

# YOUTH POLICY

## How Can We Smooth the Rocky Pathway to Adulthood?



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Center on Education and the Workforce

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# Introduction

Today's youth increasingly find themselves stumbling along the tightrope to adulthood without a strong safety net. Ideally, societal institutions and public policies would evolve alongside the contemporary needs of young people. But in reality, youth policy has failed to keep up with a changing society and economy. As a result, young people's journeys from school to work are growing progressively more precarious.

The gaps in youth policy are evident all along the pipeline from youth to adulthood, beginning long before college and even before children enter kindergarten. To bridge these gaps, a comprehensive approach to youth policy must include the entire continuum of services, programs, and wraparound supports that help youth (ages 16 to 21) and young adults (ages 22 to 27) transition from youth dependency to adult independence, both economically and socially. Such a comprehensive approach to youth policy should incorporate universal access to early childhood education along with attention to children's nutrition and housing stability, including through efforts to ensure that their parents have access to jobs with family-sustaining earnings. It should set young people up for success throughout elementary, middle, and high school and into the postsecondary arena, supporting them until they have latched onto good jobs.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, our country's current approach to youth policy bears little resemblance to this comprehensive model. There are signs that this could change: the Build Back Better Act currently under consideration in Congress—which includes proposed funding for universal preschool, teacher training and diversification, and work-based learning—would be a strong first step toward comprehensive reform.<sup>2</sup> At present, however, our failure to ensure that all youth are able to successfully make the long journey from early childhood to adult economic independence remains apparent in the educational and economic outcomes of the least advantaged young people in our society. In the race from kindergarten to a good job, the most talented disadvantaged youth do not do nearly as well as the least talented advantaged youth.

The evidence of our failure to support young people in their journeys to adulthood is clear—even after decades of proposed and attempted reforms, in America it's still far better to be born rich and White than to be born smart and poor. High achievement in elementary school is no guarantee of having a college degree and a good job as a young adult. A child from a family in the top quartile of family socioeconomic status (SES) who has low test scores in kindergarten has a 71 percent chance of being in the top half of SES as a young

<sup>1</sup> We define a good job as one that pays family-sustaining earnings. Good jobs pay a minimum of \$35,000 (\$17 per hour for full-time jobs) for workers between the ages of 25 and 44 and at least \$45,000 (\$22 per hour) for workers between the ages of 45 and 64. In 2016, these good jobs paid median earnings of \$56,000 for workers without a bachelor's degree and \$75,000 for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher. Overall median earnings for all good jobs were \$65,000. See Carnevale et al., *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs*, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Build Back Better Act, H.R. 5376, 2021.

adult. In contrast, a child from a family in the bottom SES quartile who has top test scores in kindergarten has only a 31 percent chance of being in the top half of SES as a young adult. The odds are even worse for talented low-income Black and Latino youth.<sup>3</sup> Many youth who demonstrate high achievement all the way through the 10th grade but who are from low-SES backgrounds still get lost on the way to a college degree and a good job. Among 10th graders who have above-median math scores but are in the lowest quartile of family SES, 47 percent are in the top half of SES 10

*Young people have encountered one of the most challenging economic stretches on record for workers trying to launch their careers.*

years later, compared to 56 percent of 10th graders from the top quartile of family SES with below-median math scores.<sup>4</sup> The pressures on youth that have been building since at least the late 1970s<sup>5</sup> have intensified dramatically since 2000.<sup>6</sup> The main driver of these pressures for recent generations has been structural change that increased the demand for higher-level cognitive skills in the economy, and thereby the need for postsecondary education and training. Today's economy is more stratified than the economy of the past, and it favors older workers with more education and experience while limiting the opportunities

available to young workers. In the 21st century, most young workers need a postsecondary credential to have access to a good job—and among the 20 percent of recent high school graduates who end up in good jobs, most (77 percent) are men.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the vast majority of young people and especially of young women need at least some postsecondary education to have a chance at a good job.

On the whole, young people have adjusted to the changing economy by seeking out higher levels of education and training. But rising postsecondary costs have collided with major economic crises to thwart their efforts. Most recently, the COVID-19 recession and school closings restricted access to both good jobs and the postsecondary education and training required to qualify for them. For many young people, the pandemic disrupted an important stage in their personal and professional development.

Thus, after starting the millennium with ample reason for optimism, young people have encountered one of the most challenging economic stretches on record for workers trying to launch their careers. Their trials began with the recession following the burst of the dot-com bubble (2001–02), which marked the beginning of steep collapse for a youth labor market that had been slowly declining since the 1980s. That setback was

followed by the Great Recession (2007–09), the worst economic downturn in 70 years, which substantially affected economic outcomes among young people who entered the workforce between 2007 and 2012. Then, in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent economic freeze presented another challenge to young workers. While young people's employment is on course toward fully bouncing back from this latest setback, even a full recovery would still leave young people employed at lower rates than before the Great Recession.

One after another, these economy-wide events have magnified the detrimental effects of the collapsed youth labor market, threatening to create additional distress for young adults who have just started to get back on their feet—particularly disadvantaged youth. This distress may have long-term consequences for young adults just entering the labor market, including economic scarring that could follow them throughout their careers.<sup>8</sup>

In an ideal world, a comprehensive approach to youth policy would provide the support young people need to overcome these challenges. But different areas of youth policy currently exist within different institutional silos, including the elementary and secondary

school system (pre-K–12), the postsecondary education system, and the labor market. Each of these silos is insufficient on its own to fully address the needs of young people who are trying to transition to independent adulthood. These silos conduct their work largely in isolation, with separate governance structures, constituencies, and funding streams.<sup>9</sup> A 2016 review of research and program evaluations found that strong connections among education, training, and the job market are a hallmark of successful programs for disconnected youth.<sup>10</sup> But while many

*The current approach to the challenges facing youth is a patchwork quilt that allows too many young people to slip through the seams.*

promising programs and approaches have demonstrated success in helping young people transition from education to the workforce—for example, career academies, Linked Learning, guided pathways, and apprenticeships<sup>11</sup>—the reach of these programs is too limited. As a result, the current youth policy landscape has been woefully inadequate in providing the support that young people need to transition successfully to the labor market. An example of such support is frequent contact with a data-driven counseling system in which professionally trained career counselors provide personalized advice to help young people bridge the various transition points on the journey from school to work.

<sup>3</sup> Carnevale et al., *Born to Win*, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Carnevale et al., *Born to Win*, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Freeman and Wise, *The Youth Labor Market Problem*, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> The decline in the youth and young adult labor market has been well-documented in literature. See Fernandes-Alcantara, *Youth and the Labor Force*, 2018; Sum et al., "The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults," 2014; Sum et al., "Deteriorating Labor Market Fortunes for Young Adults," 2014; Sum et al., *Out with the Young and in with the Old*, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of the data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), March Supplement, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Historically, economic downturns have caused scarring effects for young workers. For more on scarring effects, see Rothstein, "The Lost Generation?," 2021; Rinz, *Did Timing Matter?*, 2019; Kahn, "The Long-Term Labor Market Consequences of Graduating from College in a Bad Economy," 2010; Mroz and Savage, "The Long-Term Effects of Youth Unemployment," 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Schwartz and Hoffman, "Pathways to Upward Mobility," 2015; Carnevale and Smith, *Balancing Work and Learning*, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Treskon, *What Works for Disconnected Young People*, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Ross and Showalter, "Millions of Young Adults Are Out of School or Work," 2020.

In short, the current approach to the challenges facing youth is a patchwork quilt that allows too many young people to

slip through the seams—some long before they have an opportunity to enter postsecondary education. Fully addressing the problems that youth face will require systemic changes to mend the gaps between areas of

*A modernized design for youth policy would allow young adults to attain both quality postsecondary education and quality work experience to support their successful transitions into good jobs.*

policy and practice. Young people need a smooth and flexible continuum of support to ease their education and career journeys from youth dependence to economic independence. Instead of a fraying patchwork quilt, we need a seamless, modernized design for youth policy, centered around an all-one-system approach.

