A Comprehensive Plan for Educating Philadelphia's Disengaged Youth: Multiple Pathways to Graduation White Paper

I.   Purpose

The purpose of this paper is provide the Philadelphia School Reform Commission with a set of recommendations for consideration as part of its efforts to create high-quality educational alternatives for youth who have dropped out; been sent out through disciplinary actions; or are at great risk of these outcomes. The paper provides an overview of effective practices research and Philadelphia-specific data analyses, describes the efforts in Philadelphia to develop a consensus on action steps, and concludes with six recommendations to strengthen multiple pathway approaches that will improve options and outcomes for struggling students, students presenting disciplinary challenges and out-of-school youth.

II.   Background

Within the past two years, the dropout crisis has gained the attention of policy makers, academics, and school officials, and has been featured in popular media like the Oprah Winfrey Show and Time Magazine. At the state level, the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Labor & Industry have launched initiatives aimed at improving data collection, strengthening high school retention and re-engagement, and building community collaboratives to tackle the dropout issue. Here in Philadelphia, we have seen the launch of Project U-Turn and the commitment of Mayor Michael Nutter to work with the School District to achieve a 50% reduction in the dropout rate within five to seven years.

This upsurge in interest has highlighted and underscored what many parents, students and teachers have known for some time – that far too many of our city's young people are not graduating from high school and, as a result, have severely limited options in an increasingly competitive global economy. At varying levels across communities, conversations are converging around two critical educational priorities: (1) the retention, preparation, and achievement of students that remain within the traditional educational pipeline, and (2) the recovery of students who have left the traditional educational pipeline through the development of educational options that meet their needs.

Addressing these priorities is particularly critical in major urban centers like Philadelphia. Based on a report published by the Project U Turn Collaborative in October 2006 (*Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005,* by Balfanz and Neild) for the Classes of 2000-2005 , about 30,000 students who began 9th grade in Philadelphia public schools left without earning a diploma. Furthermore, a one-year snapshot for the 2003-04 school year revealed that approximately 8,000 young people left school without earning a diploma or indicating their transfer to a school outside of the School District. Though some of these students re-enrolled the following year, this annual figure provides insight into the depth of   student disengagement that occurs a in a given year.

In addition to the high rates of dropout, data reveal that thousands of youth are suspended each year for disciplinary reasons. Furthermore hundreds of students are assigned to discipline schools each year on account of violations ranging from Level One offenses like academic dishonesty, dress code

violations, minor destruction or theft of property, fighting, gambling and/or smoking) to Level Two offenses including physical harm to students or adults; sexual offenses; weapons; distribution of drugs or alcohol and major destruction of property). . Though a vast majority of disciplinary transfers are Level Two offenders, the fact remains that disciplinary students, regardless of level, generally exhibited early warning signs for dropping out of school including academic struggling and significant truancy. Another notable finding is that twenty-five percent (25%) of the students who were attending disciplinary schools during the 2006-2007 academic year were effectively special education students.

Such findings present considerable challenges. But when combined with effective practices research, they may lead to promising solutions. Local youth focus groups and surveys confirm **that an overwhelming majority (90%) of out-of-school youth would like to return to some type of education**. Therefore, as we begin to understand the status and characteristics of struggling students and out-of-school youth, we can work to institute and ensure high-quality educational programming consistent with the needs of our young people. Given the considerable variation among the academic and demographic profiles of disconnected youth, it is both appropriate and necessary that Philadelphia build a diverse portfolio of innovative educational offerings, or "multiple pathways," to meet varying student needs.

III.   Strategies and National Best Practices to Meet the Needs of Disconnected Youth

Summary. Philadelphia is at the forefront of a national movement to build multiple pathways to graduation for its young people. These efforts are informed by a wide variety of partners who are currently working on behalf of vulnerable youth, and also by a rich compilation of literature that describes effective practices for disconnected young people. In this section, we attempt to summarize twenty years of research and analysis concerning youth development and second chance programs, as well as emerging trends in alternative education that are often directed at young people who present disciplinary problems. We note that while exemplars exist, there is an apparent and compelling lack of an overall systemic structure for program delivery in this regard. Additionally, the discussions illuminate the striking similarities between what is believed to be effective practices for disconnected youth and what contemporary thinking suggests about effective broad-based high school reform. Altogether, the work suggests that an effective and efficient approach to improving education and successful outcomes of students might be to enlarge and redefine the public education system to include strategies that address the needs of all youth, not just those who tend to succeed in traditional classrooms.

A Second Chance for the Forgotten Half: Early Efforts to Address the Needs of Disconnected Youth. For much of our nation's quarter-century debate about strategies to improve educational attainment, the plight of struggling students and out-of-school youth has received scant attention from mainstream reformers. For the most part, public officials, employers and policy makers have seemed to believe that increasing academic rigor – whether in the form of strengthened core curricula, the enactment of demanding academic standards or the use of high-stakes assessments – was all that was needed, and that those students who historically struggled would shape up or simply move to the margins of American society.

Despite the lack of attention to the needs of disconnected youth in the mainstream education reform movement, the topic has been the subject of discussion and study among researchers, policy analysts and public officials for at least two decades. Reacting in large measure to the landmark 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* and other studies of its kind that focused solely on increasing academic rigor, youth advocates argued that youth who were currently faring poorly were unlikely to see any benefit from such actions that did not include different approaches and more supports.

One of the earliest discussions of the challenges faced by out-of-school and out-of-work youth is found in *Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged,* a 1987 report issued by the Committee on Economic Development. In dire terms, this report warned about imminent risks to undereducated children and youth, and the nation's broader social and economic well-being. The study included several forward-looking recommendations aimed at dropout prevention and re-engagement, including smaller learning environments, secondary-postsecondary education blends, mentoring, connections between school and work, and the provision of small, innovative alternative schools to re-enroll out-of-school youth.

In the years that followed, several other reports stressed the need to develop strategies for under-educated youth. For example, two studies funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, *The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America* and *The Forgotten Half: Pathway to Success for America's Youth and Young Families*, chronicled the difficulties faced by youth who do not go on to college (or in many instances do not finish high school), calling attention to their slim prospects for successful transition into productive adulthood. Another report by the American Youth Policy Forum, *Some Things Do Make A Difference,* countered the conventional wisdom that nothing worked to increase educational and employment options for at-risk youth.

