opportunity for moving forward.

Family Involvement

The majority of re-engagement center youth are 16 to 26 years old with negative school experiences. Many students, parents, and families are disillusioned with the educational system and have all but given up hope. In addition, the sites frequently reported that family structures can be unstable for this youth population. Some youth described very unconventional family systems—identifying friends, adult mentors, caseworkers, and others as their family. Whatever the structure, the importance of family understanding and buy-in of the center's program must be emphasized for the student to feel supported. Most sites reported that parents or family members—siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends— often accompany the young person to the initial intake interview, and some centers require an adult family member to review the work plan. Centers make efforts to involve the family in the reenrollment process, especially when developing the work plan and identifying the appropriate pathway.

Once a student under 18 is connected with the re-engagement center, family contact typically becomes less frequent, shifting to notifications of attendance, academic standing or credits earned or needed, or other instances where formal adult permission is required. One center that offered family supports and events reported they were poorly attended

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Some re-engagement centers experience an impact unanticipated by staff: once youth are re-engaged, they frequently bring other family members who are also disconnected from their education to the centers for re-engagement.

Training and Professional Development for Staff

Without exception, every project director interviewed emphasized the need for well-qualified staff who are empathic, caring individuals with a sound approach to working with disconnected youth and high expectations for positive outcomes. Identifying the right staff is challenging. Some sites developed a profile for those who could work well with this youth population and used it in their recruiting efforts. When staff are hired, it is important to provide appropriate training and professional development to meet their needs and the needs of the youth. As one program director lamented, "College doesn't prepare people to understand our youth."

Re-engagement centers reported a variety of professional development topics and models. Beyond the training associated with specific assessment tools and instructional strategies, which are essential components of programs providing these elements, youth development training benefits all staff. Recognizing the multiple levels of trauma experienced by many of their youth, one program director provides training in de-escalation strategies so staff will be able to manage conflicts that arise and model conflict resolution processes for the youth they serve. Other important professional development topics include equity training to enhance the cultural competencies of staff, legal requirements including mandatory child abuse reporting, communication and conflict management, and other topics. Centers sponsored by or partnering with school districts also provide training on district policies and initiatives.

Other professional development may target the re-engagement team relationships. As one director shared, "Do not assume everyone on the team believes that a certain path will ensure students get to the destination. You need to assure there is common understanding on the team." Providing frequent opportunities for aligning theories, strategies, and practices fosters common focus on the goals of the center. Many sites noted the value of sufficient time to collaborate on student needs and plan jointly to meet the needs of the youth. The staff of one large-scale program are employed year-round and spend much of the summer in professional development activities.

Re-Engagement Center Partners

The Value of Partnerships

The significant value of partnerships to increase the capacity to reach out to disengaged youth and reconnect them with quality educational opportunities is recognized by every re-engagement site. Certainly there is a mutually beneficial partnership among school districts, re-engagement centers, and receiving schools or programs. Beyond that, directors and staff state that community partners are a core part of the re-engagement process because the youth often need more than the center, district, or schools can provide. One program director characterized the center partners as "thought partners as well as service providers." Re-engagement centers have a variety of partnerships that provide a myriad of resources and services.

- **Districts and schools**
  Re-engagement centers that are sponsored or co-sponsored by school districts identified the receiving schools as well as the students' past schools as crucial partners in the process. Through center outreach to past and receiving schools, a much clearer profile of the student will increase the possibility of a successful placement. Centers that are not sponsored by a school district reported that obtaining access to lists of students who have withdrawn and student information systems is critical to their ability to effectively guide and re-engage youth. When re-engagement center staff can join district professional development opportunities, important relationships can occur with the schools while also achieving the added benefit of reduced center training costs. Some re-engagement centers have partnerships with multiple school districts. While all partnerships are not equal, based on the overall goal of the re-engagement centers, collaboration and cooperation with the school district is necessary to maximize the effectiveness of the center and the success of the youth.

- **City and county government**
  Government officials and agencies are often important partners with re-engagement centers. Mayors and high-level county officials are strong advocates for over half of the centers in this study. This advocacy provides the visibility necessary to access funding, resources, and community support. A few re-engagement centers receive substantial government funding for both start-up costs and operational budgets. One re-engagement center is completely funded from the county budget. Another urban center's youth receive public transportation passes from the mayor's office and transit department.

  Youth who desire or are required to return to the educational system following adjudication may have no idea what options are available. Formal relationships between juvenile justice departments and re-engagement centers assure returning adjudicated youth have opportunities for quality educational programs. One center received start-up funding through the justice department and continues to work collaboratively on a re-engagement center in the detention center. County mental health agencies are also partners in providing services to youth.

- **Workforce development organizations**
  A few re-engagement sites have partnerships with workforce agencies that provide significant Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding, staffing, and opportunities for career training and internships for students. This is an active new area of exploration. Several sites expressed interest in deepening their workforce partnerships and are seeking assistance navigating that path.

- **Higher Education**
  To fulfill the re-engagement center's goal of a connection to a quality educational pathway leading to high school completion and ultimately college or a career certification, partnerships with community colleges and universities are invaluable. The majority of the centers in this study connect students with college credits and career training at the community college. One center's staff members are employees of the community college that provides scholarships to students who graduate from a school connected to the re-engagement center. Another model has a community college satellite on the alternative school campus where students earn dual credits toward high school and college as well as career certifications. One university provides outreach services for the re-engagement center.

  When an older student is far from graduation or wants a faster track to college, partnerships with community college "GED to College" programs provide an appropriate placement, according to some sites contacted. Community colleges often provide small scholarships to students who complete the GED in these programs. As noted earlier, in 2014 the GED test was discontinued, to be replaced by new more rigorous versions (some complete, some in development) of a Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC).

  Community college partners may be able to invite re-engagement center staff to join professional development training sessions sponsored for personnel running their "GED to College" and other similar programs. This can offer a valuable opportunity for dialogue along with center cost savings.

  Beyond providing opportunities for college connection, these partnerships have provided support in other ways as well. For instance, in one city, the community college president was instrumental in the initial start-up of the re-engagement center. He increased the community buy-in and support of funders by his involvement and remains a "thought" partner to the center.

- **Community organizations**
  The value of partnering with community and nonprofit organizations is evident across every site. Many disconnected youth have significant unmet needs that have been barriers to their education. One outreach worker explained that before working at the re-engagement center, she believed the needs of disengaged youth should be met before they returned to school. Now, she said, she realizes that the youth are better off returning to school as quickly as possible to access the many resources and supports partners make available. Community organizations including agencies, nonprofits, and faith-based programs provide support to the centers, the youth, and the staff in multiple ways. These include:
  - Outreach efforts to targeted populations such as pregnant and parenting, homeless, LGBTQ, and adjudicated youth
  - Re-engagement center referrals for the youth they serve
  - Program services such as mental health, tutoring, case management, shelter, clothing, food, scholarships, and others
  - Resources and funding for start-up and ongoing operational needs
  - Professional development for staff

- **Foundations**
  Both private, philanthropic foundations and local or national non-profit community-based organizations have been instrumental in providing support to centers during initial start-up and ongoing operation. Additional services are possible when foundations provide funding for staffing outreach specialists, teachers, mental health professionals, case managers, graduation coaches, and others. Some foundations also provide scholarships for students.