A modernized design for youth policy would allow young adults to attain both quality postsecondary education and quality work experience to support their successful transitions into good jobs. In an all-one-system approach, preschools, elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, four-year universities, employers, and governments would all follow an integrated playbook, helping to smooth out young peoples' progress from pre-K–12 to college and work. The foundations of this systemic approach to youth policy would include universal access to high-

quality early childhood education, adequate funding for pre-K–12 that matches the needs of students, and free college for those with financial need. Stakeholders in each part of the system would use interconnected outcome metrics to guide their efforts, empowered by comprehensive and transparent data systems. Rather than focusing on outcomes only within discrete stages of young people's journeys, these stakeholders would look to young people's long-term trajectories to evaluate success in preparing them to lead fulfilling lives. Held together by robust, evidence-based, and culturally responsive counseling and student services, a newly redesigned system would create continuity across existing silos to improve outcomes for all young people while preventing vulnerable youth from falling into the cracks between different policies and programs.

Legislation and litigation may both be needed to establish the unequivocal need for such a system and to equalize funding within it. Since *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* and *Milliken v. Bradley*,<sup>12</sup> the US Supreme Court has slammed the door on the individual right to education at the federal level. But advocates continue to argue that the US Constitution's Equal Protection Clause establishes public education as a Constitutional right.<sup>13</sup> At the state level, the door is open for litigation based on the states' commitments, often articulated in their constitutions and

statutes, to making all high school graduates college- and career-ready.<sup>14</sup>

A legal victory mandating a right to high-quality education for all Americans would set the stage for the creation of a single system to guide young people through education and work. This system would expose students to careers in middle school, connect them with internship opportunities in high school, and ensure that they gain labor-market experience in their chosen fields in college. Throughout the education system, it would provide opportunities for students to learn foundational academic skills by applying their learning to specific career contexts in the classroom or more broadly in the workplace.

This new system would require more robust and supportive tracks to the bachelor's degree, with two kinds of reforms within colleges themselves. First, as is already the case in at least 24 states,<sup>15</sup> public community colleges should be allowed to provide bachelor's degrees in fields relevant to local and regional labor markets.<sup>16</sup> Second, to facilitate transfer from two-year to four-year schools, four-year public colleges should be required to reserve at

least 20 percent of their junior-cohort seats for transfer students from community colleges.<sup>17</sup> While public colleges are the most obvious venues for expanding access because state higher education systems are fertile ground for federal/state partnerships, federal legislation also needs to encourage private colleges, including selective private colleges, to increase enrollments of Pell-eligible students and transfer students.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, the gulf between the ideal system and the disjointed, ineffectual system we have is enormous at a time when the pressures on young people are at a historic high. In Part 1 of this report, we lay out the economic challenges facing today's youth, including those who are most vulnerable. In Part 2, we describe the current youth policy system, a patchwork quilt of governance and funding typically targeted toward specific populations that fails to adequately cover the needs of all young people. Finally, in Part 3, we propose an all-one-system approach that would modernize support for youth and young adults. We envision the kind of systemic change that would be needed to unify different elements of the system and ensure seamless transitions from youth to adulthood.

<sup>14</sup> Carnevale et al., *The Merit Myth*, 2020. Education advocates have filed cases related to adequate education funding in several states, including New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Illinois, and New Mexico, with some success. For example, rulings in *Abbott v. Burke* in New Jersey led to some comprehensive reforms, including adequate foundational funding for K–12 education. A recent settlement of a case filed by Delawareans for Educational Opportunity and the NAACP Delaware State Conference against the state of Delaware includes additional funding for low-income students, special education, preschool programs, teacher recruitment and retention, and comprehensive independent study of the school funding system in Delaware. Lecker, "Settlement in Delaware School Funding Litigation Yields Major Reforms for Vulnerable Students," 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Meza, "Overcoming the 'Opportunity Mirage' with Community College Baccalaureate Degrees," 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Soler, "Updating the National Landscape," 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Across public four-year colleges, transfer students from two-year colleges currently represent about 10 percent of the junior class cohort. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS): 2012/2017 data, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> For more on policy approaches that could encourage selective institutions to accept more Pell Grant recipients within the context of broader public subsidies, see Hill and Kurzweil, "Supporting Broad-Access Colleges and Increasing Opportunity at Selective Colleges Are Not Mutually Exclusive," 2020.

<sup>12</sup> *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973); *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

<sup>13</sup> For example, *Cook v. Raimondo*, filed on behalf of students in Rhode Island, is one recent attempt to make the case for a national right to an adequate education; see Wong, "The Students Suing for a Constitutional Right to Education," 2018.

# Part 1. The Collapse of the Youth Labor Market and the Perils of Coming of Age at the Dawn of the Millennium

At the end of World War II, the United States was in an enviable economic position. The postwar expansion produced remarkable opportunities for young workers—although those opportunities largely excluded women and members of racial minority groups, especially Black Americans. Then, beginning in the 1980s, the country experienced profound structural economic changes tied to technology and globalization. These changes raised the education level necessary to latch on to a good job by increasing the combined value

*As the value of credentials increased, many talented young people without a credential found it difficult to latch on to a pathway to a good job.*

of both general and specific skills at the postsecondary level.<sup>19</sup> They transformed the American workplace, and with it, the opportunities available to young workers.

In today's economy, postsecondary credentials like certificates, industry-based certifications, and college degrees have become the ticket to an ever-increasing share of well-paying jobs,<sup>20</sup> as well as entry-level jobs for young

people. Technological change has allowed increasing automation of repetitive job tasks, leaving workers to perform activities that are less repetitive and require higher levels of human interaction. Employers have relied on postsecondary educational attainment as a signal that young people have the general and specific competencies they need to succeed in these jobs.<sup>21</sup>

As degrees became more important, so did the relative value of specific in-demand skills. Some people with certificates in specific high-paying fields of study are now able to earn more than others with higher-level degrees in lower-paying fields.<sup>22</sup> On the whole, 36 percent of workers with bachelor's degrees earn more than the median for workers with graduate degrees. Similarly, 28 percent of workers with associate's degrees earn more than the median for workers with bachelor's degrees.<sup>23</sup> At the same time that some specific competencies have gained value, the importance of general competencies, such as problem-solving and complex thinking, also has been rising.<sup>24</sup> The richest combination of specific and general

education—a combination typically associated with the American bachelor's degree—now yields the highest economic returns.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the bachelor's degree has become an increasingly important launching point into young adulthood.

By the end of the 20th century, the relationship between education and work had been transformed in ways good and bad. The good news was that modern capitalist economies affirmed the economic value of education and training. The bad news was that the gateway to the middle class was increasingly closed to those without educational credentials beyond high school.

Inevitably, credentialing came with a degree of credentialism—the interpretation of education as social capital, a practice that reinforces the intergenerational reproduction of race and class privilege.<sup>26</sup> This meant that as the value of credentials increased, many talented young people without a credential found it difficult to latch on to a pathway to a good job. Research by Byron Auguste and Opportunity@Work finds that there are more than 70 million workers with at least a high school diploma but no bachelor's degree. Many of these workers have developed the skills to perform higher-wage jobs through alternative routes, such as on-the-job training, community college, apprenticeships, or bootcamps. Yet they often have limited access

to higher-wage work and few opportunities for upward mobility. They tend to start at lower wages than workers with bachelor's degrees, and only 39 percent of their job transitions yield wage increases of at least 10 percent, while 37 percent result in lower wages.<sup>27</sup>

While educational credentials have become the keys to the middle-class kingdom, credentials alone are not enough to ensure young people's success in the modern labor market. The value of high-quality work-based learning makes the transition from school to work and from youth to adulthood even more daunting for those who don't have it.<sup>28</sup> The failures of the youth labor market have denied young people access to quality work experience, thereby widening the gap between the kinds of jobs available to them and the work experience they need to succeed in entry-level career-track jobs later on. As a result, young people who face a deficit in education often also lack the work-based learning necessary to advance their careers.

