

## **SECTION 5: YOUTH STRATEGIES**

The Governor of California believes our state must have a well-educated and highly-skilled workforce in order to remain prosperous and competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. To this end, the state's guiding youth goal is to increase the number of high school students, including those from underrepresented demographic groups, who graduate prepared for postsecondary education and/or a career.

The following narrative describes the LA County Workforce Investment Board vision for increasing the educational attainment of youth, consistent with the following State priorities to:

1. Increase the number of high school students who complete a challenging education, including math gateway coursework and industry-themed pathways that prepare them for college, "Earn and Learn" training through apprenticeships, OJT, etc., and other postsecondary training; and
2. Increase opportunities for high school students and disconnected youth to transition into postsecondary education and careers.

### **The L.A. County Youth WIA System Re-imagined**

To better address the distinct needs of the high number of disconnected, out-of-school youth in L.A. County, the local Board and its youth council took a bold move to overhaul the local WIA youth system by re-designing its service delivery model to target in-school and out-of school youth separately, with services tailored to the unique needs of each respective population. This youth system re-design is guided by **14 new policy recommendations** (Attachment #\_\_) adopted by the local Board to achieve four key local area goals of *re-engaging disconnected youth, reducing the high school dropout rate through K-12 school-based collaborations, increasing attainment of post-secondary degrees and credentials, and increasing exposure to career pathways in high demand sectors*. Both the re-design and its strategic goals reinforce the State Strategic Workforce Development Plan's goal to *increase the number of high school students, including those from underrepresented demographic groups, who graduate prepared for post-secondary education or a career.*

An estimated 200,000 youth in L.A. County are "disconnected" youth who are in foster care, homeless, in the justice system, underrepresented racial minorities, disabled or who have dropped out of high school and are not working. Or, they are older youth who may have a high school degree but who have not been in the workforce, or have been looking for work, for a long time.

These youth live in highest need areas in the County, below the poverty level, in multiple households, attend the lowest performing schools, and have few role models of college graduates or working adults. Several of the 14 new youth system re-design policy recommendations adopted by the local Board ensure a framework for meeting the needs of this key demographic, beginning with a policy to **prioritize of services to older and out-of-school youth, specifically disconnected youth** (Recommendation # 2.) To ensure the realization of this policy, and in recognition that the expenditure of WIA funds should be consistent with this newly determined priority, the Board adopted the additional policy to **establish a minimum threshold of 70% of funds to be spent on out-of-school youth and older youth** (Recommendation #3.)

To this end, the Board has initiated a system to utilize a majority of these funds to procure, through a competitive bid process, ten (10) service providers with a proven track record in developing and delivering a comprehensive set of services designed to re-engage young people, ages 17-21, who have dropped out of school or are at-risk in education and employment. This includes developing a single system of services including: outreach; intake; orientation; skills-level, aptitude, ability and supportive service needs assessments; job search and placement assistance; career counseling; education on Accurate Labor Market Information (ALMI) and statistics; and a minimum of Ten (10) Core Elements of Service including tutoring and study skills, training, alternative secondary school offerings, summer employment opportunities, paid and unpaid work experiences, occupational skills training, leadership, supportive services (transportation, child care, dependent care), adult mentoring, 12 months of follow-up services, and comprehensive guidance and counseling.

An additional policy was adopted to **re-engage disconnected youth through strategic partnerships with secondary and post-secondary education** (Recommendation #5.) This policy builds upon established initiatives to coordinate with local districts and other relevant stakeholders to fund the re-engagement of out-of-school, disconnected youth into education and employment programs.

Several of the Board's disconnected youth re-engagement initiatives represent the Board's strategy to promote collaboration between the workforce investment system, education, human services, juvenile justice, and other systems to improve success in connecting youth with the most significant barriers to success with education and training opportunities leading to successful employment. One such initiative--the System-Involved Youth Initiative-- is a product the *LA County Youth Self Sufficiency Task Force*, an interdepartmental collaborative on which the local Board

plays a leadership role working with Probation, Children & Family Services (DCFS), and Public Social Services to combine and leverage funding from each department to improve system supports and self-efficacy outcomes for system-involved youth. In this initiative, renewed for the 2013/14FY, the local Board works with county agencies to develop shared protocol to establish cross-departmental communication and information sharing to ensure that youth re-entering from the Probation system, in the child welfare system, or who are recipients of CalWorks are connected with WIA youth service supports in their community and placed in educational settings that match their needs. Key to this initiative is the braiding of County department funds with Chaffe private funding to augment education and pre-employment supports with paid work experience and on-the-job training.