See Appendix for Table 5: Partners.

Leaders at the College, Career, and Technology Academy (CCTA) in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas forged strong community partnerships bringing community partners together around a common purpose: to bring all off-track youth back on track to college and career readiness. The profile highlighted next describes the way the community's families joined with high school, higher education, and civic leaders to offer critical services to their youth and persistently, relentlessly encourage them to come back to school and stay in school to the finish line.

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY (CCTA)
RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF SOUTH TEXAS

College Connection

CCTA serves youth who have either dropped out of school or who have reached the end of their senior year lacking high school credits or having failed the state's high-stakes exit exam.

In the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, nearly 90 percent of the population is Hispanic, and one third is considered economically disadvantaged. Situated there, the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) Independent School District, under the leadership of Dr. Daniel King, created the **College, Career, and Technology Academy**, a recovery educational option for youth aged 18 to 26 who have dropped out of school. Over 1,000 former out-of-school and off-track youth have graduated since the model's launch in 2007, many obtaining postsecondary credits before graduating. This has helped the district high school completion rate to climb from 62% to 88%.

CCTA serves youth who have either dropped out of school or who have reached the end of their senior year lacking high school credits or having failed the state's high-stakes exit exam. CCTA students—many of whom have been out of school for years—take classes to complete their high school credit requirements and prepare for the state tests; when they are ready, they seamlessly transition into college courses at nearby South Texas College while finishing up their high school requirements.

Beginning with recruitment, CCTA builds a college-going culture. At intake, students chart their path to graduation and register for South Texas College, selecting the dual enrollment courses they will take once they are eligible. As soon as they pass the exit-level English Language Arts state test, CCTA students are eligible to enroll in a limited selection of college courses primarily in Career and Technical Education. Recent options include medical terminology, welding, and business technology. CCTA students also enroll in a college-sponsored College Success class that conveys the "college knowledge" often new to first-generation college-goers and their families. College courses provide a hook, motivating students to stay on track to graduation and post-secondary success while they complete their remaining credit and test requirements for graduation.

CCTA's recruitment drive—the initial, essential outreach leading to the district's goal of graduating every student who enrolls—begins with **Countdown to Zero (CTZ)**; community members know it as "the walk" that occurs each September. During the **CTZ Walk**, district staff and volunteers from the community disperse to connect personally at the homes of every potential CCTA student. Key elements of the Countdown to Zero Walk include:

CCTA serves youth who have either dropped out of school or who have reached the end of their senior year lacking high school credits or having failed the state's high-stakes exit exam.

Intentional outreach to youth to convey the community's commitment to their future

- PSJA developed the CTZ walk strategy because district leaders recognized that young people who have left school need intentional outreach to encourage them to return.

Demonstration of the full community commitment to graduating every student

- The entire community supports the goal of zero dropouts and the CTZ Walk. During the walk, district and school staff and community members go door-to-door to the homes of youth identified as eligible to reenroll, encourage them to persevere and graduate, and register them for the program most appropriate for them.

Sustained, positive community attention on CCTA and the goal of "Zero Dropouts"

- The publicity around the CTZ walk, as well as the impact of enlisting a wide variety of community members in the effort, has had a positive impact.
- Family members continue to encourage young people to return to CCTA for their diplomas in the months following the walk.

Focused communications and publicity on moving forward

- CCTA makes sure that the communications and publicity around CTZ and enrolling in CCTA are forward-looking and positive. The slogan is "Haven't finished high school? Start college today!"
- Rather than "return," which implies going backward, all communications and marketing focus on going forward to college, with the high school diploma as a step along the way.

http://www.psjaisd.us/ccta

Maximizing Partnership Success

Partnerships create a more robust re-engagement program and process for youth, increasing opportunities for long-term student success. Some project directors emphasized the need for the relationships to be formal to assure sustainability. Partnerships are made formal through a variety of means:

- Contracts—especially useful when funding is involved, e.g., between districts and alternative schools and between service providers and districts; for grant awards; and when accountability is required
- Memoranda of Understanding to clarify roles and responsibilities
- Cooperative Agreements, often used in co-sponsored programs

Clear, frequent communication is essential to partnerships both before and throughout the relationship to assure common direction. Strong, sustained partnerships share the same mission, goals, and strategies of re-engagement while understanding and respecting one another's interests. One program director cautioned, "Be cautious of any funding and partnerships that are tied to constraints that do not fit your mission or may muddy your focus."

Strong, sustained partnerships share the same mission, goals, and strategies of re-engagement while understanding and respecting one another's interests.

The Los Angeles profile included here describes an innovative and relatively new partnership forged between the school district and the mayor's office. Joining forces to lead the Los Angeles YouthSource Centers, leaders from departments of education and labor convened a group of community leaders focused on strategies to re-engage youth. With dogged persistence they have creatively found solutions to an array of bureaucratic snags that can discourage progress and even derail a community initiative.
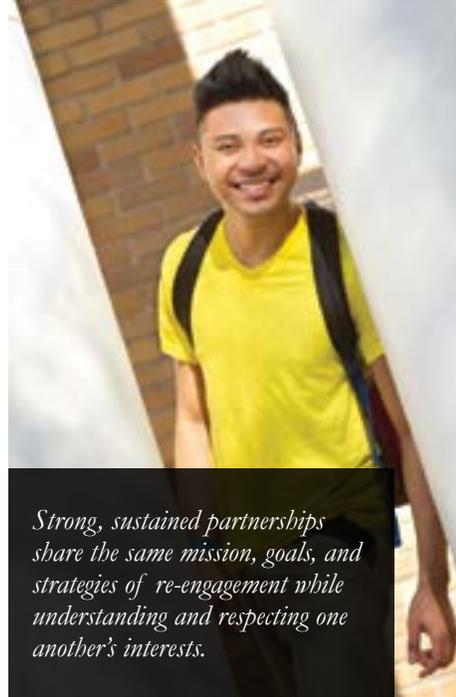
LOS ANGELES YOUTHSOURCE CENTERS
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Together We Can

"You have to stay focused on who is willing to come to the table to support and work for change. You have to find the right people in an organization to make this happen—people who want to make a change for the students. The hardest part is getting people to believe in this work and in systemic change."

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department, which is responsible for administration of Workforce Investment Act funds (WIA) created a partnership that makes possible the implementation of sixteen YouthSource Centers throughout Los Angeles. This systemic effort combines LAUSD personnel and WIA funds. Youth Centers offer young people the chance to return to school and resume their education while also gaining workforce experience and earning some money, providing added incentives for young people to return to school.