Despite these obstacles, the dawn of the millennium was a moment of hope and optimism for many young Americans. Their generation was the first one in decades that could look forward to growing up and transitioning to adulthood during what many assumed would be a time of relative peace and prosperity. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had been over for

<sup>19</sup> Carnevale and Rose, *The Economy Goes to College*, 2015; Carnevale and Rose, *The Undereducated American*, 2011; Carnevale and Cheah, *Five Rules of the College and Career Game*, 2018; Carnevale et al., *Workplace Basics*, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Carnevale et al., *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs*, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Carnevale and Rose, *The Economy Goes to College*, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> For example, median annual earnings for workers with certificates in engineering technologies are higher than median annual earnings for workers with bachelor's degrees in education. Carnevale et al., *The Overlooked Value of Certificates and Associate's Degrees*, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> These comparisons are for full-time, full-year workers. Carnevale et al., *The College Payoff*, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Carnevale et al., *Workplace Basics*, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the benefits of a combination of general and specific education, see Hanushek et al., "General Education, Vocational Education, and Labor-Market Outcomes over the Lifecycle," 2017; Gould, "Rising Wage Inequality, Comparative Advantage, and the Growing Importance of General Skills in the United States," 2002; Krueger and Kumar, "Skill-Specific Rather than General Education," 2004. For more on the economic returns to bachelor's degrees, see Carnevale et al., *The College Payoff*, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> See Carnevale et al., *The Merit Myth*, 2020; Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit*, 2020; and Collins, *The Credential Society*, 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Opportunity@Work, *Navigating with the STARs*, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the importance of high-quality work-based learning in bridging school and work, see Ross and Showalter, "Millions of Young Adults Are Out of School or Work," 2020; Ross et al., *Pathways to High Quality Jobs for Young Adults*, 2018; Kautz et al., "Fostering and Measuring Skills," 2014.

nearly a decade. The rise of personal computers and the internet promised newly widespread opportunities. Growing international trade and mobility across borders promised increasing social and economic benefits through the exchange of goods and ideas.

The next 20 years would demonstrate just how skewed this rosy outlook was. First the 9/11 terrorist attacks abruptly upended the illusion of a safe and peaceful world. Then it became evident that the technological progress that promised to disrupt societal inequalities was helping to entrench them. Finally, globalization and the country's growing diversity became flashpoints in an increasingly divided society.

Against this backdrop, three major economic downturns since the beginning of the millennium have pummeled the labor market and devastated the fortunes of young adults as they sought to begin their careers and transition to economic independence. These economic downturns, in particular the Great Recession, have taken a serious toll on young people's prospects as they navigate youth and young adulthood. Together, these events have defined the experience of coming of age in early-21st-century America.

# 1

**The burst of the dot-com bubble in March 2000.** As the dot-com bubble began to collapse, many formerly high-flying technology companies rapidly lost value and dragged the rest of the stock market with them. All in all, the markets experienced a massive drop, with the NASDAQ index losing more than 75 percent of its value between March 2000 and October 2002.<sup>29</sup> In March 2001, the US economy entered a recession that lasted through November 2001; this recession was followed by a jobless recovery, as the labor market did not experience sustained growth again until September 2003.<sup>30</sup> While the overall recession was relatively mild, young people were hit hard, with the unemployment rate among workers ages 16 to 21 increasing from a low of 10 percent in December 2000 to a high of 18 percent in June 2003. Over the same period, the unemployment rate for workers ages 22 to 27 increased from 5 percent to 8 percent.<sup>31</sup>

# 2

**The Great Recession of 2007 to 2009.** Starting in December 2007, a financial crisis originating with subprime mortgage products launched the Great Recession, the longest—and, at the time, the most severe—economic downturn since World War II.<sup>32</sup> While the recession officially ended in June 2009, sustained employment growth did not start until January 2010, and the recovery was sluggish and inconsistent. In the end, it took more than four years to regain the 7.2 million jobs that had been lost.<sup>33</sup> Youth and young adults were again hit particularly hard, as unemployment for workers ages 16 to 21 increased from 13 percent in December 2007 to 24 percent in January 2010, and unemployment for workers ages 22 to 27 doubled from 7 percent to 14 percent in the same period. By early 2014, both groups' unemployment rates were still in the double digits.<sup>34</sup>

# 3

**The COVID-19 Recession of 2020.** Most recently, the decade-long recovery and expansion was punctured by a sharp economic decline, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting business closures and economic hiatus. The overall unemployment rate experienced its sharpest spike in modern history, jumping from 3.6 percent in January 2020 to 14.7 percent in April 2020.<sup>35</sup> Within four months, between January and May 2020, cumulative job losses reached roughly 23 million,<sup>36</sup> more than triple the 7 million jobs lost during the two years of the Great Recession.<sup>37</sup> Once again, youth and young adults were hit disproportionately hard; the unemployment rate for workers ages 16 to 21 tripled between February and April 2020, rising from 10 percent to 31 percent, and the unemployment rate for workers ages 22 to 27 quadrupled, rising from 5 percent to 20 percent over the same time period. Certainly, youth employment (among those ages 16 to 21) bounced back during the unusually fast recovery in late 2020 and 2021.<sup>38</sup> Employment among young adults (ages 22 to 27) is also on track to recovery, albeit at a slower pace.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, significant uncertainty remains about how sustainable this recovery will be, and these events underscore how vulnerable young workers are in the face of economic downturns.

<sup>29</sup> Murdock, "The Dotcom Bubble Crash Was 20 Years Ago Today," 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Labonte and Levine, *The "Jobless Recovery" from the 2001 Recession*, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–03.

<sup>32</sup> Rich, "The Great Recession," 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Carnevale et al., *America's Divided Recovery*, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2007–14.

<sup>35</sup> Carnevale and Wenzinger, "Tracking the COVID-19 Economic Devastation," 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Carnevale and Wenzinger, "Tracking the COVID-19 Economic Devastation," 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Carnevale et al., *America's Divided Recovery*, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> For youth ages 16 to 21, the unemployment rate returned to around 11 percent, and the employment-to-population ratio bounced back to around 40 percent, by the summer of 2021. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2019–21.

<sup>39</sup> For young adults ages 22 to 27, the unemployment rate was still more than 8 percent in June 2021, compared to rates ranging between 4 percent and 6 percent in the months before the pandemic, and the employment-to-population ratio was less than 73 percent, compared to a 76-percent-to-78-percent range in the months before the pandemic. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2019–21.



## The Ongoing Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Compared to typical cyclical activity in the US labor market, the economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has been an anomaly. While recessions usually develop over many months, the emergence of COVID-19 caused a sharp economic downturn in the spring of 2020 as state governments imposed limits on commercial activity to control the spread of the virus. While the short-term consequences of the economic freeze were severe, unprecedented fiscal action by the government, along with the rapid development of vaccines and the expeditious vaccination of large swaths of the population, has resulted in a sharp resurgence in economic activity, including a growing demand for workers.

While the American economy appears to be on the upswing, the pandemic's long-term consequences for youth and young adults are not yet fully understood. As of summer 2021, youth employment seemed to be headed toward a full recovery, due partly to a boost in job openings in lower-wage occupations that tend to employ youth, such as food preparation and serving and retail sales.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, missing a year of education, training, and work experience during a critical time for personal and professional development will likely be tremendously consequential for some young people whose plans changed or were suspended during the pandemic.