One of the most influential studies from this time was *A Generation of Challenge – Pathways to Success for Urban Youth*, by the Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Policy Studies. It offered a set of research-based youth program principles that included:

- connections to at least one caring adult;
- the centrality of work and connections to employers;
- a variety of options for improving educational and skill competencies, with opportunities to pursue postsecondary education;
- access to support services; and
- opportunities for leadership and service.

In his chapter from *Generation's* , Gary Walker of Public/Private Ventures argued that, while the principles of successful programs for disconnected youth were coming to be better understood and were evident in individual programs around the country, the major missing link was a <u>system</u> through which to deliver effective programs at significant levels to the young people who needed them. The primary reason for this, Walker stated, is "our unwillingness to face the fact that no one formal high school system is ever going to work for all youth."

More recently, the 2003 study, *Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds,* by Michael Wald and Tia Martinez for the Hewlett Foundation helped to launch current interest in vulnerable youth. In this publication, Wald and Martinez chronicled the

challenges confronting disconnected youth, and argued for a strong focus on young people in public care systems, including juvenile justice and foster care, and on young women with children.

A critical point made by Wald and Martinez echoes Walker's sentiment in *A Generation of Challenge:* "There are programs available for these youth…" they state, "but programs are not enough. There needs to be a system that has responsibility for reaching out to those not making it, with adequate dedicated resources … The key is accepting the public responsibility."

Alternative Education and Training: Definitions and Typologies. Alternative educational approaches share much with second chance youth programming, including innovative pedagogies, smaller classes and connections to real-world learning. Unfortunately they also share a less positive trait; they are often largely isolated from other institutions and systems. Hence, the comments of Walker, Wald and Martinez about the lack of delivery systems for second chance programs also ring true for alternative education.

Not only are true alternative education systems quite rare, but there is no commonly agreed-upon definition or typology which describes alternative education's characteristics and traits. In fact, alternative schools and programs vary widely with regard to standards, structure, accountability, policies and procedures, hours, admissions, pedagogy and instructional focus, and community and parent involvement. To bring some clarity to the discussion of the topic, Laudan Aron, in an extremely thoughtful 2006 study for the Urban Institute, describes alternative education typologies identified in three different research studies.

1. Raywid (1994) focuses on program goals to organize thinking about alternative schools:

   o Type I Schools are "full-time, multi-year options for students of all kinds," that provide credits toward high school graduation, smaller and more supportive learning environments and individualized instruction. Models range from schools-within-schools to charters to after-hour recovery programs.

   o Type II Schools are primarily focused on discipline, and "aim to segregate, contain and reform disruptive students." Placement is involuntary and short-term, with curricula limited to a few required subjects.

   o Type III Schools provide voluntary, "short-term but therapeutic settings" for targeted student populations with social/emotional problems that create barriers to learning. They offer counseling, access to social services and academic remediation.

According to Raywid, Type I Schools are the most successful approach, with Type II Schools much less likely to realize academic gains. Type III programs demonstrate some progress while students are attending, but gains tend to dissipate over time.

2. Aron and Zweig (2003) propose a typology that focuses on the target population, physical setting and program administration; i.e.:

   o *who is served* in the alternative setting (e.g. OSY, pregnant and parenting teens, delinquent youth, low-achievers, at-risk youth);

   o *where they are served (*e.g. in resource rooms, pull-out programs, schools-within-a-school, in self-contained schools, community-based locations, etc.)

   o *what are the content and objectives of the alternative program (*e.g. regular diploma, GED, occupational skills certificate, internships, or employment); and

o *how is the program administered and funded,* e.g. by the school district, CBO, charter school, adult education, juvenile justice or private operators.

3. The University of Chicago's Melissa Roderick offers still another approach to defining alternative education programming. Roderick suggests that the most appropriate typology is neither risk factors nor program characteristics, but rather students' educational issues. She posits four types:

   o Students who have fallen off-track because of a specific problem and need short-term interventions to regain their footing.

   o Students who have prematurely transitioned into adulthood; e.g. teen parents or youth in the juvenile justice system.

   o Substantially off-track students who are older and who are returning on a short-term basis to gain credits to transition into community college or training; and

   o Substantially off-track students who are older but are significantly deficient in academic credits and reading levels, making existing educational options inappropriate.

Consequently, a synthesis of these ideas suggests that program models must be deliberately crafted with consideration for the outcomes to be effected, the context for service delivery and the students who will be served both in terms of academic characteristics and impediments to schooling.

What are Effective Practices in Alternative Education and Training Programs? The varieties of alternative schools and programs make comprehensive evaluations difficult. In the absence of empirical research, Aron suggests a list of characteristics based on studies and reports of a number of national organizations that have also promoted youth development and career preparation efforts (Jobs for the Future, the National Youth Employment Coalition and the Urban Institute), and several research summaries on the efficacy of alternative education strategies. According to Aron's synthesis, effective alternative programs include:

   o A clear focus on academic instruction, with rigorous standards and varieties of instructional approaches;

   o Instructional staff who choose to be part of the program, and receive on-going professional development;

   o Schools that are small and have low student-teacher ratios, encouraging caring relationships between youth and adults;

   o Facilities that are clean, safe and foster a sense of pride;

   o Community partnerships that provide linkages to community organizations for assistance and support, and to employers for workplace connections;

   o Administrative and bureaucratic autonomy, and operational flexibility; and

o Student supports through structured but flexible individualized programming.

Many elements in Aron's summary are echoed in a recent research scan by the Philadelphia Education Law Center of *Best Practices in Disciplinary Education Strategies,* including smaller classes, professional development, student supports and individualized programs. ELC's summary also emphasizes components with specific relevance to discipline-related programs, including:

o *Positive Behavior Program Elements* that focus on structure, assessment-based intervention, individual goals, and a focus on changing rather than punishing behaviors;

o *High Quality Academic Instruction*, with specialized instruction, student choice, alignment with regular class offerings and re-integration into regular education;

o *Parent Involvement,* including parent training, home-school consequences and rewards, and positive programming for students and parents.