Staff for LAUSD Pupil Services and attendance counselors are co-located at the YouthSource Centers. They conduct extensive outreach activities to identify youth and encourage them to reconnect with school and get back on track to a successful future. Across the Youth Source Centers, staff infuse a youth-centered approach in their assessment and referral services.

Leaders from both organizations faced sobering data: one out of five LA youth aged 16 to 24 was out of school and out of work. Each organizational leader was personally committed to do better for the city's youth. They drew on their previous experiences with youth programs serving small numbers of students as they determined the strategies that could be taken to scale to address LA's high numbers of dis-engaged youth district-wide. They realized LA had a systemic problem that no one organization could solve.

How did they get started?

- **Data:** Using American Community Survey data and working with Paul Harrington of Drexler University, they were able to accurately describe the problem. They compiled a profile of the population aged 16 to 24 including youth demographics, school involvement, and employment rates.
- **Persistence:** Determined leaders encouraged all involved, stating, "Don't take no for an answer or let it stop you."
- **Partners:** They sought out the partners needed to achieve the goals, including city and county agencies, community-based organizations, and the LA community college district.
- **Funding:** Using data to make the case, they demonstrated to the Workforce Board, the city council, and the LAUSD School Board that the plan was viable.

"Everyone loves to fund programs when it serves 100 to 200 students, but it is difficult to design something that will serve thousands of kids."

What's making it work?

● **Equal Partners:** Everyone took up the challenge together. All involved are partners in a common purpose: they come together on an equal footing, without a hierarchy of leaders and followers. The partners' attitudes are summed up as: "We don't care who gets the credit. Let's just get this done."
● **Adaptation:** Partners creatively work around bureaucratic snags and barriers that crop up, learning how to share data, use different funding streams, and keep the focus on what's good for the youth.
● **Accountability:** They candidly and regularly report what's working and what's not. They use evaluation results to make necessary adjustments to their strategies.

In the words of the initiative designers, "You have to stay focused on who is willing to come to the table to support and work for change. You have to find the right people in an organization to make this happen—people who want to make a change for the students. The hardest part is getting people to believe in this work and in systemic change. Everyone loves to fund programs when it serves 100 to 200 students, but it is difficult to design something that will serve thousands of kids."

http://achieve.lausd.net/Page/1495

While the LA profile describes the relatively recent establishment of a community partnership, the next profile for Dayton, OH, chronicles one that has strengthened over many years.

FAST FORWARD CENTER
DAYTON, OHIO

Widespread Community/Stakeholder Engagement

The Fast Forward Center of Dayton, Ohio, also offers an example of community collaboration around a common purpose. The Fast Forward Center grew from a broad-based community task force convened in response to sobering dropout data in 2000.

The Fast Forward Center of Dayton, Ohio, also offers an example of community collaboration around a common purpose. The Fast Forward Center grew from a broad-based community task force convened in response to sobering drop-out data in 2000. The longevity of the Dayton partnerships offers a distinctive example of what is necessary to sustain a focus over time.

According to its website, the Fast Forward Center partners with three alternative high schools that specifically serve students who have dropped out and other Dayton-based alternative education programs to serve the needs of out-of-school youth. All of these programs are student-driven, allowing students to work at their own pace and earn credits in a school geared toward credit recovery. The Fast Forward Center has made the process for any Montgomery County student wishing to return to school easy. The student simply calls 512-FAST to schedule an appointment where he or she is assessed in Math and Reading and presented with school options. After the student chooses which school they would like to attend, the Fast Forward Center compiles a file of assessment results and contact information. The Fast Forward Center then refers the student to the school of their choice.

Established in 2001, the award-winning Fast Forward Center is among the longest standing re-engagement initiatives in the country. The center serves Montgomery County, a region of over 500,000, of which Dayton is only a portion. Fast Forward was founded by the Montgomery County Out-of-School Youth Task Force, a powerful cross-sector collaborative formed in the late 1990s to respond to alarmingly high dropout rates across the county. Studies by University of Dayton researchers and data provided by Montgomery's Family and Children First Council showed that over 26 percent of county students dropped out and that between 5,000 to 6,000 school-aged youth were not enrolled in school. They also found that the problem was not just located in Dayton but spread across fourteen of the sixteen school districts serving a geographically and ethnically diverse majority of county residents. The force of these data inspired local community leaders—the Chair of the Sinclair Community College Board of Directors and a local CEO—to approach Montgomery County's top administrator to form a task force of over thirty individuals with positional power in school districts, higher education, county agencies (including juvenile justice, social services, and workforce development), and the business community.

The task force commissioned additional studies and garnered investments by nontraditional stakeholders, including higher education and private corporations. Task force leaders also worked to assure the sixteen school districts (which are independent of the county government) that a re-engagement center and new

Between 2000 and 2008, the dropout rate in Montgomery County was cut in half (from 25.6% to 12.6%), moving the county from the ninth highest to second lowest rate among the ten largest counties in Ohio.

alternative education options would not be "stealing kids" from district rolls but rather serve youth who had withdrawn from the systems. Over a two-year period, the task force raised $3.2 million to develop alternative options. It also secured a sustained commitment from the county government of $500,000 per year to fund the Fast Forward Center, which is operated by Sinclair Community College and housed in the county's Job Center.

Between 2000 and 2008, the dropout rate in Montgomery County was cut in half (from 25.6% to 12.6%), moving the county from the ninth highest to second lowest rate among the ten largest counties in Ohio. Alternative options for out-of-school youth in Montgomery County have grown, including several alternative charter schools started by task force members and, notably, many more programs operated by the local school systems. To provide a clearer pathway to college, local philanthropists established the Taylor Scholarship Program for eligible re-engaged students to continue their education at Sinclair when they complete high school.

http://www.sinclair.edu/centers/ffc/

Funding For Re-Engagement Centers

The costs associated with a re-engagement center start-up and its ongoing operations may be deterrents for some communities and school districts. What are the costs? Where do we find the money? How much money is enough? These are not questions with easy answers. Many of the project directors participating in the study had difficulty identifying the actual costs for their re-engagement centers. Clearly, necessary funding varied among the program models, but many agreed that the available funding determined the model at the start rather than the other way around. As the center evolved and stable funding was identified, reforms occurred. One school district superintendent stated, "The one thing I learned through the re-engagement center was that you have to start before you're ready, or you'll never know what to do."

Initial start-up costs also varied based on the facility and center sponsorship. Re-engagement centers that were sponsored by a district, community college, city or other entity with available space to house the center faced lower overhead. For instance, district-sponsored programs sharing space in a public school building have far fewer initial costs than one located in an office building. Furnishings, technology, materials, advertising, as well as personnel planning and design time are a few of the other initial expenses. Research sites reported a broad range of start-up costs from $200K for a district-sponsored program located in a public school to $3.2 million for a county/college co-sponsored program with multiple sites.