Substantial uncertainty about the trajectory of the economic recovery continues as the potential for new COVID-19 variants persists. The pace and shape of the recovery depend on controlling the pandemic, and the public health landscape is changing rapidly. In addition, Congress recently passed an infrastructure bill and is considering additional legislation addressing domestic priorities.<sup>41</sup> These legislative initiatives are also likely to have a significant impact on the long-term trajectory of the economy.

Thus, while recovery seemed to be taking hold at the time of this report's publication, the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for youth and young adults remain uncertain. Moreover, even a complete recovery from the COVID-19 recession would still leave youth in a substantially worse position than they were at the beginning of the 21st century.

<sup>40</sup> The two biggest occupational groups in which youth (ages 16 to 21) are employed—food preparation and serving occupations (23 percent) and sales and related occupations (17 percent)—are also the two occupational groups that have added the largest number of jobs (for all workers ages 16+) since April 2020. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2019–21.

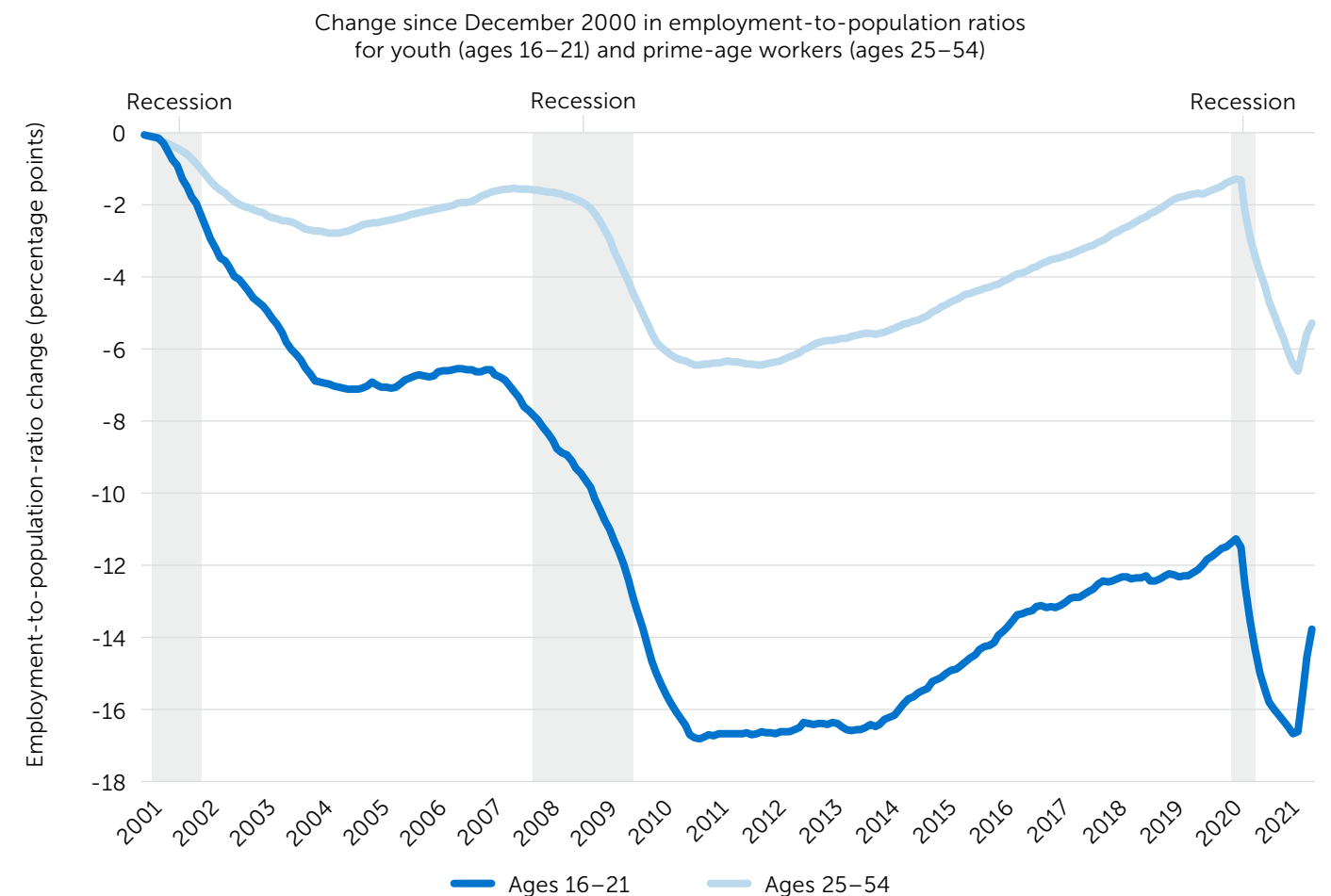
<sup>41</sup> Pramuk and Franck, "Bipartisan Infrastructure Plan Could Get Another Chance after Senate Setback," 2021.

## Recessions hit the youth labor market particularly hard.

While the successive economic downturns have affected all workers, the three most recent recessions have affected youth (ages 16 to 21) much more severely than prime-age adults (ages 25 to 54). By the end of 2019, youth were already 11 percentage points less likely to be employed than in 2000,

compared to a 1-percentage-point difference for prime-age adults. During the pandemic, the youth employment rate declined by another 6 percentage points; by April 2021, it was 17 percentage points lower than in 2000 (Figure 1). It has since largely recovered. Nonetheless, the youth employment rate is 37 percentage points

Figure 1. Recessions followed by incomplete recoveries have hit youth employment particularly hard since 2000.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–21.  
Note: The figure shows the change in the employment-to-population ratio since December 2000, using a 12-month trailing moving average. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

less than the employment rate for prime-age adults, a gap that has grown by 9 percentage points since 2000.<sup>42</sup>