Several other re-engagement initiatives are products of the *L.A. County Education Coordinating Council (ECC)*, a broad-based collaborative that includes, in addition to the local Board, DCFS, Office of Education (LACOE), Probation, County Counsel, Public Defender's office, District Attorney, and community-based advocates. The collaborative has been a leader in several ground-breaking initiatives that have established policy and enacted systems change that has set the foundation for improved education outcomes for system-involved, disconnected youth throughout the county. Some of these efforts include:

- Spearheading countywide advocacy for the recently passed *Uninterrupted Scholars Act* that permits school districts to share foster youth education records with social workers without first seeking parental consent or a court order, thus removing one of the biggest barriers to improving school success for students under the aegis of DCFS. The Board will continue to work with the ECC to assist school districts in acting on this legislation's directive to increase communication between child welfare social workers and school districts to ensure foster youth get into supportive educational settings, recover units, access basic skills deficiency supports, and secure a high school diploma.
- Supporting the efforts of Judge Michael Nash, the nationally-recognized presiding judge over L.A.'s Juvenile Dependency Court, to enact California state legislation, to accompany the Federal *Uninterrupted Scholars Act*, that will allow the free exchange of information between schools and *all* county departments serving disconnected youth, particularly the Probation Department.
- Developing and implementing an *Electronic Education Information-Sharing System Demonstration Project* that pilots a Student Information Tracking System that carries real-

time information on all 11,879 DCFS children who attend local district schools, and makes this information accessible to social workers through a web-based application. The local Board will continue to work with the ECC in its expansion of this pilot to school districts in LA County WIB service regions beginning with: Pomona, Alta-Dena, the Antelope Valley, and Montebello.

- Through the ECC's *School Attendance Task Force*: changing the LA City ordinance on daytime loitering so that students are no longer ticketed for truancy; and collaborating with the local juvenile court system to redirect ticketed students into diversion programs to keep them out of the juvenile justice system and in mainstream school settings.
- Through the ECC's *Exclusionary Discipline Work Group*, working with school districts throughout LA County to identify and implement strategies for reducing exclusionary discipline and referrals to juvenile court.
- Advocating passage of AB 951 (Medina) that mandates school districts to increase their support of homeless students.

Additional youth re-engagement initiatives with which the Board is involved are products of the *LA County Juvenile Justice Council*--a multi-sector collaborative that was established based on key recommendations from the *Los Angeles Youth & Young Re-entry Blueprint* that the Board and its youth council published in 2010. Under the leadership of nationally-recognized LA County Juvenile Delinquency Court Judge Donna Groman, the local Board works, through this Council, with county departments, local school districts, and community based leaders to ensure students transitioning out of county probation camps and halls are effectively and efficiently placed in appropriate educational settings that meet their learning needs. The Board also partners with the LA County CEO *LA County Gang Violence Reduction Initiative* (GVRI) to connect WIA youth service providers with gang-impacted probation youth to re-engage them in high school degree, GED, and occupational training programs in four targeted high need regions of the County: Huntington Park, East San Fernando Valley, Florence Firestone, and the Harbor Gateway.

Finally, the local Board will continue to provide intensive technical assistance to contracted youth service providers to help facilitate their collaboration with local school districts' to identify suspended and expelled students and ensure their connection to local area youth workforce supportive services, degree completion programs, work experience, adult mentorship, community leadership opportunities, and mentoring. An example of such an effort is a planned partnership

with Monrovia Unified School District's *Quest Academy Community Day School* to provide appropriate alternative educational supports for probation referred and expelled students who are prohibited from attending regular schools in the district. This partnership provides substantial individual assistance to these youth through collaboration with district counselors, psychologists, the County office of education, law enforcement, County Probation, and human services agency staff.

To build upon existing partnerships with adult education and community colleges to transition youth into adult programs and services, local Board enacted a policy recommendation **requiring that 25% of older youth are co-enrolled with WIA Adult Programs** (*Recommendation #4.*) With enactment of this policy, youth ages 18-21 will be co-enrolled in both the youth and adult programs allowing for a seamless access to the continuum of services and supports that older, out-of-school youth require to navigate the labor market. This recommendation will also help facilitate the Board's additional recommendation to **co-locate youth centers with adult WorkSource Centers to strategically align and target Adult and Youth services to populations of highest need** (*Recommendation #13.*) Co-location of adult and youth services will achieve greater programmatic, operational, and economic efficiencies, effectiveness and accountability. To be implemented through a phased-in approach over the next three years, this strategy will reduce the local system's footprint and infrastructure costs so that it can commit a higher percentage of resources to direct services and partnerships with education and business.