A Clear Convergence. Those familiar with the current thinking on high school reform will recognize most of these characteristics. In fact, to a considerable extent these elements define our current thinking about effective educational programming at the high school level. As one example, these elements compare quite favorably with a compilation of high school reform effective practices identified by Jennifer Husbands for the Aspen Institute in 2004. The major categories included in her *Selected Review of High School Reform Strategies* include:

o Small Schools and Small Learning Communities

o Applied Learning

o K-16 Alignment and Dual Enrollment

o Professional Development

o Upgrading curriculum and instruction to eliminate non-college prep offerings

o Youth Development; and

o Whole School Reform.

The Gates Foundation, in an evaluation of its National School District and Networks Grants Program, which has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support of high school reform, identifies its own characteristics of effective high schools, based on a rigorous analysis of research. They include:

o A common focus on key research-based goals;

o High expectations, with all students completing a rigorous core curriculum;

o Small, personalized learning environments;

o Respect and responsibility among students, among teachers and between these groups; and

o Time to collaborate and the inclusion of parents and the community in an educational partnership.

A review of the elements above from Aaron, Husbands and Gates reveals that there are strong connections between effective practices for disconnected youth and modernized education strategies. The recurring themes of personalization, relationships and partnerships, quality

instruction and facilitated growth prove that it is entirely rational and highly advantageous to join traditionally disparate efforts focused on in-school and out-of-school youth into a single, comprehensive education reform strategy.

Getting from Here to There: A Philadelphia Strategy. Philadelphia is already making extraordinary progress in building a comprehensive system to educate all of the City's young people, and is poised to do even more. With the benefit of more than two decades of effective practices research and its own rich history of successful program innovation, Philadelphia is especially well-positioned to build the comprehensive educational system that has been so long discussed but as of yet, unrealized. The next three sections focus on what currently exists in Philadelphia; Philadelphia-specific youth and student data; and how stakeholders are employing the data to build multiple pathway options for struggling students and out-of-school youth.

IV. What Currently Exists in Philadelphia

Currently, Philadelphia has a number of strategies in place to address the needs of out-of-school youth and those students who are subject to disciplinary transfer.

Educational options for disconnected youth including those significantly at risk of dropout.

The School District of Philadelphia offers three diploma-granting options for youth who are either at risk of dropping out, over-age and with few credits earned towards graduation or out-of-school.

1. The Educational Options Program operates from 3:00PM to 6:00PM at ten area high schools, providing instruction in core subject areas and enrolling students who have previously earned a minimum of eight academic credits. Each academic year, a student is eligible to enroll part-time and earn four to eight academic credits, depending on whether the credits are newly attempted or recovered from previously failed or incomplete courses.

2. Gateway to College, a Gates Foundation-supported replication of the national model pioneered by Portland (OR) Community College, enables former dropouts to graduate from high school and also to accumulate credits toward a postsecondary credential. Gateway students must read at the 8th grade level, and attend classes on a postsecondary campus. The Gateway-to-College replication is a partnership between the School District of Philadelphia and the Community College of Philadelphia, with additional support from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's dual enrollment program.

3. Accelerated High Schools enroll students full-time with as few as zero credits and are designed to provide individualized, year-round instruction meeting the academic needs of overage and under-credited students. These schools offer smaller learning environments with connections to adults and peers, and are managed by contracted organizations. Philadelphia's current mix of accelerated high schools includes Camelot EXCEL Academy, Fairhill Community High School; Community Education Partners' Accelerated Learning Academies and the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America Career and Academic Development Institute. YouthBuild Charter School, a long-standing high-quality alternative

high school, also operates a competency-based program aimed at young people with similar academic and social challenges.

Low literacy levels and lack of credits earned toward graduation make it highly unlikely that the majority of Philadelphia's out-of-school youth can succeed in traditional high schools. Therefore, the schools and programs described above provide viable diploma-granting pathways for thousands of out-of-school youth. While these approaches appear to be working well for those young people who are able to enroll, the fact remains that there are too far few slots available to meet the demand for high quality alternative education options. At present, EOP, the Accelerated Schools and Gateway to College can accommodate only about 3,000 youth. With the School District's dropout rate approximating 45%, this total does not come close to meeting the demand for seats.

With support from the U.S. Department of Labor, two supplemental models are under development. A "Bridge" program, designed to serve youth whose literacy and numeracy skills are below a sixth grade level, will help to prepare low-literate youth to enter formal educational programs; and "Learning to Work" program, pioneered by New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways, will provide linkages to employment and wrap around social services for students in the City's alternative education programs as a powerful retention strategy. Additionally, a hybrid accelerated and vocational school model that will enroll court involved youth is being planned for fall 2008.

Furthermore, a series of major grants awarded to the School District by the U.S. Department of Labor will support the establishment of research-based systems and supports within seven comprehensive high schools with the goal of making significant progress in dropout prevention and increasing the numbers of students who graduate ready for college and careers.

Educational Options for Disciplinary Students

For the 2007-08 school year, there were 3,140 slots contracted to four vendors to provide disciplinary placements for Philadelphia youth. These providers include the following sites:

- Community Education Partners

    o Hunting Park
    o Miller
    o Allegheny

- Camelot

    o Boone
    o Shallcross

- Cornell Abraxas

- Delaware Valley High School

Numbers of students served in each school are included in the chart on page 13. The models vary rather extensively, as do the populations of young people served. In some instances, programs

primarily use individualized computer-based instruction, in others, a completely different strategy is employed.

Current System Gaps

Based on a variety of data sources, including-*Unfulfilled Promise*; School District of Philadelphia records; tabulated results from Project U-Turn's kickoff Expo and calls from more than 1,200 young people who voluntarily contacted the Project U-Turn hotline since October 2, 2007- we have learned several things about our disengaged youth population and the factors that might support improved educational outcomes.

1. Less Restrictive/More Flexible Pathway Options

There is a need for programs that offer greater flexibility in determining where and when learning takes place. Programs capable of accommodating different schedules and diverse skill levels of students are especially needed for those young adults who are unable to attend programs at fixed locations and times.

2. Skill-Building and Credit-Bearing Interventions

In order for students to enter and succeed in alternative pathway options, remediation services and supports must be readily available, including literacy-focused interventions to improve student reading levels. Furthermore, where credits pose a barrier, credit-bearing curriculum modules would be helpful in supporting credit recovery.

3. Post-Secondary Preparedness

To be prepared for successful adulthood, students must be equipped with the skills needed to excel in life, work and higher education. To these ends, programs that support college and career-readiness are especially needed. Examples of such activities include subsidized internships, college and career counseling, support for the college application and financial aid applications processes, employability skills development workshops and job placement.