Ongoing operational costs are most driven by:
- Staffing and personnel—dependent on the services provided by the re-engagement center
- Facility/location—high associated costs if outside a partnership with a school district or community agency
- Materials including supplies and technology
- Administrative needs such as clerical, data management, records, transportation, and advertising

The transitional nature of re-engagement center youth creates great challenges identifying per-pupil costs. Unless a youth remains in a center that has a model including a school, the transition to other pathways varies. One large urban center estimated $4,700 was spent per student. Yearly estimated budgets, again dependent on the model and the sponsorship, ranged from $400K to $3 million.

So, how is this effort financed? What are the funding sources? Most re-engagement centers have blended and/or braided funding. Three programs have single-source funding by the sponsoring school districts, and others receive combined funding from districts, state funding streams, and other partners.

States provide school districts funding according to per pupil allocations based on attendance. When a student is re-enrolled in a public school, the district receives compensation for that student, although it may be delayed to the following year. While re-engagement centers may prompt the re-enrollment of the student, the centers are usually funded through a separate line item in a general fund budget or in some other creative manner. In most cases, no correlation exists between increased

compensation to a district for re-enrolled students and funding of a re-engagement center. One program re-ceives 80 percent of its operating budget through an innovative funding model specifying that the district share a percentage of the state per-pupil funding with the re-engagement center for every youth reconnected to state-approved educational programs.

As described earlier, partnerships provide opportunities to weave together financial resources to provide the needed outreach, assessments, and transition services. The sites in this study reported receiving funding from the school districts, Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act, community colleges, foundations and philanthropic organizations, juvenile justice, faith-based organizations, and through private fundraising. Many programs received and are receiving grants to offset some of the costs for innovative services. Directors expressed concern for the sustainability of some of these services after grant support has ended. The key to sustained funding is strong partnerships with committed resources.

Over time most communities face fiscal challenges created by fluctuations in the local and national economy. Re-engagement efforts can experience budget cuts in early rounds of cutbacks when pressures rise to fund services first for students who are already attending school. District and civic leadership changes with their at-tendant shifts in priorities can also impact funding sustainability. Philadelphia's story, profiled here, recounts the ways leaders *stayed the course* on re-engagement while adjusting to the realities of budgets cuts and leader-ship changes.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER
PHILADELPHIA, PA

Sustaining the Work through Shifts in Funding

"We make sure youth who come to us are clear on the next steps" be it an appointment with a counselor or a program orientation or assessment date; they know where to go so that no one falls through the cracks.

Philadelphia was a pioneer in re-engagement efforts, leading the way for other communities. Their accelerated high schools were initiated in 2004, with the Multiple Pathways Re-Engagement Center opening in 2008 through a partnership between the Philadelphia School District (approximately 150,000 students), the city of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN). Physically located in the school district's administration building, the Re-Engagement Center connects students who have dropped out or are behind in credits to one of four programs to earn a HS diploma. Since its inception, the center has served over 15,000 students—approximately 2,400 per year.

Initially, the Re-Engagement Center had a staff of twenty who provided many supports such as group sessions facilitated by Behavioral Specialists from the Department of Mental Health. In these sessions the youth discussed and explored the reasons behind their previous failures and created a support system among them to assure future success. Also, the center conducted math and reading assessments during an initial screening. These tools provided a "picture of the whole student" and helped youth understand their own strengths and weaknesses. The center's main focus has been to identify the best-fit option, connect the youth, and provide follow-up after placement to assure the connection is sustained.

With changes in leadership and an unstable economy, the Re-Engagement Center has been forced to make adjustments. The center and its programs are now fully funded by the Philadelphia School District and its staff scaled back to just three people. Justin Green, the program manager who has been on staff since 2000, explained that many of the original support services are no longer available. However, the focus is still the same: a direct connection to a school is critical for out-of-school youth who are looking to re-engage. In the past year, 2,300 youth were interviewed to assess why they dropped out and what they need to get back on track. A center staff member stated, "We make sure youth who come to us are clear on the next steps be it an appointment with a counselor or a program orientation or assessment date; they know where to go so that no one falls through the cracks. We don't have a choice. You have to stay passionate and committed."

http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/r/alternative/programs--services/
multiple-pathways

Assessing Impact And Outcomes

Leaders of re-engagement centers want to be held accountable and to demonstrate impact. Identifying valid measures that reflect the real work of a re-engagement center, work that is within its span of control, is new and unsettled territory. The Re-Engagement Network sponsored by the National League of Cities has appointed a special task force to address the question of valid measures of re-engagement center impact. The NLC reports that in 2013, "re-engagement centers in 14 cities across the country made an initial outreach to more than half of the youth on their city's dropout lists. More than 10,000 young people received referrals to education options from a re-engagement center or program and for 6,000 of those youth, the center received confirmation of en-rollment. Of those enrolled, 73 percent completed a full additional year of school or graduated." Therefore, the NLC task force and the sites in this study recommend the identification of outcome measures that confirm the impact of a re-engagement center from the outset—measures for individual student progress and measures of program effectiveness.

Determining exactly what outcomes a center can be held accountable for is not simple since it plays a limited yet pivotal role in a student's path to earning a high school credential. For example, because disconnected youth are usually off-track from a typical four-year path to graduation and often continue to grapple with other personal issues that pull them to the margins of the high school population, they need more than the main-stream student: more assessment, more acceleration and remediation, and more support services. While the goal of re-engagement is to ensure that the reconnected student earns a valued high school credential and is prepared for postsecondary education and training, the process differs and usually takes longer. Within their organizations, with local high school systems, and with other cities, centers are actively debating how to use a five- or six-year high school completion measures without weakening the urgency and drive to move re-en-gaged students on their path forward.

Given the nonlinear paths and high needs of the youth served, much debate currently exists about defining the most accurate and informative measures of impact and success of a re-engagement center. Some centers focus on recovery; others incorporate acceleration; others extend a strongly supported hand-off to college and career. However, an increasing number of sites routinely collect student and program data on a set of near-term out-come measures within the span of influence of a re-engagement center. These include:

- Evidence of increased youth, family, and community awareness of re-engagement services and educa-tional options
- Number of youth contacted via outreach activities
- Number of youth assessed
- Number of youth reconnected to education services
- Number of youth who remain in school for the academic year after they have re-enrolled (also known as the "stick rate"[1])
- Number of youth who are "old and near" and complete high school within 12 months of re-engagement

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[1] The term "stick rate" is used by the NLC Re-Engagement Network and has also been referenced by Jobs for the Future as a way to assess the effectiveness of re-engagement center referrals to educational options.

