

Building a Regional System to Reconnect Opportunity Youth

DRAFT ACTION PLAN - SUMMARY

Every year several thousand youth in our region leave high school without a diploma. Many who do finish are unable to successfully transition into postsecondary education or living-wage work. **We estimate that nearly one in five 16-24 year-olds living in South Seattle and S. King County – or 20,000 young people – are currently disconnected from school and work.** The majority are poor youth of color. We refer to this group as “opportunity youth” given their positive aspirations and the lost potential they represent should we fail to act.

Dropout prevention and intervention are critical, and important work in both areas is underway across our region. **Our focus here is re-engagement.** If the Road Map Project is to meet its bold 2020 goals – doubling the number of young people in the region who are on track for a college or career credential and closing opportunity gaps for low income students and students of color, we must support student success in school *and* we must help youth who fall through the cracks get back on track.

Opportunity youth face a complex range of assets and challenges. Many have urgent needs related to stabilization, physical and mental health and other challenging life circumstances. Many are involved with the juvenile justice or foster care systems. Many need specialized academic and social support. Addressing these barriers and understanding young people’s interests and strengths is essential to effective re-engagement.

A broad group of stakeholders came together between December 2013 and June 2014 to learn about the scale of the opportunity youth population, discuss the needs of our communities and develop a regional action plan. The group came to several conclusions. While the region is home to a patchwork of alternative schools, re-engagement programs, community college offerings and employment training programs, **programs are fragmented, hard for youth to find, capacity and evidence of effectiveness are limited and uneven, and connections to postsecondary pathways and employment are not as strong as they could be.**

The group concluded that the Road Map Region needs **a robust, coordinated, diverse system of re-engagement pathways designed to help youth and young adults reconnect to education and progress toward a college or career credential and living-wage work.** Building a re-engagement system will require collaborative work toward four goals: improving supply, coordination, quality and access.

In each goal area, the work group identified *high-leverage strategies* it feels are necessary to make progress, as well as more specific activities for implementing each strategy. The plan reflects the Road Map Project’s theory of change which emphasizes aligned action, data, community engagement, and system-building. Work is now underway to develop more specific timelines and work teams as we transition from planning to implementation. We expect this plan can guide work over the coming 2-3 years, but we see it as a living document that will need to be refreshed and revised at least annually given the complexity of system-building work.

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The focus of the Opportunity Youth Action Plan is building a robust, coordinated, diverse system of re-engagement pathways designed to help youth and young adults reconnect to education and progress towards a college or career credential and living-wage work.

Goal 1: Improve the SUPPLY of re-engagement pathways in the Road Map Region

Strategies:

- Support the development and expansion of pathways
- Address systemic barriers to effective re-engagement

Goal 2: Increase COORDINATION of re-engagement pathways in the Road Map Region

Strategies:

- Establish a shared vision for re-engagement in our region
- Identify and develop shared structures that link pathways into a system

Goal 3: Improve the QUALITY of re-engagement pathways in the Road Map Region

Strategies:

- Develop shared continuous quality improvement tools & processes
- Monitor system reach and outcomes

Goal 4: Increase AWARENESS of & ACCESS to re-engagement pathways & system

Strategies:

- Develop ways to reach out to students quickly when they leave school or college without finishing
- Implement regional youth-led outreach strategies

To review the full draft **Opportunity Youth Action Plan**, which includes more detail on the research conducted and more specific activities under each of the strategies, go to www.roadmapproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Draft-action-plan-7-11-14.pdf