4. Increased Capacity in High-Quality Educational Alternatives

The demand for pathway options outpaces supply, as does the breadth of needed supportive services. This past year, over 1,500 youth sought connections to these programs but could not be placed due to a lack of available seats   Therefore, there is a compelling need for more capacity within high-quality alternative options like Accelerated High Schools, which enroll students with low credit and literacy levels.. With many students attributing their inability to be fully engaged in school to a variety of personal and academic barriers, strong systems of support must also be built to enhance core academic programs. Some of the issues to be tackled include: childcare, housing, healthcare, employment and mentoring.

V.   A System of Programs and Services Informed by Data and Research

Current efforts on behalf of disconnected and disengaged youth are being informed by the effective practices research detailed above, and by powerful data analyses of the educational needs and characteristics of Philadelphia's struggling students and out-of-school youth. Ruth Curran Neild and

Robert Balfanz, researchers from Johns Hopkins University, analyzed data sets from the School District of Philadelphia, the City Department of Human Services and the Department of Health and Vital Statistics, housed at the University of Pennsylvania's Kids Integrated Data System. Their findings were published in the ground-breaking report *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005*. Additionally, the School District's Office of Specialized Services provided data on the discipline schools for academic year 2006-2007 to further deepen our knowledge base, and Neild through more recent research has examined the characteristics of referred to District disciplinary schools Below are some of the key findings which have shaped the recommendations found in this report.

A. Dropout and Graduation Rate Data from *Unfulfilled Promise*

1. *The Class of 2000.* Students in The School District of Philadelphia's Class of 2000 had a 54% rate of graduation within 8 years of starting high school (based on first-time entering 9th graders in 1996).

What happened to students by 2004	**Percent**	**n**
Graduated	54%	7,169
Out-of-School Youth	45%	5,977
Removed non-voluntarily	.26%	34
Still enrolled	.33%	43
TOTAL	100%	13,223

2. *A one-year snapshot.* In the 2003-04 school year more than 13,000 students left school without a diploma or were severely truant. While some of these 8,321 students who became "full—time out-of-school youth" eventually returned to school, most did not.
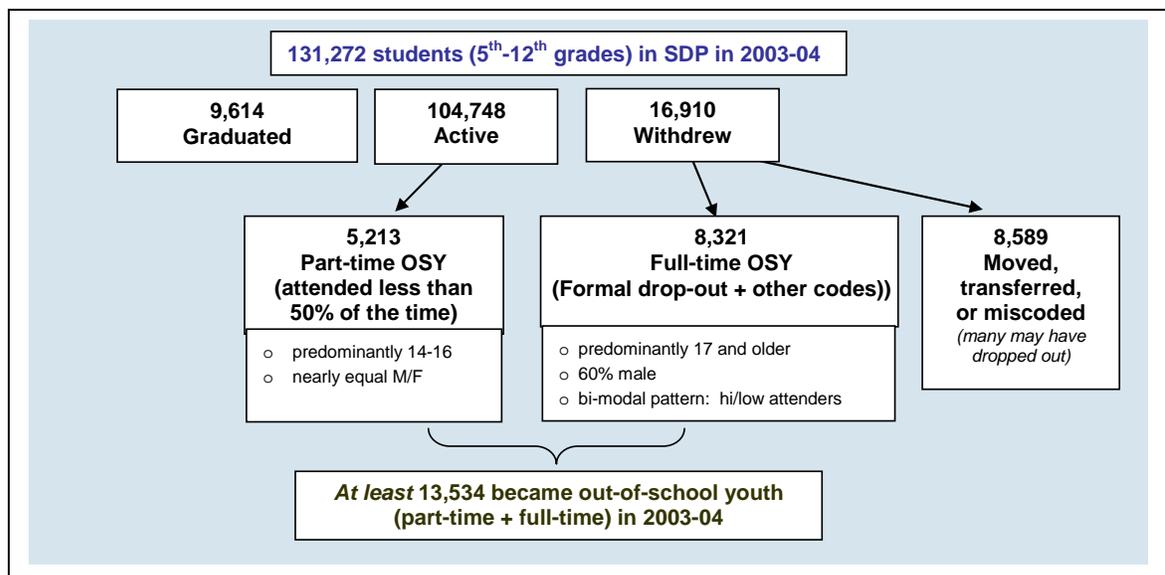
3. *Credit profiles of out-of-school youth.* A typical out-of-school youth is a 17 year-old 9th or 10th grader who is at least 2-3 years from graduation based on his or her credit accumulation at the time of dropping out.

- More than 50% of the cohort studied had practically no credits and another 21% needed between 12-18 more credits to graduate
- 9th grade is the modal grade for dropping out (not necessarily the students 1st year of high school, but they are 9th graders credit-wise when they drop out);

Credits away from graduation at end of 2003-2004	More than 22.5 (4 Years HS)	22.4-19.0 (4 Years HS)	18.9-12.5 (3 Years HS)	12.4-6.5 (2 Years HS)	6.4-2.5 (1 Year HS)	Less than 2.4 (.3 Year HS)
OSY/DROP	579 (19.4%)	581 (19.5%)	1054 (35.3%)	581 (19.5%)	146 (4.9%)	44 (1.5%)
PT-OSY	1218 (32.7%)	820 (22.0%)	1049 (28.2%)	427 (11.5%)	138 (3.7%)	71 (1.9%)
Total OSY	1797 (26.8%)	1401 (20.9%)	2103 (31.4%)	1008 (15%)	284 (4.2%)	115 (1.7%)

4. *Early Predictors of Dropping Out.* Philadelphia's out-of-school youth population is bi-modal, comprised predominately of youth who attended less than 50% of the time, but also of a significant group of students (more than 20%) who attended 90% of the time prior to withdrawing.

- This year's "withdrawal" is often last year's truant: a majority of 2002-2003 withdraws attended less than 60% of the time in 2001-2002;
- Most students attempt to repeat at least one high school grade before withdrawing. Most dropouts fail to gain on-time promotion to the 10th grade and a significant number of students repeat the 12th grade.