Several sites place greatest impact measurement value on the stick rate. If they have built a strong working relationship with a young person, accurately assessed learning and personal needs, identified an education option that is most likely to move the youth toward the goal or goal, and supported the transition to that option, then the referral should "stick" for at least a year. It is important to note here that successful referrals and a 12-month stick rate correlate with the number and quality of education options locally accessible and depend on the nature of the center's partnership with the local school system. If few choices exist in the system, then the re-engagement center provides case management for youth with nowhere to go other than locations of prior failure or already demonstrated insufficient support resources. Whether the re-engagement center is external to the local high school system or in partnership with it, its success and that of the high school system are codependent.

Overall, every site studied reported evidence of progress on some dimension: increased outreach contacts with youth; increased number of disconnected youth served at a center; increased number reconnected to a school; and/or improved stick rate.

Long-term (12 to 60 months) outcome measures for youth and programs include:

- Increased graduation rates
- Decreased dropout rates
- Increased visibility of the out-of-school youth issue
- Identified system actors responsible, equipped, and accountable for engaging youth and re-engaging out-of-school youth
- Increased cross-sector collaboration and data sharing and use to support identification and re-engagement of disengaged youth
- Expanded, higher quality, and/or more accessible education options and pathways to college and the workplace
- Recouped student funding received based on re-engagement figures as a measure of progress.

Establishing metrics for the long-term outcome measures beyond the straightforward graduation and dropout rates is an evolving and sometimes controversial discussion at present. Discussions are occurring at individual sites, with partners, and across the NLC Re-Engagement Network.

At locations where centers are joining with workforce development or local government, partners are developing ways to quantify the costs and benefits of re-engaging youth in their communities. This work involves exploring if and how blended and braided funding streams work and investigating if proactively investing in youth as early as possible is a better approach than reacting to unemployed and out-of-school youth's needs. In addition, collaborating with partners can pose new challenges in reporting any possible outcomes: different agencies and funding streams require tracking of different outcome measures, which can complicate recordkeeping for those at the service delivery sites. Resolving the conflicts in this area represents emerging accountability work for sites with expanding community collaborations.

It is complicated to link youth outcomes to the work of re-engagement centers. Specifically, commonly cited high school data may not capture the aspects of youth progress addressed by re-engagement centers. The measures typically prioritized by a school system or required by states (high school graduation rate, dropout rates) do not always reflect the impact of re-engagement center services. Additionally, improvement—or lack thereof—on these measures may not reflect the actual success of a re-engagement center. The re-engagement center is part of the system, not the system. Equating changes in those measures to positive or negative re-engagement center performance can be misleading as well as frustrating to center personnel as well as school and civic leaders. How to link outcomes directly or indirectly to the efforts of re-engagement centers remains an ongoing issue that must be addressed over time.

While data gathered at re-engagement centers can aid in establishing the efficacy of re-engagement efforts, they are potentially even more valuable as a window into the deficiencies of school systems. Re-engagement centers hold very rich data on who's out of school, why they left, and what programs and services are critical to out-of-school youth's return to school. Further, when youth bounce from school to school, re-engagement centers may be the hub that maintains contact throughout. In a community-wide effort to bring youth back on track, the data collected and analyzed by re-engagement centers provide insights into system-wide performance.

The Boston example provided on the next page pinpoints some of the leading data work occurring nationally at re-engagement centers. Acknowledging that this is still an evolving effort, the Boston staff agreed to join the National League of Cities Re-engagement Network leaders in their efforts to determine meaningful methods for measuring the impact and outcomes of re-engagement centers, and they welcome others to contact them with ideas and questions.

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Strategic Use of Data

The youth who were coached persisted at higher rates than REC students placed at that school in previous years, and the school ultimately installed a graduation coach program for all students.

The Boston Re-Engagement Center (REC), founded cooperatively by the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Private Industry Council, was one of the first established re-engagement programs in the country. Originally designed to study the "dropout crisis" in Boston and develop and implement an action plan to address it, the center continues to use data to inform the school district's planning efforts, especially for multiple pathways. For example, the large number of returning students who have dropped out showed the district that hundreds of disengaged young people wanted to return to school each year. However, the number of returning out-of-school youth choosing alternative education compared with those who were actually able to be placed suggested that Boston needed multiple pathways to graduation. Furthermore, the high proportion that were "old and far"—that is, over 18 years old and more than two years off-track academically—suggested the district needed more programs designed to engage those the district high schools were not designed to serve—in this case, young adults who needed to accelerate their academic progress and get help with postsecondary and career transitions. The REC used these data to focus on informed advocacy for expanded alternative education capacity.

Case management practice is also informed by usage data within the REC. Periodically, staff members assess the number of young people who made an initial engagement but did not follow through to re-enrollment. This list of youth becomes the focus of outreach, so that such youth receive multiple outreach communications in their process of reconnecting. The REC has used relevant data to help shape and improve practices in the district. In a previous year, REC leaders noticed that one in-district alternative school was receiving a high number of REC youth over multiple years—almost a hundred in one year—so they secured grant funds to pilot a graduation coach for REC youth at that school over a two-year period. The youth who were coached persisted at higher rates than REC students placed at that school in previous years, and the school ultimately installed a graduation coach program for all students.

Boston's website notes the range of services offered at the Re-engagement Center. Staff initially conduct systematic, personalized outreach to dropouts via mail and phone. Once youth signal an interest in returning to school, staff review transcripts to give students a picture of what they need to do to complete school and then help them enroll in an appropriate BPS high school or alternative program. The REC offers a variety of academic support options including online credit recovery, night school, and summer school classes, and a GED program referral. Staff continue to follow-up with students after their school placement, offering encouragement and assistance solving problems as they arise. REC connections to various support services within the community as well as life and career workshops add to the safety net the center can provide.

http://www.bostonpic.org/programs/re-engagement-center-rec

Sustainability Strategies

If a re-engagement center can persuasively prove it is doing its job, then how does a community keep it going? Normalizing re-engagement functions and incorporating them into the overall graduation and college and career pathway system is a critical step toward sustainability of re-engagement center services. Credible outcome data must be communicated to relevant audiences. This data must recognize the positive effects already generated by a re-engagement center while also making a compelling argument for continuation of its services. Communities must keep in mind, however, that when they speak honestly about the need for services for disconnected youth, they should guard against appearing to blame others for failing to meet students' needs. Districts should understand that shining a spotlight on system weaknesses need not become a disincentive for a re-engagement center's continuation.