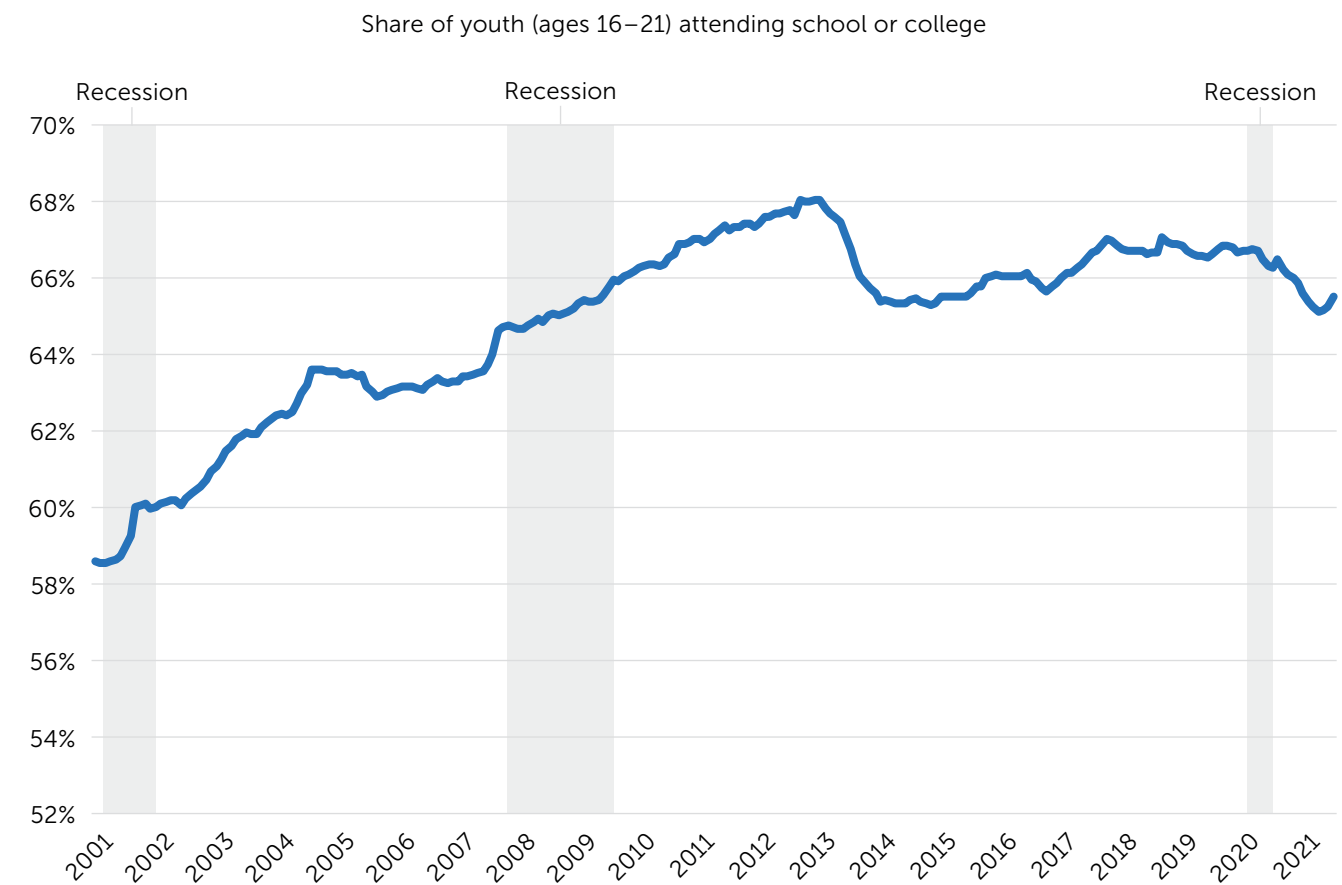
As Figure 1 shows, the fallout from the recent economic downturns hit youth harder than prime-age adults. With less work experience than older workers, young people were in particularly precarious positions each time a new recession hit. A significant share of youth may be looking for their first job. If they already have a job, they likely have little seniority in their position. Younger workers generally have less formal education and training than older workers because they have had less time to acquire such education and training.<sup>43</sup> They may also have weaker job search skills and underdeveloped professional networks.<sup>44</sup>

Young people’s lower levels of education are particularly consequential in today’s labor market. Because they tend to have less education, many youth compete primarily for jobs that require a high school diploma or less—the very jobs that declined the most during recent recessions. For example, during the Great Recession, jobs held by workers with a high school diploma or less declined

by 5.6 million, compared to a decline of 1.8 million in jobs held by workers with some college or an associate’s degree and essentially no decline in jobs held by workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in the COVID-19 economic downturn, workers with a high school diploma or less lost 14 million jobs between January 2020 and April 2020, compared to 10 million jobs lost by workers with some college or an associate’s degree and 6 million jobs lost by workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher during the same period.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the decline in youth employment rates can be attributed to an increase in the share of youth enrolled in either school or college. In fact, the share of youth (ages 16 to 21) attending school or college increased from 59 percent in 2000 to 68 percent in 2012, and although it has declined since then, it has remained above 65 percent (Figure 2). The decline in enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic represented a 2-percentage-point drop relative to enrollment in February 2020, leaving enrollment rates 6 percentage points above their 2000 levels even at the height of the pandemic shutdowns.

Figure 2. As the youth labor market has collapsed, the share of youth who attend school or college has grown substantially.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–21.  
 Note: The figure shows the share of youth who are enrolled in school or college, using a 12-month trailing moving average. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

However, these enrollment shares tell only part of the story. The share of youth who are disconnected—those neither working nor enrolled in school, who are often referred to as “opportunity youth”<sup>47</sup>—has remained in the double digits since 2000 (Figure 3). This share increased significantly during the Great Recession. It started trending downward during the recovery from that recession but

spiked back up in 2013. In 2014, it began a sustained decline, reaching 12 percent by February 2020. However, the share of youth who are disconnected has risen again during the COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic downturn, reaching 16 percent by March 2021 before dropping back to 14 percent in June 2021.

<sup>42</sup> The employment rate—or the employment-to-population ratio, as the metric is officially called—indicates the share of a specified population that is employed. The employment rate takes as its base the specified population, in contrast to the unemployment rate, which takes as its base individuals who are either (a) employed or (b) unemployed and looking for a job. The employment rate is particularly relevant for the youth labor market, as many youth are not officially considered unemployed because they are enrolled in school.

<sup>43</sup> Younger workers have generally recognized the beneficial effects of education and training on their careers and pursued it accordingly. In fact, once they have had sufficient time to acquire more education, their educational attainment as a group exceeds that of previous generations. Around 4 in 10 millennials ages 25 to 37 have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to roughly a quarter of the baby boomers when they were the same age. Bialik and Fry, “Millennial Life,” 2019.

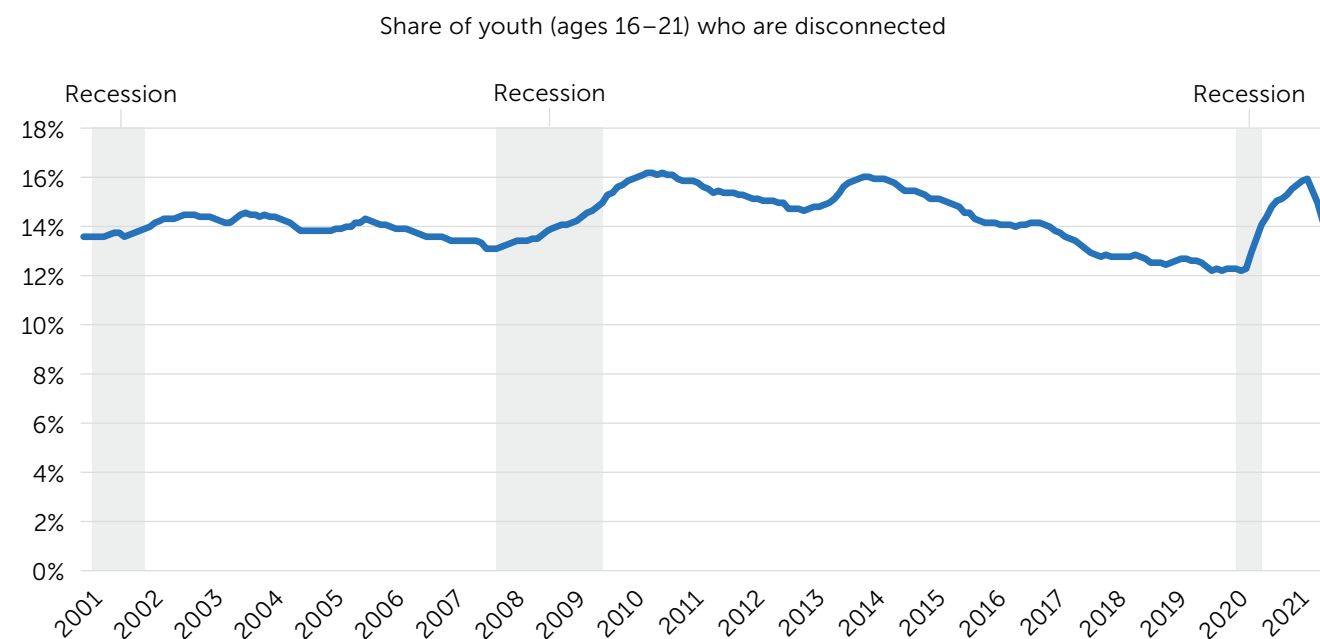
<sup>44</sup> Carnevale et al., *Failure to Launch*, 2013; Fernandes-Alcantara, *Youth and the Labor Force*, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Carnevale et al., *America’s Divided Recovery*, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Belfield et al., *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, 2012.