In addition to policy recommendations to improve outcomes for disconnected, out-of-school youth, the local Board likewise adopted a number of recommendations aimed to improve outcomes for in-school youth. First, the Board has determined to **partner with K-12 and other stakeholders on strategies to reduce drop-out rates for In-School youth** (*Recommendation #1.*) The local Board, through its new procurement process, has required its youth contractors to work with schools identified as having the highest drop out rates to create close connections between WIA enrolled youth and school-based drop-out reduction. Such supports include increased face-time with school counselors, engagement in school-based leadership opportunities, participation in after-school programs, effective tutoring, parent engagement, mental health counseling, substance abuse interventions, and participation in community-based service learning and after school programs.

In the northeast region of the County, for instance, the local Board has developed an effective model to recruit and target youth at risk of dropping out by partnering with the Azusa and Covina Unified School Districts. A key element of this model is local WIA participation as a member of the

Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) that comprises representatives from the County Department of Public Social Services, Probation, Mental Health, the District Attorney's Office and medical professionals. WIA service providers assist the SARB in developing and implementing good attendance, truancy prevention, and drop-out reduction strategies.

For the next planning period, the Board will actively partner with regional leaders implementing nationally-recognized, evidence-based Full Service Community School Partnerships. These partnerships engage a wide array of public, private and community-based partners in highly coordinated supports that surround the traditional high school curriculum to transform a school campus culture for maximum student engagement and post-secondary matriculation, prioritizing students at highest risk of dropping out. To this end, the Board will partner closely with Los Angeles Education Partnership's (LAEP) full service community partnerships in three of the County's highest unemployment areas to increase WIA youth program enrollments, services, employment placements and secondary school enrollments in the following target neighborhoods: Florence Firestone (Fremont High School), West Athens (Washington Preparatory High School), and Northeast San Fernando Valley (San Fernando, Arleta and Sylmar High Schools.)

Another key policy recommendation adopted by the local Board is to ***increase the number of youth that attain post-secondary degrees and other credentials with a priority on high growth industry sectors*** (Recommendation #6.) In a proactive move to address the needs of employers by focusing intensively on the workforce requirements of specific industry sectors, the local Board has developed key industry sector strategies to engage youth participants in sector-related credential and certificate programs that require less time than a 2 or 4 year degree.

The first of these strategies was ***to mandate that twenty-five percent (25%) of the overall In-School youth served be required to complete a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) curriculum to qualify for exit of the local youth WIA program.*** To help effect this, the local Board, having identified health care as a top growing industry sector in LA County, partnered, with Loma Linda University and its hospital to develop coursework in the STEM subjects for high school students interested in a career in biotech, health sciences, engineering. Upon completion of the STEM coursework, participating students were given college credit recognized by Loma Linda University and other math and science-focused universities. The development of the curriculum included the critical involvement of economic development experts in workforce issues specific to the healthcare industries.

The local Board also established a STEM Partnership with the Aerospace Corporation of America

(ACA, named by Winds of Change Magazine's one of the top 50 best STEM Workplaces) and LA Clean Tech Incubator (LACI) to form training pipelines utilizing local public educational systems and the expertise of participating businesses to offer building blocks of education in green science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This education and workforce partnership will implement STEM curricula and hands-on training developed jointly by the Aerospace Institute, LACI, select WIB WorkSource Centers, community colleges, and school districts in South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, and the San Gabriel Valley. The partnership avails to participating youth ACA's expertise in research, architecture, engineering, design, development, acquisitions, operations, and program management, as well as LACI's experience in identifying, developing, and bringing to market local green-jobs talent to the LA region. Through this partnership, the local Board is: actively mapping career pathways within local demand industry sectors, including green utilities, manufacturing, and healthcare/biomed; increasing youth attainment of industry-recognized certificates; and establishing training pipelines among the K-12 schools, continuing education programs, and community colleges in WIB-served regions.

Another sector-related strategy the Board has implemented is to establish closer links with community colleges, universities, and vocational education schools to increase post-secondary degree and industry sector-related credential attainment. To this end, the Board has identified, established relationships with, and developed a two-year schedule to convene educational institutions and establish regional collaborations in four key unemployment-impacted regions of the County. These efforts involve local school districts, community colleges, workforce training organizations, and employers in high growth industry sectors to implement region-specific strategies to engage WIA-enrolled youth in post-secondary education and occupational credential programs, and to implement concurrent enrollment practices and early registrations among school districts and the colleges.

In one such effort, the local Board facilitated a partnership between its contracted provider in West San Gabriel Valley and Pasadena City College to provide opportunities for enrolled youth in the region to gain industry-recognized workplace readiness certificates and college credits for internships. This credit and certificate achievement effort proved effective in helping participating youth become more marketable to an employer, while at the same time providing youth the foundation and necessary skill sets to achieve success in growing industries.