In general, many sites appear to be pulled between the urgency of daily demands at a re-engagement center and the requirements to think systemically about sustainability. They increasingly try to do both. Some steps being taken at the study sites include:

- Keep the needs of youth in the public eye.
- Tell the re-engagement center story: communicate honestly about challenges, mistakes, and progress.
- Report results regularly to partners and the community using credible data.
- Establish a data-sharing agreement with the local school district(s).
- As the re-engagement center moves from start-up to regular operation, adopt a continuous improvement strategy with periodic reflection and adjustment. If possible, find a way to share lessons learned from youth about the high school system and what does or does not help youth succeed with district decision-makers.
- Create, maintain, and expand partnerships as a deepening community collaboration focused on increased youth success in completing high school on a path to college and career. Confirm that individual partners' interests are adequately met as well as the collective interest. Share credit freely; resist blame.
- Ensure alignment of re-engagement center programs with the local high school system(s) and college / career pathways.
- Explore new, accountable ways to blend and braid funding streams.
- Fund staff through different partners.
- Capitalize on capacities of specific partners to offer resources or deliver services that other partners do not provide. For instance, a work force development department may fund internships, local social service agencies may offer drug and alcohol counseling, while school districts may provide online remediation and opportunities to earn high school credits.

The Portland story profiled next offers an example of one community's strategies to improve the entire high school system, an effort aimed at decreasing the need for re-engagement services by improving the system's ability to meet students' needs and support their on-track progress to graduation. Incorporating prevention and remediation, this design demonstrates one model likely to be sustainable.

RECONNECTION CENTER
PORTLAND, OREGON

More Targeted Intervention/ Less Need for REC Services

Portland leaders balance their vision with realism: they will guard against falsely optimistic detours on their journey, knowing they will not "solve" the dropout problem by focusing all resources on prevention and intervention at Tiers 1 and 2 of the system.

At the Portland Public Schools (PPS) Reconnection Center, staff initially conduct an academic assessment through Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) along with an evaluation of credits earned and former transcripts. They strive to under-stand who the students are and what they each want and need to succeed from the point of re-engagement forward. They interview the students and if possible also speak with their family. Together staff and the student develop a short-term education plan (STEP), review available programs/schools, and map out a personalized transition to a "best-fit" educational placement. Staff follow-up for at least one semester once a student is placed.

PPS sees itself on a journey of moving from a reactive system to a proactive sys-tem. As with any journey, district leaders must figure out how to get there in the most effective and efficient way. They are taking the first step by defining the des-tination. Portland describes its vision as reducing the need for dropout recovery programs and services by appropriately resourcing instruction and support earlier in the process while also maintaining significant resources for the shrinking but arguably neediest student population in the system – the dropped out and Tier 3 Response to Intervention (RTI) youth.[1]

Energized by the vision of their destination the Center has been restructured to include the following program services:

- Outreach to students and families not enrolled
- Academic Assessment through Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)
- Credit/Transcript Evaluation
- Student/Family interview
- Development of Short-Term Education Plan (STEP)
- Review of Programs/Schools
- Personalized transition to a "best-fit" educational placement
- Follow-up for one semester

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1   The Response to Intervention model presents a framework of tiered interventions related to the nature and severity of a student's difficulties. The third tier of interventions is designed to serve students with needs for intensive, individualized instruction and attention.
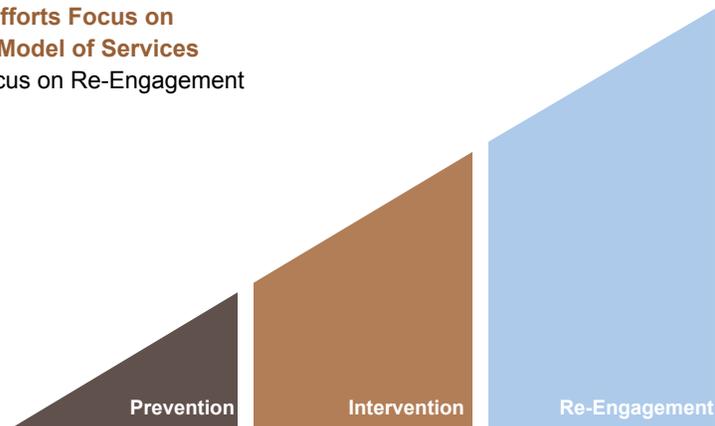
Reconnection Services and Portland's community-based contracted alternative schools will then fulfill a clear and meaningful role within an overall educational system intended to prepare all students for the postsecondary world beyond high school.

What are the next steps? Advocating for allocating, co-investing, and repurposing staff dollars to support an array of college and career readiness services by: 1) providing teachers with training to develop culturally responsive, personalization skills and tools with which to engage and prepare an increasingly diverse student population; and 2) fully implement an early response system that identifies students at different tiers of risk and appropriately provides supports and interventions using an RTI model. With these two actions, they expect to be better able to respond to student needs in a preventive manner and over time (3 to 5 years) reduce the amount of need for reconnection services and alternative programs.

http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/education-options/1779.htm

http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/education-options/10104.htm

Current Efforts Focus on Reactive Model of Services
Heavy Focus on Re-Engagement

Prevention   Intervention   Re-Engagement

Working toward Proactive Model of Services
Heavier Focus on Prevention with Very Intentional Focus on Re-Engagement

Prevention   Intervention   Re-Engagement

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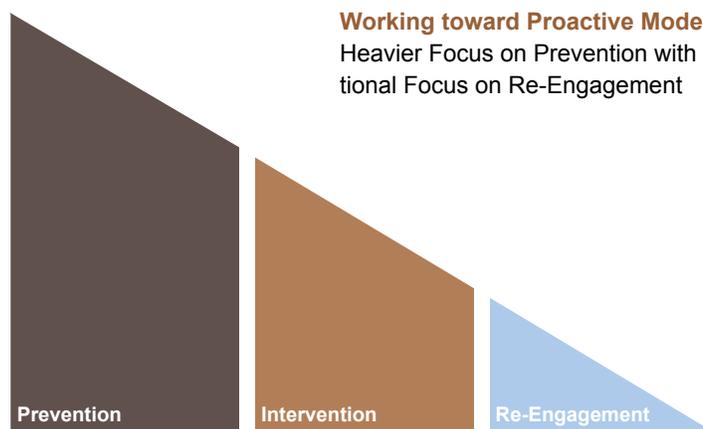
Emerging Lessons From The Field

> ## "Re-engagement is the door to school reform."
>
> *— School District Central Office Cabinet Member*

The creation of re-engagement centers is a relatively new effort, and, as such, practitioners and leaders are learning daily; this is a field ripe for innovation. For those starting or improving a re-engagement center, probably the most productive approach is to stay in a learning mode—taking thoughtful action while being open to new ideas and shifts in practice and policy as more is learned.

From a review of data from all ten re-engagement centers studied and a comparison with publications from other organizations involved with dropout recovery, some crosscutting themes and emerging practices stand out. Consensus seems to be emerging about what does and does not work, allowing community members newly focused on re-engagement to guard against missteps and act with greater confidence.

The following list of high leverage strategies, offered here for others seeking to establish or improve a re-engagement center, reflects consistent findings across a majority of the study's research sites. If employed they are most likely to support an effective, sustainable re-engagement initiative.