Figure 3. The share of youth who are neither working nor in school spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–21.  
 Note: The figure shows the share of youth who are neither employed nor enrolled in school, using a 12-month trailing moving average. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

Many disconnected youth face challenges that make it difficult for them to pursue education and training, as well as to obtain and maintain employment. Some have experienced violence or trauma. Others have dropped out of school. Still others have disabilities, have been involved with the criminal justice system, are teen parents, or have aged out of foster care.<sup>48</sup> Broad education and training services are often insufficient to address the varying needs of this population. Some young people require specific services—for example, physical and mental health services to address past trauma; education and training programs that allow currently or previously incarcerated

individuals to put the past behind them; and affordable childcare integrated with education, training, and employment to expand options for teen parents. Some would benefit from reforms designed to improve opportunity, such as policies that allow individuals with felony convictions to use federal financial aid and that limit criminal background checks and forced disclosure of criminal history in the hiring process<sup>49</sup> and the college application process. Some would see their chances of success improve if their schools, colleges, or workplaces provided childcare or if the foster care system offered guidance to help them transition to adult independence.

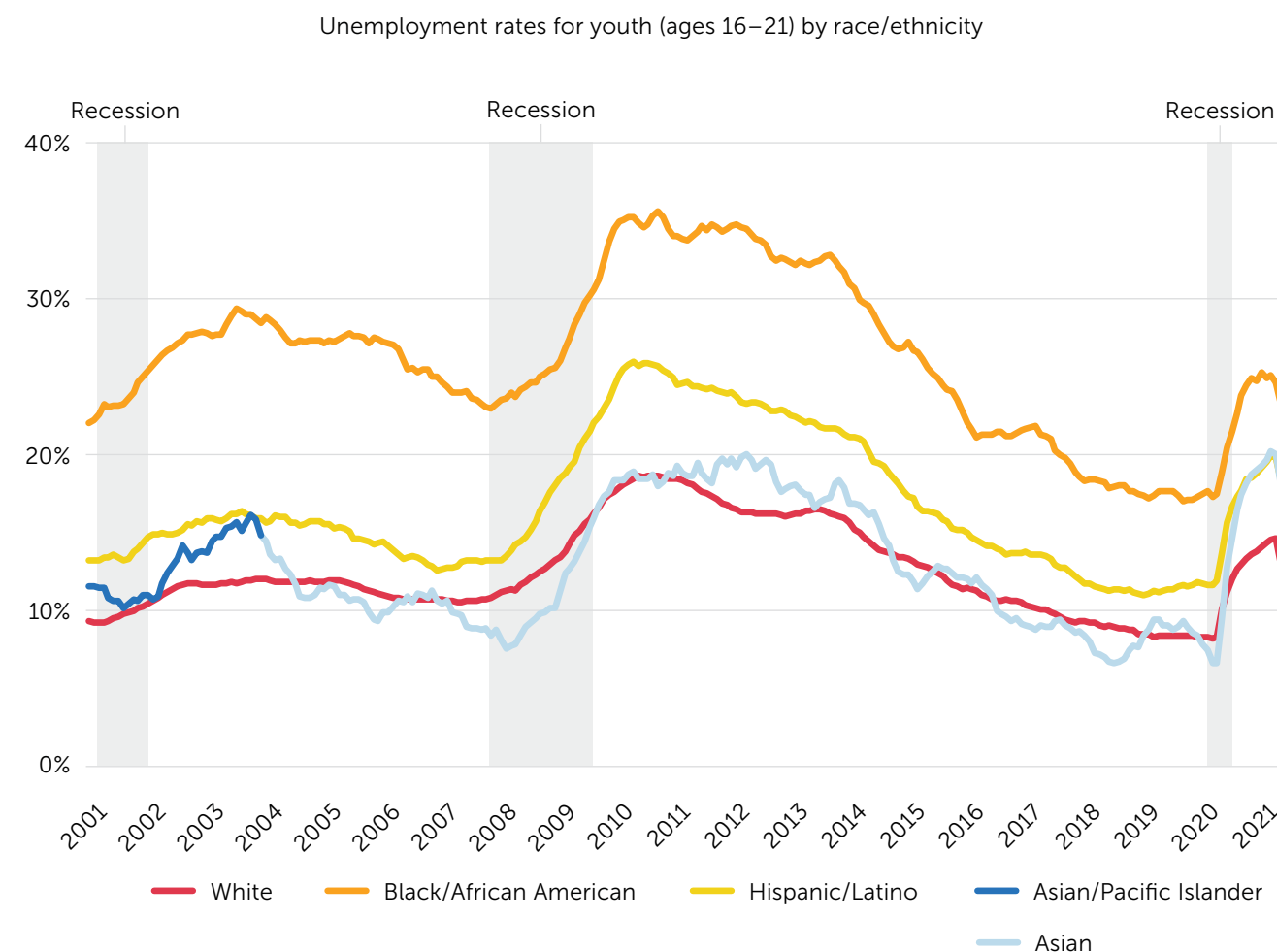
<sup>48</sup> Loprest et al., “Disconnected Young Adults,” 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Loprest et al., “Disconnected Young Adults,” 2019.

Racial and ethnic inequalities also make some youth more vulnerable to disconnection from school, work, or both.<sup>50</sup> Since 2000, Black youth have consistently had unemployment

rates double those of White and Asian youth, and Latino youth have also had unemployment rates that are consistently higher than those of White youth (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Black and Latino youth have generally been more likely to be unemployed than White and Asian youth.



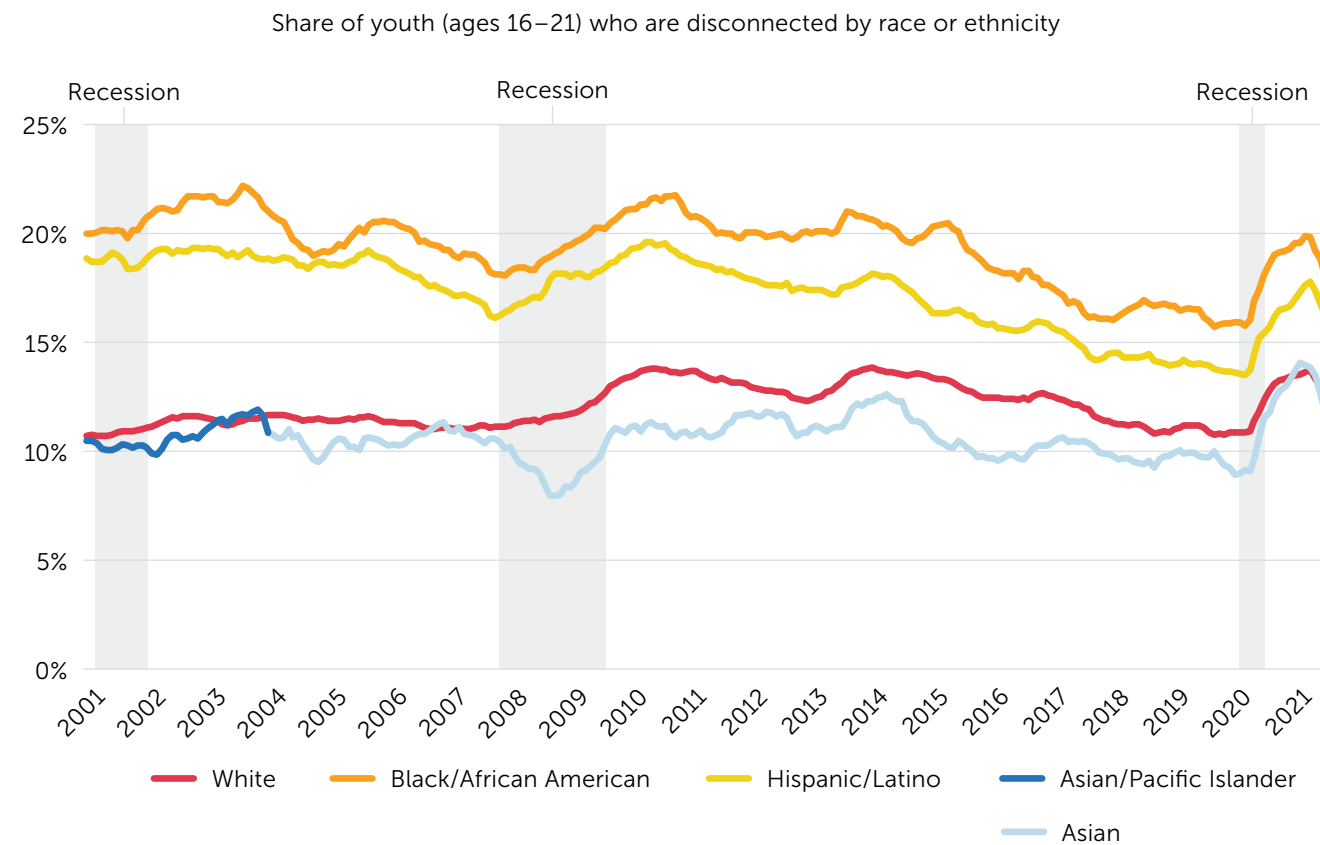
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–21.  
 Note: The figure shows the unemployment rates for youth (ages 16 to 21) by race/ethnicity, based on a 12-month trailing moving average. Before 2003, the Current Population Survey combined the Pacific Islander and Asian race/ethnicity groups. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