We can identify many of the future dropouts in 8th and 9th grade

When exhibited	What indicators	Probability of dropping out	% of all drop-outs
8th grade	✓ Failing math or English ✓ Attending school < 75% of the time	78.2%	80%
9th grade	✓ Attending school < 70% of the time ✓ Earning fewer than 2 credits ✓ Not being promoted to 10th grade on time	81.5%	
No 8th or 9th grade factors		22.7%	20%

5. Involvement in Public Care Systems. Overall, 5-12th graders who have experienced life events that resulted in social service agency involvement (e.g. foster care placement, substantiated cases of abuse or neglect, pregnancy, and/or juvenile justice system interactions) are 4 times as likely to become OSY; However, as many as 70% - 75% of OSY have no social service involvement.

	% of all dropouts	% of all graduates	% of all students
Substantiated case of abuse or neglect	2.8%	.89%	1.8%
Foster care placement	7.4%	2.0%	4.5%
Juvenile justice placement (all students)	14.4%	1.3%	7.2%
Juvenile justice placement (males only)	22.6%	2.2%	12.8%
Gave birth within 4 years of starting high school (females)	32.8%	9.7%	18.7%
Gave birth within 5 years of starting high school (females)	41.4%	15.2%	25.5%
Total number of students (male and female)	**6,083**	**7,296**	**13,393**

	% dropping out	% graduating	N of students in this condition
Substantiated case of abuse or neglect	71.3%	27.4	237
Foster care placement	75.2%	24.6%	597
Juvenile justice placement (all students)	90.1%	9.5%	965
Gave birth within 4 years of starting high school (females)	68.3%	31.5%	1,262

B. Data on the Discipline Schools from 2007-2008 school year:

1. *Capacity and Enrollment.* Disciplinary Programs FY 08 Capacity and Enrollment (as of 9/28/07)

Provider / Program	Slot Capacity	Enrollment as of 9/28/2007
CEP Hunting Park	1200	954
CEP Miller	600	486
CEP Allegheny	350	286
Camelot Boone	400	386
Camelot Shallcross	300	322
Cornell Abraxas	165	66
Delaware Valley High School	125	111
Total	**3140**	**2611**

2. Students' Race, Ethnicity and Gender. The vast majority of students in Philadelphia's discipline schools are African American. In each of the ethnic groups the students attending discipline programs is disproportionately male (roughly 66% male and 33% female).

Ethnicity	% of total number of students attending discipline programs	% of total school district demographics
White	5%	18.9%
African American	82%	65.3%
Latino	12%	13.3%
Asian	.5%	2.3%
Other	< .05%	.2%

3. Grade Levels. Only half of all the students in discipline school placements are in their high school years.

	# of students	% of total discipline program students
9th – 12th grade	1056	49%
6th – 8th grade	895	42%
3rd – 5th grade	181	1%

4. Special Education Enrollments. Of the 2,132 students attending discipline programs in 2006-2007, 532 (25%) were special education students.

- Special Education students make up a significant proportion of the overall population at all but the CEP schools;

- Camelot Schools had a higher percentage of special education students than the other programs; and

- Camelot also retained special education students at higher rates than most other programs.

Program	% of students who were special education	% of special education students who withdrew
Camelot - Boone	45%	9%
Camelot – Shallcross	38%	15%
Delaware Valley High School	25%	0
Cornell Abraxas	24%	18%
CEP Miller	22%	26%
CEP Hunting Park	17%	21%
CEP Allegheny	17%	27%

5. Schools Producing High Numbers of Discipline Students. A small number of schools are producing a high number of the discipline students

- 8 schools are sending 26 % of the students to discipline programs.

- 150 schools are sending less than 10 students each to discipline programs

	Number of schools sending youth for disciplinary school assignments in 2006-2007
… Sending more than 100 students to discipline programs	1
…Sending between 75 – 100	0
…Sending between 50 – 74	7
…Sending between 25 – 49	14
…Sending between 0 – 24	187

6. *Reasons for Referral to Disciplinary Schools.* A 2006-07 school year survey of the types of incidents which could merit disciplinary transfer showed that there were 3,041 incidents in high schools which could merit disciplinary transfer. The vast majority (2,378, or 78%) of these incidents were for assaults, threats (verbal and written), and weapons. However, although these categories of offenses were consistent, the nature of the incidents in each category varied.

A new study by Neild provides information about students' demographics and disciplinary histories at the time of placement in a disciplinary school. The research presents an analysis of data for students enrolled in six discipline schools serving School District of Philadelphia (CEP Hunting Park, Miller and Allegheny; Camelot Boone and Shallcross; and Delaware Valley High School) on a single day (November 15, 2006) Key findings include:

- More than 60% of students attending disciplinary schools were age 15 or younger, with 20% being 13 or younger and some as young as 10 years of age.

- While the modal year for entry was ninth grade, more than 60% of students entered when they were in 5th-8th grades.

- Seven percent of students enrolled in discipline schools were 18 or older (that is, beyond the age of compulsory attendance), suggesting a strong desire to earn their diplomas.

- Most students were over-age for grade when they entered, suggesting some history of academic and/or behavior difficulty.

- The vast majority of disciplinary school students had at least one Level Two offense and/or was named as the defendant in at least one Serious Incident in the twelve months prior to entry into a disciplinary program. However, ten percent of students committed no Level Two offenses over this time period.

- Roughly three-fourths of students had at least one Level One suspension over the twelve months prior to entrance into a disciplinary school. Of these, the majority received five or fewer Level One suspensions, with approximately 11 percent of students having received at least six Level One suspensions.

Additional Data Needs

While Philadelphia is benefiting from the availability of integrated data from multiple sources and high-quality research analyses, much more information is needed to continue to design and to refine multiple pathway options for struggling students and out-of-school youth. Several areas of need include:

o More in-depth analysis of educational status and characteristics of youth in juvenile justice system, with particular emphasis on those returning from delinquent placement (Status: *planned*).

o An analysis of educational profiles of pregnant and parenting teens (Status: *beginning shortly*).

o An analysis of the labor market and postsecondary education status and characteristics of out-of-school youth (Status: *underway*).

o A rigorous analysis of the pathways eventually leading students to placement in Philadelphia's disciplinary schools; and

o Outcome data for youth in disciplinary schools and multiple pathways schools, including attendance, credit accumulation, graduation and postsecondary status.