Getting Started

1. **Know the demand for re-engagement services in your community.** Determine the number of students who have dropped out in the area. As soon as possible, conduct a segmentation analysis to spotlight how near or far students are from completing high school, and provide essential information needed to define exactly the problems a community faces. If feasible, conduct further assessments to clarify what services and approaches can best address the needs of your community's disengaged youth.

2. **Create a community collaborative focused on the re-engagement issue.** No one organization or school district can tackle this problem alone. To sustain a re-engagement initiative and maintain the necessary ongoing visibility, support, and healthy pressure on the community's high school system, a community needs to access a mix of funding streams and other resources. Whether the collaborative is initiated by a school district or other community organizations external to the school system, if possible ensure that the school district(s) is a primary partner in any community collaborative.

3. **Map the community's resources for youth services and options.** Determine the local context including accessible resources and allies. Identify whether a re-engaged student will return to a setting of previous failure and if so whether there will be added wraparound supports and services to help the student avoid prior pitfalls or alienation. Assess what other education pathways or options exist for the community's youth and if there is available space at those options. Determine the employment needs and most promising career pathways in the community.

4. **Study state policies affecting re-engagement and funding of students in high school and postsecondary education options.** Determine if any state policy changes or supports for re-engagement are being considered and if any policies appear to present barriers. Compare local state policies to those of Washington State and others making similar moves to encourage re-engagement.

Operations

5. **Outreach.** Enter the disengaged youth comfort zone. Build personal, immediately responsive relationships with youth—relationships of trust and authenticity, likely to be tested over time, essential to providing the secure base from which youth will risk failure and deepen resiliency. Youth re-engagement is more apt to be cyclical than neatly linear, and the re-engagement relationship may prove to be the glue that ultimately affects a student's decision to stick to a plan.

6. **Assessment and referral services.** Any re-engagement center needs to incorporate components of highly personalized assessment and referral to an education solution on the pathway to college and career. Assessments (depending on data available) need to confirm achievement progress and needs. In addition, they can measure social/emotional factors, employment interests, and risk factors. Once a young person's situation and personal needs are fully understood, a referral can point toward the best available fit in the community's education options.

7. **Seamless transition.** Support for the transition from the safety of the re-engagement center or services to a new educational setting is essential. Successful sites know the demands of education options and carefully seek a "best fit" solution for each student. When re-engagement staff who are trusted by the youth continue to check in and follow up after placement, emerging problems can be solved early and just-in-time encouragement or guidance can occur.

Staying on Course

8. **Ensure continual access to a student data system.** The re-engagement center needs continual, timely access to student achievement and attendance data. Past performance is necessary for assessment; ongoing performance identifies needs while also helping a center track its impact. This requires some kind of relationship with the school district(s) as a partner or through a formal memorandum of understanding.

9. **Guard against boundary creep.** Avoid trying to "rescue" a high school system. Re-engagement staff works most effectively as part of a system-wide team addressing engagement, with each focused on a particular role. Many re-engagement centers face challenges (and opportunities) with blurred roles and seem to be most successful when roles and functions are clear.

10. **Emphasize the re-engagement center as an integral part within the community's high school system.** A re-engagement center (or re-engagement system services) fulfills certain key functions that may be autonomous, but re-engagement must be an ingredient in the community's high school system with recognized legitimacy and authority.

11. **Keep youth at the center.** Adult needs and interests often drive systems. By keeping the previous and immediate experiences of youth, their needs, and their active involvement and role in their reconnection and future success at the center of all planning and service delivery, a community re-engagement initiative can stay true to its "North Star."

Online and On-Site Resources, Tools, and Sample Documents

The sites participating in the study have a wealth of information on starting, maintaining, or strengthening re-engagement centers that will be extremely useful to others involved in this work. These documents include Memorandums of Understanding, intake forms, program assessments, program curricula, etc. All ten of the study sites have agreed to serve as resources and to share these documents with others.

We encourage readers to contact the sites directly using the information listed below. We also encourage readers to use the resources of the National League of Cities' Re-Engagement Network, which serves as a repository of information across centers. This organization can identify sites with common concerns or share relevant documents. The NLC welcomes inquiries about re-engagement center resources.
http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/institute-for-youth-education-and-families/expanding-youth-opportunities/reengagement

Boston Public Schools Re-Engagement Center, Boston, Massachusetts
http://www.bostonpic.org/programs/re-engagement-center-rec

College, Career, and Technology Academy, Rio Grande Valley, Texas
http://www.psjaisd.us/ccta

Colorado Youth for a Change, Denver, Colorado
www.youthforachange.org

D2 Center | Directions. Diploma., Omaha, Nebraska
http://www.d2center.org/

Fast Forward Center, Dayton, Ohio
http://www.sinclair.edu/centers/ffc/

Los Angeles YouthSource Centers, Los Angeles, California
http://achieve.lausd.net/Page/1495

Multiple Pathways to Graduation Re-Engagement Center, Philadelphia, Pa
http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/r/alternative/programs--services/multiple-pathways

Newark Re-Engagement Center - Fast Track Success Academy, Newark, New Jersey
http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/fta

Reconnection Center, Portland, Oregon
http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/education-options/1779.htm
http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/education-options/10104.htm

Re-Engage Dubuque, Dubuque, Iowa
http://www.dubuque.k12.ia.us/re-engage/index.html

Tables

Table 1: Populations Served By Re-Engagement Centers

The varied student populations served by re-engagement centers, along with commonalities, differences, and emerging trends for the centers in the study, are shown in the table below.

POPULATIONS SERVED BY RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTERS (REC)			
Student Information	Commonalities Among REC Sites	Differences Among REC Sites	A Growing Number of Communities Are…
Student Age	Young people 16–21 targeted.	Sites differ according to local and state laws. Some fund services down to age 14 or up to age 26.	…using lessons from re-engagement centers to add systemic early warning systems and prevention strategies for students predicted to move off-track (e.g., middle school attendance, achievement, and behavior; other off-track indicators) before they drop out.
Student's School Status	Dropouts and disconnected youth, typically identified by nonattendance at assigned high school.	The definition of a dropout varies by state. A dropout may be totally out of school, or may be disengaged according to attendance pattern or lack of credit accumulation.	…using RECs to provide prevention or early intervention strategies with students still attending HS but significantly off-track for earning a HS diploma within four years.
Targeted Youth	Partnerships for adjudicated youth at more developed sites; still a challenge to address effectively.	Some sites target outreach and services specifically to special groups like Homeless youth or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning youth.	…ensuring that partners are able to provide targeted support for specific sub-populations.

Table 2: Start-Up Activities

Critical start-up activities, along with commonalities, differences, and emerging trends for the centers in the study are shown in the table below.