(Add future partnership with SMC's recycling training program)

Finally, the Board has developed contractual requirements and developed technical assistance trainings to ensure that workforce system youth service providers establish and maintain One Stop service centers that are youth-friendly, providing culturally-relevant and age appropriate services, in order to ensure maximum accessibility to: information on jobs in priority industry sectors with career pathways leading to economic security; access to post-secondary education that provides credentials, certificates and degrees in priority sectors; and published information and resources that show the connection between postsecondary credentials, certificate or degree attainment and complement rates and wages.

To further ensure WIA youth connection to career pathways, the local Board adopted a recommendation to ***partner with employers, education and other stakeholders to connect youth to career pathway options*** (Recommendation # 7.) To manifest this policy recommendation, the Board will continue to work with employers, education institutions, and industry associations in the LA County high growth sectors of healthcare, construction, hospitality and tourism to introduce youth to career pathways and increase opportunities for paid internships, on-the-job training, and pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeships training programs in these three high growth industries.

In addition, the local Board has partnered with LA County Office of Education's (LACOE) Perkins Program to implement Career Technical Education (CTE) within LACOE schools. Currently, courses for the following Career Pathways are made available to LACOE students: Agriculture and Natural Resources; Landscaping Arts; Media and Entertainment; Stage, Media and Filmmaking Building Trades & Construction; Residential and Commercial Construction Hospitality; Tourism and Recreation; and Food Service and Hospitality. LA County WIA staff sit on the CTE Advisory Board that promotes and develops partnerships with local businesses for employment opportunities, as well as with community colleges to ensure a smooth transition and continuance in the career pathway.

To Increase the number of high school students informed about the market value of "Earn and Learn" training, and participating in such "Earn & Learn" opportunities as apprenticeships and on-the-job training, the local Board adopted a policy recommendation to **increase access to "Earn and Learn" opportunities by earmarking a minimum of 40% of youth formula funds for these direct services** (Recommendation # 8.) To develop these opportunities, the LA County WIB Youth Council has developed a linkage between WIB adult program initiatives and career pathways for youth system enrollees in demand industries. For instance, youth program providers

are coached to prepare youth participants for placement in the Retrofit America™ Training Program designed to develop skilled labor in the field of electrical creation and management to deploy a smart-labor workforce for the Smart Plug/Switch industry. Likewise, they are encouraged to prepare enrollees for participation in the Green Building and Retrofit Partnership with LA Mission College and the Laborers Training School & Apprenticeship Program offering a career pathways “boot camp” training in building and retrofitting that is coordinated with DIR/DAS approved pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship programs.

Additional apprenticeship opportunities have been developed with the Abram Friedman Occupational Center, the East Los Angeles Skills Center, Los Angeles Trade Technical College, and the Compton Unified School District Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Career Technical Education (CTE) to supply students ages 18 and over with combined hands-on and classroom wage-earning experiences. These opportunities include a 16 week pre-apprenticeship plumbing class followed by the opportunity to enroll in the related local union apprenticeship program, as well as apprenticeships within several different trades unions, including Local IBEW 11 Electrical Training Institute, the local UAW-LETC, Southern California Heat & Frost Insulators, Asbestos Workers & Laborers, and the Cement Masons.

Recognizing the un-tapped potential to expand paid work experience as a critical youth workforce development program component, the local Board adopted a strategic policy recommendation to ***build partnerships with the private sector, chambers of commerce, labor unions, community based organizations, and economic development corporations to maximize the competitive opportunities for youth*** (Recommendation 9.) In addition to the partnerships developed with local unions to establish youth pathways to their apprenticeship programs, the Board has also engaged in a campaign to forge partnerships with major corporate employers in the region to expand youth career pathways, including summer youth employment. The County’s Summer Youth Employment Program is a foundational element of its youth system that provides short-term, subsidized employment opportunities as a gateway into its year-round programs that provide more comprehensive workforce readiness preparation for career pathways.

The local County Board plays a leadership role in coordinating a Los Angeles County-wide Summer Youth Employment Program providing funding, through the CLEO, to all seven WIB’s within the County. To assist this multi-WIB collaborative effort, the Board directed the development of a single reporting database used by all partners to track individual and collective performance.