VI. Process to Date for Designing a System of Services for Disconnected and Disengaged Youth

This section contains a brief overview of Philadelphia's efforts to develop policies and programs for struggling students and out-of-school youth. This work is based on the data and research findings discussed in the previous sections, and has benefited from the actions and continuing commitment of several stakeholder groups, including the Project U-Turn Collaborative, the Alternative Education Task Force, and the Anchor Three Work Team that is part of the School District's overall Secondary Education Reform efforts. Recognizing the mutual interests in their work, and appreciating the synergy that could be created through a unified approach, the three groups convened in November 2007 for a one-day retreat to discuss common ground and next steps and to produce a set of action recommendations.

Three Inter-Related Efforts

1. Project U-Turn

Background. The Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative (now known as the Project U-Turn Collaborative) was organized in March 2005 when Philadelphia received funding from national philanthropies (Gates, Carnegie and Mott), with major matching support from the William Penn Foundation, to study and respond to the city's dropout crisis. The Collaborative operates as a subcommittee of the

> **Project U-Turn Steering Committee:**
> Center for Literacy
> Center for Social Organization of Schools at
>   The Johns Hopkins University
> City of Philadelphia, Managing Director's Office and
>   Department of Human Services
> Congreso de Latinos Unidos
> Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project
> Nu Sigma Youth Services
> Public Citizens for Children and Youth
> Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network
> Philadelphia Education Fund
> Philadelphia Juvenile Probation Department
> Philadelphia Reintegration Initiative
> Philadelphia Youth Network *(managing partner)*
> School District of Philadelphia
> University of Pennsylvania, Cartographic Modeling Lab
> United Way of Southeastern PA
> William Penn Foundation

Philadelphia Youth Council, a committee of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board.

In October 2006, the Collaborative's work culminated in the launch of **Project U-Turn**, a citywide campaign to bring much-needed attention to Philadelphia's dropout crisis and to build the collective will to resolve it. The Project U-Turn collaborative now consists of more than 50 agencies and organizations that represent grassroots organizations, citywide community-based organizations, education and youth-serving non-profits agencies, Family Court, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Social Services, the Reintegration Initiative, and key offices of the School District. Members of the Project U-Turn Steering Committee are listed in the box above.

In addition to increasing public awareness of the issue, Project U-Turn's work has achieved significant successes. These include the release of important research and analyses (*Unfulfilled Promise*), the creation of several hundred new and expanded educational programs; the design of a new re-engagement system for dropouts, truants and youth returning from juvenile justice placements; and leveraging more than $10 million dollars to respond to the dropout crisis.

Goals. Based on the research in *Unfulfilled Promise*, Project U-Turn set as short-term goals that by the 2010-11 school year, the out-of-school youth population will have seen an **overall reduction of 25%, or more than 2,000,** with a corresponding **increase in the graduation rate of approximately 20%.** These improvements are to include young people with credit accumulation at all levels, including those farthest from graduation.

Organizing to Achieve the Goals. In order to accomplish the above goals, the Collaborative created several subcommittees two of which have directly impacted the recommendations in this document.

- The **Multiple Pathways Committee** was charged with defining and designing a system of multiple educational options – incorporating those that already existed within the District – which would lead to a high school diploma and meet the needs of current out-of-school youth and those at highest risk of dropping out. One of the key activities of this committee was to host a 2-day event in which national providers of alternative educational programs made a series of presentations to Philadelphia educational leaders in order to better inform their decision-making about possible programs for replication here..

- The **Alternative Education Providers Network** is a peer-learning group made up of 15 organizations that provide alternative pathways to a high school diploma. This group meets to share best practices and information which can aid in future programs' design and development efforts.

2. Secondary Education Reform: Anchor Three Work Team

The **Secondary Education Reform** work begun by the District in July 2006 has overlapped chronologically with the efforts of Project U-Turn. This work has been divided into five areas of primary focus (termed "Anchors"). Because the **Anchor 3** workgroup was charged with addressing issues relating to preventing and re-engaging dropouts, and since many of the participants in Anchor 3 also participated in the Project U-Turn Collaborative, these groups were merged into one committee.

3. Alternative Education Task Force

Most recently, the ***Alternative Education Task Force*** was formed by the interim Chief Academic Officer to review, assess, and offer recommendations to improve the options for four types of students: 1) youth not meeting with academic success in the traditional school environment and at risk of disconnecting; 2) out-of-school youth who have disconnected due to academic failure; 3) youth who have experienced a pattern of difficulty adhering to in-school behavioral norms; and 4) youth returning from adjudicated court placement. The Task Force met seven times between September and December 2007 to develop its recommendations.

Alternative Education Task Force:
School District of Philadelphia
Center for Literacy
Communities in Schools
Education Law Center
Healthnastics Center Inc.
Managing Directors Office-City of
   Philadelphia
PAAN/NuSigma
Parent Leadership Academy
PCCY
PFT/Health and Welfare Fund
Philadelphia Education Fund
Philadelphia Youth Network
Reintegration Initiative
SE PA Network for Family Health
   Education and Welfare
William Penn Foundation
Youth Empowerment Services

A Unified Vision for Change.

In order to effectively leverage the work of these groups, all participants in each committee were invited to a full day retreat. Schedules dictated that the retreat be held on Veterans Day, and, despite the fact that this was a holiday for most invitees, more than 60 individuals participated in the day's discussions. The group came together again on December 7th to review the recommendations and findings from November 12th.

VII. Recommendations

This section of the paper reviews the final recommendations that have been generated as a result of all of the research, best practices, data analysis and dialogue detailed in the previous sections of this report. Recommendations fall into two primary categories: those that focus on overall secondary education reform efforts; and those that address services and policies for disengaged youth who have dropped out of school, been sent out or are at-risk of either outcome.   There are six key recommendations with corresponding suggested implementation strategies detailed in this section. Already, efforts are underway on a number of proposed actions. Recommendations include:

1. Prioritize key interventions and systemic supports for youth at the highest risk of disengagement as part of an overall secondary education reform strategy

Improving services for Philadelphia's disengaged students must start with overall improvements to middle grades and high schools, so that all students are fully engaged in their own learning, connected to at least one caring adult in the school building and on track toward graduation. As indicated by research outlined earlier in the report, the criteria for the provision of quality educational offerings overall are quite similar to the best practices that have been identified to serve youth who are at the highest risk of dropping out or being sent out of school, as well as those who have already dropped out of school. To reiterate, the summary of effective practices based on Aron's synthesis of relevant research identified in the second section of this paper includes:

- o A clear focus on academic instruction, with rigorous standards and varieties of instructional approaches;
- o Instructional staff who choose to be part of the program, and receive on-going professional development;
- o Schools that are small and have low student-teacher ratios, encouraging caring relationships between youth and adults;
- o Facilities that are clean, safe and foster a sense of pride;
- o Community partnerships that provide linkages to community organizations for assistance and support, and to employers for workplace connections;
- o Administrative and bureaucratic autonomy, and operational flexibility; and
- o Student supports through structured but flexible individualized programming.