START-UP ACTIVITIES		
Commonalities Among REC Sites	Differences Among REC Sites	Emerging Trends: A Growing Number of Communities Are:
Determine community need: identify disconnected youth through credible assessment of number out-of-school and their demographics.	Sites have varying access to data sources and types of analyses.	…analyzing data on number of youth (aged 16–26) out of school and out of work. …conducting a segmentation analysis as soon as possible.
Map community education options.	Sites vary regarding the number and type of available rigorous, quality education options leading to postsecondary education and training.	…making comparisons between available seats in education options and number of seats needed. … creating new alternative options specifically designed to serve the needs of the disen-gaged youth population
Map existing community assets and youth support services.	Communities differ in the amount and quality of youth supports available.	…REC centers designed to fill specific district or regional gaps
Build stakeholder buy-in.	Some sites focus on informing the community about the need and how it is being addressed. Some sites focus on reach-ing youth via public media and youth-friendly technology.	
Enlist partners.	There is a range of combina-tions of public and private high schools, higher education, work-force, social service agencies.	…increasing the strategic, intentional selection of partners to cover the wide variety of youth needs.

START-UP ACTIVITIES		
Secure initial funding.	Sites vary in how they mix public, private, and cross-agency funding sources. Sites are exploring strategies to recoup school district enrollment dollars.	…planning for braided funding, allowing a common focus on youth with different partners able to fund different activities/strategies needed to support youth. …developing strategies to allocate recouped enrollment dollars for re-engagement services.
Establish relationship with local school district(s).	Sites vary by the relationship with the school district. If no official relationship, there is less access to data and/or influence on referrals. If some relationship, roles and types of information sharing vary.	…increasing trust, information sharing, adjustments of practice, flexibility in rules and regulations. ….developing contracts and MOUs (Memos of Understanding) between school districts and re-engagement centers clarifying operations and data access.
Decide on location(s) for re-engagement center/service delivery.	Location is generally based on partnerships and relationship with school district. May be in school, office, community center, or virtual. Some centrally located close to students. Some prioritize easy public transportation access.	
Hire staff with varied expertise in education, youth development, mental health, needs of disconnected youth, etc.	Varies depending on scale of re-engagement initiative, partners, and planned services to be offered.	…finding outreach staff with personal histories of school disengagement and reconnection.
Expect positive economic and social impact for community.		…beginning planning for sustainability of re-engagement efforts from the start of the initiative.

Table 3: Re-Engagement Center Scale

RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER SCALE			
	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE
Outreach	Personalized outreach	Personalized outreach; community advertising	Targeted and personalized outreach; extensive and varied advertising
Assessment	Assessment with minimal access to academic and attendance data; some support services provided	Extensive assessment and access to achievement and attendance data; multiple support services provided	Extensive assessment, access to data through formal partner agreements, and additional support services provided
Referral	Quick referral	Services prior to referral with some extended follow-up	Referral with hand off supported over time, intervention and prevention linkages
Partner Role	Minimal partner role or no partners	Multiple partners	Multiple partnerships and community collaboration incorporating individual organizations' interests and common interest in re-engagement

Table 4: Re-Engagement Center Services Offered

The centers offer a variety of different services (described below) that are customized based on the specific population and needs of the REC.

RE-ENGAGEMENT SERVICES OFFERED			
Services	Commonalities Among REC Sites	Differences Among REC Sites	Emerging Trends: A Growing Number of Communities Are…
Wraparound services	• Recognition of physical/social/ emotional needs • Referral to service providers	Some sites have: • On-site counselors • Social workers • Partnerships with support agencies	….offering social/ emotional and mental health component located at centers.
Instruction and Assessment	• Assessments in-clude credit review.	• Sites vary by the depth of academic assessments. Some use online literacy/ numeracy skills assessments. • Sites vary by instructional "dosage" and ap-proach: options include online instruction and credit recovery; blended and direct instruction in core content areas; or a full academic program leading to diploma. • Sites vary by length and integra-tion of program-ming. Options include connec-tion to community colleges with dual credit; career train-ing with certifica-tions; GED with connection to post-secondary options.	…increasing connections to college and career pathways.

RE-ENGAGEMENT SERVICES OFFERED			
Services	Commonalities Among REC Sites	Differences Among REC Sites	Emerging Trends: A Growing Number of Communities Are…
Follow-up services	• Close, trusting relationships • Targeted follow-up for up to one year • Progress checks with students and receiving schools • Return to REC if disconnected	• Some offer extensive mentoring, monitoring, future planning. • Some offer specific follow-up approaches for students returning to previous school.	…using social media and technology to maintain connections with youth.
Family involvement	• Often attend intake • Many give input to school choice • Challenging to involve family	Some sites may have requirements for family involvement.	…accepting a new definition of "family." …working with youth who refer siblings and family members.
Training and professional development	• Initial training to new staff • Assessment training • Ongoing professional development	Sites may offer training in: • Youth development • Instruction • Other as needed for center	…doing team development, collaboration, and planning with staff. …having REC staff participate in district PD sessions.

Table 5: Partners

As noted previously, establishing successful partnerships is essential to the workings of a re-engagement center and will vary depending on community size and resources.

PARTNERS			
Partner	Commonalities Among REC Sites	Differences Among REC Sites	Emerging Trends: A Growing Number of Communities Are:
School Districts	Identified need for close relationship with school districts	Some RECs: • Are sponsored or cosponsored by districts • Have contractual relationships with multiple districts • Have access to lists of withdrawn students • Participate in Professional Development options through the district	…initiating contracts that provide RECs with full access to student information systems.
City and County Government	• High-level government officials' advocacy increases REC visibility • Juvenile justice relationships assist adjudicated youth returning to school	Some sites benefit from: • Co-sponsorship • Start-up funding • Public transportation provided to youth • County mental health agencies	…recognizing the value of mayoral advocacy and support.
Workforce Development	Flexible schedules to allow students to work full and part-time while in the re-engagement program	Varying sites are provided with: • WIA Funding • Staffing • Career training • Internships	…including workforce partners at the start-up of the REC.

	PARTNERS		
Partner	Commonalities Among REC Sites	Differences Among REC Sites	Emerging Trends: A Growing Number of Communities Are:
Higher Education	Connecting students to pathways with college connection and career training	Some RECs: ● Are co-sponsored ● Provide dual enroll-ment /credits ● Provide student scholarships ● Have outreach services ● Have co-location of HS and community college programs ● Participate in Professional De-velopment options through higher education	…strengthening con-nections with com-munity colleges and universities.
Community Organizations	Many resources pro-vided through commu-nity partners	Some sites' partner-ships with community partners provide: ● Funding and resources for REC start-up and ongo-ing operation ● Outreach ● Services to tar-geted populations ● Professional development	…locating community partners on the REC site.
Foundations	Access to grants through foundations	● Foundations may provide: ● Funding and resources for REC start-up and ongo-ing operation ● Staffing ● Outreach ● Scholarships	

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