

Opportunity Youth Work Group

Summary of Dec. 18, 2013 Meeting

Objectives

1. Build connections and awareness about new chapter in Road Map work
2. Clarify work group charge and process
3. Review national research and local data on the opportunity youth population
4. Identify gaps in knowledge and begin building a data agenda

Purposes

After introductions and an icebreaker, Kelly Goodsell reviewed the charge of the work group (see below). She described the cross-sector make-up of the work group and noted that reengaging opportunity youth in our region is critical to achieving the overall Road Map Project goal of doubling the number of youth who are on-track for a college/career credential by 2020.

*Group Charge: The work group will help develop a strategic action plan to help 16-24 opportunity youth in the Road Map region connect to pathways that lead to postsecondary or career credentials. This involves **identifying priority strategies** our region should pursue in order to achieve significant improvements.*

Road Map Project Context

Mary Jean Ryan shared key aspects of the Road Map Project theory of change: alignment, community engagement, power of data, and system-building. She emphasized the system-building component because there really is no system when it comes to reengaging opportunity youth – either those who drop out of high school or those who finish high school but remain disconnected from postsecondary or career pathways. To address the significant scale of the problem – perhaps up to 20,000 youth – a systemic approach is critical.

Youth Panel

Roslyn Kagy from SOAR facilitated a panel discussion among our three youth members. Themes:

Biggest determinants of your success:

- Supportive adults who care
- Information and access (peers and word of mouth are key to finding out about available options)
- High expectations and programs/adults who recognize youth potential
- Support combined with autonomy

Work history/experience

- Undocumented youth face systemic barriers
- Employment programs are key; if you don't have a degree or experience it's hard to start
- Hard to find anything other than very part-time jobs and internships – not sustainable

Key messages to adults:

- Remember every single young adult wants to be successful and has potential
- Many youth are unaware of the resources and opportunities out there
- Understand who you are trying to help and look at root causes, not just the problem

Review of Local Data

See page 10-15 of [this handout](#) to review data shared at the Dec. 18th meeting. The presentation started with graduation rates and percentages of youth hitting early warning indicators during 9th grade, then estimated the number of 16-24 year-olds currently disconnected based on a snapshot from 2012-13 data. The data show that certain groups of young people are much more likely than others to be off-track and disconnected (youth of color, ELL, homeless, low-income).

Small Group Discussion Highlights

- Group one discussed data on opportunity youth *without a HS diploma*, and identified areas it would be useful to better understand as we develop an action plan:
 - Surprised to see youth with many credits dropping out. Would like to better understand that group since being close vs. far from graduation should inform strategy/
 - For ELL students how much of the challenge is related to English language proficiency vs. other needs/issues that immigrant/refugee families may be dealing with
 - Need a better understanding of breakdown by age, particularly 16-21 vs. 22-24 year olds
 - Geographic picture of where dropouts are concentrated vs. available programs
- Group 2 discussed data on opportunity youth *with a high school diploma*, and identified areas it would be useful to better understand as we develop an action plan:
 - Would be useful to unpack demographic patterns related to this older group (e.g., age, gender, race, origin, disabilities)
 - In addition to population we need program analysis. Programs to scale up? And cost analysis – what does it really cost to move students through?
 - Keep a focus on sustainability throughout plan
- Group 3 discussed system-involved youth and identified several areas it would be useful to better understand as we develop an action plan:
 - JRA data
 - Mobility data
 - Gaps between supply and demand
 - Understanding system overlap
 - Understanding what services may be underutilized
 - Lack of culturally relevant services
 - Are we increasing need through some interventions?
- Group 4 discussed ideas for increasing youth engagement and building public will:
 - Reengagement needs to be connected to schools, schools need to be more connected to students. Schools should engage all youth more in decisions (e.g., via surveys).
 - Demographic shifts needs to be reflected in of diversity of staff, leadership, teachers, advocates.
 - Need to identify goals for building public will: How do we make messages relatable? Cross-sector? Multiple communication methods.
 - Need for alternative settings with high standards, supportive adults. Education system and alternative programs need to value the whole person. Everyone learns differently.