<sup>50</sup> In this report, we use the term Black to refer to people who identify as Black or African American and the term Latino to refer to people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. We use single terms for different racial and ethnic groups—White, Black, Latino, and Asian—to alleviate ambiguity and enhance clarity. In charts and tables, we use White, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian (or Asian/Pacific Islander for data collected before 2003, when these groups were aggregated in the data set).

An examination of racial and ethnic gaps among disconnected youth—those who are neither employed nor enrolled in school or college—reveals encouraging news and concerning news. The encouraging news is that Black and Latino youth are less likely to be disconnected from both school and work than they were in 2000, even though their rates of disconnection were nearly as high during the COVID-19 pandemic as they were in 2000.

The concerning news is that, since 2000, the shares of Black and Latino youth who are disconnected have been substantially and persistently higher than the shares of White and Asian youth who are disconnected (Figure 5). In addition, the likelihood of being disconnected increased for all racial and ethnic groups during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and has remained elevated through June 2021.

Figure 5. Over the past two decades, Black and Latino youth have been more likely to be disconnected from both school and work than White and Asian youth.



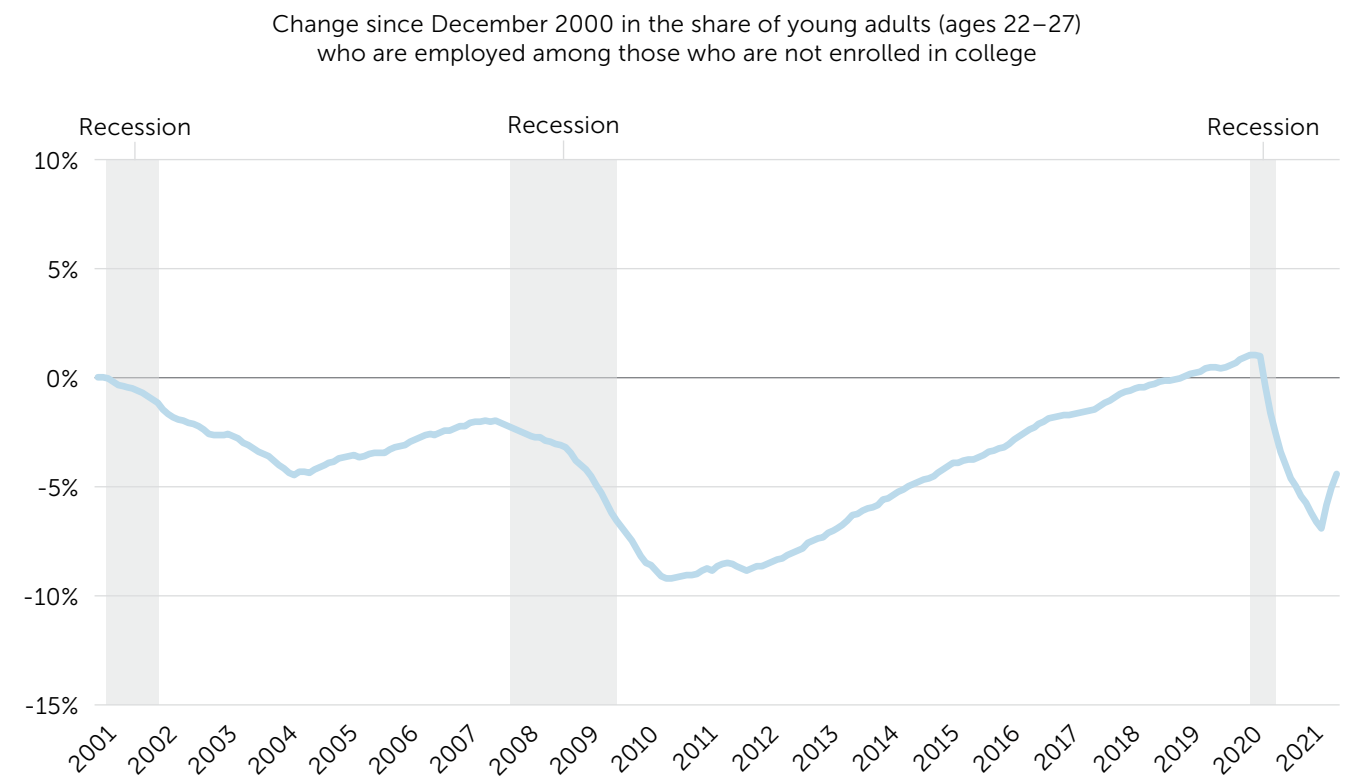
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–21.  
 Note: This figure shows the share of youth by race/ethnicity who are neither employed nor enrolled in school, based on a 12-month trailing moving average. Before 2003, the Current Population Survey combined the Pacific Islander and Asian race/ethnicity groups. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

## Recent recession and recovery cycles are amplifying trends that stretch back 50 years.

For youth (ages 16 to 21), the labor market collapsed between 2000 and 2010 and has not substantively recovered since then. In contrast, the labor market for young adults (ages 22 to 27) who are not enrolled in college has recovered from its lost decade, with the employment rate for this group

surpassing its 2000 level by the beginning of 2020 (Figure 6). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the employment of young adults, but the rapid pace of the recovery to date suggests that employment rates may soon return to their 2000 levels among young adults not enrolled in college.

Figure 6. For young adults, COVID-19 has wiped out years of progress since the last two recessions.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–21.  
 Note: The figure shows the change in the employment-to-population ratio since December 2000, using a 12-month trailing moving average. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

## The Miserable Luck of the Millennials

One generation of young adults has been particularly unlucky—millennials.<sup>51</sup> Their experience doesn't bode well for later generations who attempt to launch their careers during recessions.