Within this context and specifically in support of the targeted population outlined in this report, the School District should:

a.   Provide ongoing and job-embedded **professional development** for faculty and staff on classroom and behavioral management, and on specific issues (e.g. information on social service options, youth development approaches, workplace connections, diversity and inclusion strategies) related to youth who are still enrolled but evidencing characteristics associated with dropping out.

b. Offer and monitor intensive **literacy support aligned with the core curriculum** for students grades 6-12.

c. Offer innovative **8th to 9th grade summer transition programs** with an emphasis on youth at the highest risk of dropping out or being sent out of school, based on early dropout predictors.

d. **Restore programs for struggling middle school students** that will accelerate learning.

e. **Implement school-wide student support** strategies, including behavioral supports to ensure that youth receive necessary transitional and social services help to which teachers have access for their students.

2. Review, revise and fully implement key School District interventions and policies specifically for disengaged youth

As is the case with the secondary education reform strategies, there are certain district interventions and policies that must be strengthened and enhanced in order to ensure the success of educational interventions for students at high risk of dropping out.

a. **Ensure full implementation of the Comprehensive Student Assistance Process (CSAP)**. CSAP is a critical intervention for high-risk youth. A fully resourced and implemented CSAP process is the primary vehicle for ensuring appropriate social and educational intervention and is a key element in an effective intervention and prevention system. Recommendations to ensure that District secondary schools are best equipped with the resources, training, and tools needed to fully implement CSAP, include:

- Determine appropriate staffing and personnel needs at the school level to ensure the effective implementation of CSAP. This includes ensuring that all staff understand their role in the CSAP process as well as building the counseling and behavioral health capacity within the school to fully implement the process.

- Improvement of current data systems to provide principals with real-time access to data needed for CSAP monitoring.

- Finalization and submission of draft CSAP policy for SRC ratification.

- Development of a secondary principals' CSAP task force to further inform central office of field-based implementation challenges and guide effective problem-solving.

- Development of a secondary CSAP Best Practice Institute to promote identification and replication of best practices.

- Collaboration with parent groups to develop and implement a CSAP parent leadership training strand and to ensure that families understand and are full partners in the CSAP process.

- Better align CSAP with school schedules and ensure common planning time.

- Mandate the composition of CSAP teams and weekly meeting time.

- Creation of a CSAP/Response to Intervention workgroup between central offices and leadership advisory groups to narrow the scope of current interventions and provide targeted training in these interventions that will increase fidelity of implementation.

- Expansion of the District's current K-8 school-based behavioral health partnerships with child-serving systems to the secondary level (underway).

- Finalization of a data sharing agreement with the City to ensure timely data sharing and improve care coordination for the District's most vulnerable students (underway).

b. **Charge the Safe Schools Advisory Committee to undertake a thorough review of the implementation of the Code of Conduct** to ensure its consistent implementation across the School District. Specific attention should be paid to the following:

- Consistency of implementation across schools;

- Due process;

- Graduated sanctions;

- Parent notification as soon as incident occurs;

- More focus on restorative justice than zero tolerance; and

- Determination of intentionality (e.g. students with weapons offenses for pocket knives in backpacks, etc.).

c. **Re-evaluate and streamline student placement and restoration practices and protocols**. Specifically:

- Review District's process for how student offenders are placed in disciplinary schools vs. other options;

- Allow Level 1 offenders to exercise choice by staying in school, with additional supports and clearly understood consequences for additional behavioral incidents or choosing a placement outside of school;

- Ensure that slots in an expanded set of accelerated programs can also be utilized as placements for disciplinary students;

- Consider restoring academically qualified students to special admission schools;

- Give families/students an appeal process to provide input on when and where students are restored;

- For first-time and non-violent offenders, review the mandatory one year assignment for Act 26;

- Assess each disciplinary provider's restoration success;

- Educate principals and school staff regarding creating welcoming environment and success plans for restored students;

- Allow disciplinary schools to graduate students as appropriate;

- Ensure that students who are placed in an alternative program are continuously reviewed to see if they are ready to return to the regular school environment;

- Ensure adequate support for students transitioning from disciplinary placements back to schools after restoration. Identify programs that connect daily services directly to restored students inside neighborhood high schools and implement these programs at scale: and

- Have students returning from placement (and after RET-WRAP) go to an accelerated school, a school within a school, or the regular school program as opposed to a disciplinary school, where appropriate.

3. Release a Request for Proposals for the provision of all disciplinary and multiple pathways options to ensure better alignment with student needs and best practices, clearer accountability measures and a more robust and expanded set of educational offerings to support students' academic success

The systemic components outlined above should be supported by a robust set of educational options designed to meet the needs of all young people in the District. To this end, this report recommends that a Request for Proposals (RFP) be released for the provision of services to young people who are at risk of dropping out, for those being sent out of school and for those who have already dropped out. Releasing an RFP will enable the School District to:

- Diversify the models and services to better meet the needs of the target population based on data analysis and research-based best practice;

- Streamline and enhance systemic supports to ensure necessary conditions of success for these models;

- Improve quality assurance and accountability measures;

- Provide clear contractual expectations for student academic performance;

- Ensure standardized and transparent payment structures for all contractors; and

- Ensure that the options created are part of an overall multiple pathways/high school reform agenda and not designed to create a second tier educational system for youth.