One of the corporate partnerships developed by the Board to enhance the Summer Youth Employment program is with Wells Fargo Bank who committed to providing their financial education curriculum to summer youth participants, and to including County WIA program youth in their privately funded summer youth corporate placements already availed to City WIA youth participants. Wells Fargo summer youth placements have resulted in several permanent employment placements for youth participants. The Board has targeted two additional major corporate employers for similar partnerships to expand paid youth placements in corporate settings over the next programmatic year.

The Board has also recently joined the LA City WIB and its youth council in partnering with the LA Chamber of Commerce's *L.A. Youth at Work* program that prepares youth for entry level employment through a three step process of skills training, mock application process with certification to industry defined standards, and hiring events where local employers meet pre-screened applicants. This partnership allows the County WIB to leverage its youth program WIA funding with the resources of the LA City WIA, the LA Chamber, and local businesses for sustained employer partnerships resulting in expanded employment opportunities for youth.

To further ensure the leveraging of WIA funding in response to the decrease of federal funding for youth WIA programs in the past few years, the Board developed a policy recommendation to ***establish a minimum of 30% leverage for agencies that receive WIA youth funds to ensure additional resources are available to increase the number of youth in the County (Recommendation #10.)*** To actualize this policy, the Board has contractually required its youth program service providers to demonstrate an ability to augment WIA funding with other state and federal workforce grants, private funding, and other resources to ensure a comprehensive array of workforce readiness supportive services to ensure higher high school and college degree attainment and workforce placements for more youth in LA County's system.

In response to increased legislative and public scrutiny demands for greater WIA system accountability, the Board adopted a policy recommendation to ***adopt a performance-driven youth system (Recommendation #11.)*** To realize this policy, the Board implemented additional policies that establish performance evaluation and program costs as two guiding factors defining the re-designed youth program. Performance targets will measure employment placements and post-secondary degree and certificate attainment. Youth system provider agencies are contracted based on their demonstrated ability to achieve these goals.

The Board and youth council will further effect a more performance-driven system through it's establishment of metrics to track increases in high school degree and industry-related certificate attainment, on-the-job training placements, occupational training, numeracy and literacy gains, post secondary degree attainment, and employment placements. To this end, the Board has implemented a WIA research & statistics protocol wherein performance outcomes are consistently tracked through bi-monthly meetings with contracted youth program providers where monthly outcome numbers, performance obstacles and data-driven best practices are reviewed. In addition, youth providers are weekly furnished with online and real time performance reports as a tool to manage their programs and stay on target with their goals. These reports are shared with the local youth council on a quarterly basis.

Finally, performance will be improved with the implementation of the California Awards for Performance Excellence (CAPE) Certification process. The Board is requiring that all its providers achieve, at a minimum, the Prospector Award: the second level of the CAPE certification process that utilizes the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program Standards. The CAPE process evaluates standards related to an organization's: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Customer and Market Focus, Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management, Workforce Focus, Process Management and Business Results. Certification of youth providers in this way is the Board's strategy to ensure services are comprehensive, high quality, and equally accessible by jobseekers and employers. This policy will be applicable to all youth providers secured beginning July 1, 2013.

In order to assure the greatest possible youth access to services, the Board adopted a final policy recommendation to guide its youth system re-design: ***utilize technologies to increase access and services***. Youth and young adults increasingly use mobile devices, social media and online resources to access information and communications of all kinds. Technology offers tremendous opportunities to increase access to and utilization of services while minimizing costs. Youth WIA programs around the country have implemented and experienced great success with models that utilize social media and other online platforms to not only increase access to services, but also to enhance access to certificated and non-certificated courses and trainings.

To further enhance youth outcomes, the local board is committed to providing contracted service providers with information on myriad youth activities available to participants that will support their success in the WIA youth program. To this end, acting on a key recommendation published in it's 2010 Los Angeles County Youth & Young Adult Re-entry Blueprint, the local Board partnered with the County Human Relations Commission to secure Department of Mental Health Prevention &

Early Intervention funding to regionally map youth activities and resources pertinent to the highest risk, system-involved and disconnected youth in LA County and publish them in a *Los Angeles County Youth & Young Adult Regional Resource Guide* that will help youth providers and youth themselves identify and engage in activities and supports that will improve their self-efficacy, community-engagement and workforce readiness.

In the end, the Los Angeles County WIA Youth System Re-Design involved a year-long process that began in January of 2012 and entailed a number of labor-intensive strategies to gain contribution, feedback, recommendations, and support from a diverse array of relevant public and private stakeholders; however, this investment in creating a policy framework to raise the bar for youth services and outcomes within our system will greatly strengthen Los Angeles region's ability to compete in a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce by better developing the grossly un-tapped resource that lies in the vast talent of Los Angeles County youth. The County's Youth System Re-Design is on track to begin implementation in July 2013.

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