  Such an RFP should:

a. **Create Schools within Schools**. These schools would be located in the current School District high schools with the highest drop-out rates and the highest number of students sent out for disciplinary placement. Consistent with research, schools within schools must provide more personalized and individualized learning environments for youth and minimize transitions which have the potential to produce further disengagement from school. These services could be provided by outside contractors or by the school itself under the guidance of the Office for Multiple Pathways to Graduation. This is also consistent with the Secondary Education Blueprint and in particular Anchor Four which is focusing on developing small school environments to better serve young people.

b. **Explore additional alternatives to disciplinary placement** (e.g. TOPS, Accommodation Rooms, additional counselors/social workers, etc.) to see if these alternatives could replace a subset of disciplinary programs/slots. These additional options should not, however, diminish the district's capacity or ability to refer students longer term programs.

c. **Continue to expand accelerated school options and seats.** The further development and expansion of these models will be informed by an evaluation currently underway. This evaluation, being performed by the Center for Applied Research and Technical Assistance, is designed to identify effective practices and to provide some early insights into the impact of these models on student academic success.

d. **Create several small stand-alone disciplinary schools** across the District for young people who have committed offenses that warrant this type of placement. Ensure that these schools are structured to meet all of the recommendations listed in recommendation number four. (following)

e. **Create alternatives to suspension programs**, including Saturday programs, in-school behavioral support, instructional support, and Teen Courts to handle infractions. These models should be based on national best practices and on work in other cities, which have been compiled to inform the RFP development.

f. **Place investment priority and emphasis on more school within a school programs** and prevention programs/alternatives to suspensions and transfers rather than stand alone disciplinary schools.

4. Standardize and increase accountability when contracting for outside services

When considering contracting with outside vendors to procure the types of programming described above, several recommendations were made regarding standardizing and increasing accountability within these contractual relationships, including:

a. **Create a standardized payment system** that adequately reflects the intensity of service models, accounts for fixed vs. variable costs and provides incentives for providers to increase student performance and actively and successfully restore students;

b. **Explore a "Pay for Performance" system**: decreasing per student payments for students who are in disciplinary schools longer (less money after 120 days, 240 days, etc.);

c. **Create a systematic way to track provider performance** while students are enrolled in disciplinary programs and for at least one year after restoration;

d. **Standardize data collection for success rates with students** – involve Office of Assessment and Accountability and potentially contract with universities to assist with this process;

e. **Create mechanism for publicly sharing aggregate student outcomes** in these programs;

f. **Require all providers to maintain student data on schoolnet/SCN**; and

g. **Determine priority of outcome:** academic gain and/or behavioral changes.

5. Increase and sustain funding for multiple pathways opportunities

In order to ensure the long-term success of multiple pathways opportunities, specific efforts must be made to develop sustainable funding to support these options. Current efforts that are supported for the most part by grants and special funding initiatives of legislators do not provide the necessary stability to build the multiple pathways system needed in Philadelphia. Additionally, over 1,500 youth sought access to these opportunities during the 2006-2007 school year, but could not be placed due to a lack of available slots. Several possible approaches to building sustainable resources include:

a. **Establishing weighted funding** within the School District that recognizes the additional costs of high-quality programs for disengaged and disconnected youth.

b. **Funding Multiple Pathways Program Slots with Permanent School Budgets** by

   o Acknowledging that students enrolled in multiple pathways program slots are full-time students and should be allocated resources similar to students enrolled in other District schools; and

   o Allowing providers one year of start-up funding from the state Alternative Education allocation to enroll students and funding each school with a District operating budget after the first year of operation.

c. **Supporting the Commonwealth's Costing-Out Study** that recommends additional funding for under-resourced school districts across the state, including Philadelphia.

d. **Advocating for changes to related state education programs and funding,** including

   o Broadening Act 30 of 1997 that authorizes funds for programs to address the needs of disruptive students by broadening the purposes of the current statute and by increasing appropriations;

   o Significantly increasing support for state dropout prevention programs, authorized by Act 49 of 1987, that address key research-based components but are woefully under-funded;

   o Increasing support for the Governor's Project 720 high school reform initiative, that includes provisions for supporting struggling students and out-of-school youth; and

   o Expanding the Commonwealth's PA Youth in Transition initiative, that supports the formation and work of community collaboratives to address the dropout crisis.

In addition, an assessment should be undertaken to ascertain the needs of the responsible District departments to have adequate staffing and infra-structure to implement multiple pathways options and the accountability measures recommended in this report.

6. Continue to build systemic components utilizing key partnerships and leveraging non-district resources.

Significant work has been done to engage partners and city systems in the provision of this work. This system-building should continue and key partnerships and connecting activities should be further nurtured and established. Several of the areas recommended below have been underway and should be fast-tracked in the next sixty days including:

a. **Establishing and sustaining a District-wide Re-engagement Center** that would include outreach & identification, intake, assessments, development of individual service learning plans, connection to services, follow-up, & evaluation. Significant funding for this effort has already been raised and design and development meetings have taken place;

b. **Performing an audit of community-based and non-profit organizations to access additional support for at-risk or disciplinary students in their communities.** This recommendation will support many of the wrap-around needs identified above;

c. **Connecting with local employers** to sponsor or support students in connecting employment opportunities to multiple pathways offerings;

d. **Exploring the City's "first offender" program**, to align services to students with Act 26 weapons offenses. The program is open to first-time juvenile offenders charged with misdemeanors or felonies that would otherwise be heard by a Juvenile Court Judge. The program offers first-time offenders a chance to avoid a criminal record, and to make offenders understand the seriousness of their actions and its impact on victims and the entire neighborhood. The program includes community services, drug counseling, written reports and projects.

e. **Continuing to partner with City systems** including the Department of Human Services, the Reintegration Initiative and the Office of Juvenile Probation, Philadelphia Family Court to ensure coordination of services and resources.

VIII. Conclusion

Altogether, Philadelphia has begun to embrace the goal of educating all of its youth, from the gifted to most challenged, through high support, high achievement academic programs and strategies. The efforts that are suggested in this report are defined jointly by student and system need, and reflect a combination of new and enhanced efforts. Basing its response to current conditions on research, national and local best practices, experiential insights and other empirical data, the City, and in particular the School District of Philadelphia, with its network of partners, is proposing a course of action for transforming the landscape of public education here in Philadelphia. The recommendations above and the preceding discussions of history, strategy and need are all critical to developing an effective plan that holds youth outcomes focal and promotes partnership and collaboration. While the success of this plan depends upon the ability of stakeholders to galvanize resources and support, it is undeniable that a comprehensive plan grounded in research and derived through an inclusive process, will increase the likelihood of innovation and opportunity for all youth despite their individual circumstances and challenges.