Economic studies have consistently shown that entering the labor market and starting a career during a recession has a long-lasting negative impact on workers, often described as “scarring effects.”<sup>52</sup> Many millennials who entered the workforce around the time of the Great Recession began their careers in one of the weakest labor markets in recent history.<sup>53</sup> As a group, these millennials never fully recovered from the Great Recession<sup>54</sup> and were not prepared to absorb the disproportionate economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>55</sup> Having suffered two earlier economic downturns in their working lives, older millennials had already fallen behind previous generations in income and wealth.<sup>56</sup>

Millennials have faced a uniquely weak economy compared to members of previous generations. Because of the major economic downturns over the past two decades, millennials saw slower growth in inflation-adjusted GDP per capita while they were between the ages of 18 and 33 than any other generation in US history, stretching all the way back to the 1700s.<sup>57</sup>



<sup>51</sup> While the exact birth years vary from source to source, the generations referenced here are typically defined as follows: baby boomers—people born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X—people born between 1965 and 1980; millennials—people born between 1981 and 1996; and Generation Z—people born between 1997 and 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Rothstein, “The Lost Generation?,” 2021; Rinz, *Did Timing Matter?*, 2019; Kahn, “The Long-Term Labor Market Consequences of Graduating from College in a Bad Economy,” 2010; Mroz and Savage, “The Long-Term Effects of Youth Unemployment,” 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Van Dam, “The Unluckiest Generation in U.S. History,” 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Rinz, *Did Timing Matter?*, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Adamy, “Millennials Slammed by Second Financial Crisis Fall Even Further Behind,” 2020; Van Dam, “The Unluckiest Generation in U.S. History,” 2020; Kent, “Three Reasons Why Millennials May Face Devastating Setback from COVID-19,” 2020; Carnevale and Gulish, “Education, Race, and Jobs in the COVID-19 Crisis,” 2020.

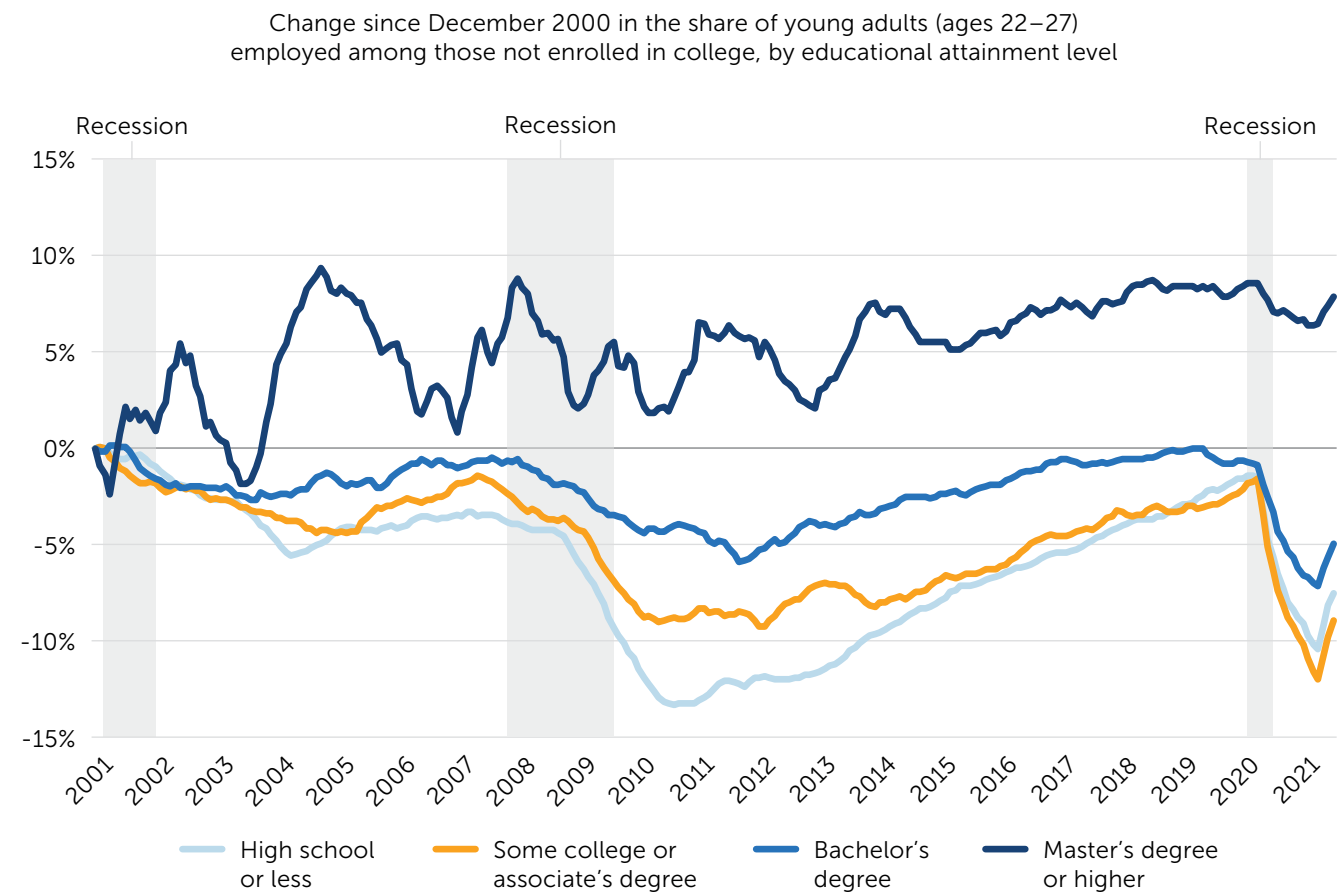
<sup>56</sup> “Older millennials” here refers to people who were born between 1980 and 1989. Kent et al., “Are Millennials a Lost Generation Financially?,” 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Van Dam, “The Unluckiest Generation in U.S. History,” 2020.

Higher levels of educational attainment have been key to the good fortunes of those young adults who have found success in the labor market. In particular, young adults (ages 22 to 27) with graduate and professional degrees have a higher employment-to-population

ratio than similarly educated young adults had in 2000, while all other groups of young adults have lower employment rates now than similarly educated young adults did more than 20 years ago (Figure 7).<sup>58</sup>

Figure 7. Among young adults who are not enrolled in college, those with a master's degree or higher are the only group whose rate of employment has grown since 2000.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), Basic Monthly, 2000–20.

Note: The figure shows the change in the employment-to-population ratio from 2000, using a 12-month trailing moving average. The shaded areas indicate recessions based on official National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) dates.

<sup>58</sup> Education has also been important to the financial fortunes of older millennials. While older millennials both with and without a college degree have less wealth than previous generations did at a similar age, millennials with a four-year college degree or higher are only about 6 percent behind what might be expected based on the wealth accumulation of previous generations. In contrast, millennials without a college degree are 44 percent behind what might be expected based on the wealth accumulation of previous generations. Kent et al., “Are Millennials a Lost Generation Financially?,” 2019.

While the economic downturns of the past two decades have exacerbated the declining fortunes of younger workers and workers without postsecondary education, these recession and recovery cycles are amplifying trends that stretch back 50 years.<sup>59</sup> Over this time period, long-term skill-biased structural change has transformed the US economy. The result is fewer jobs in blue-collar occupations that have higher demand for physical competencies (such as mechanical skills, spatial navigation, and strength and coordination) and growth in professional and technical occupations that demand more cognitive competencies (such as communication, problem-solving and complex thinking, digital technology, business and economics, science and engineering, sales and customer service, and leadership and teamwork). Between 1970 and 2019, the share of workers employed in blue-collar occupations dropped from 40 percent to 21 percent, while the share

of workers employed in professional and technical occupations increased from 27 percent to 44 percent.<sup>60</sup>

Because in-demand cognitive competencies are typically associated with higher levels of formal education, the shift toward professional and technical occupations requiring these competencies has

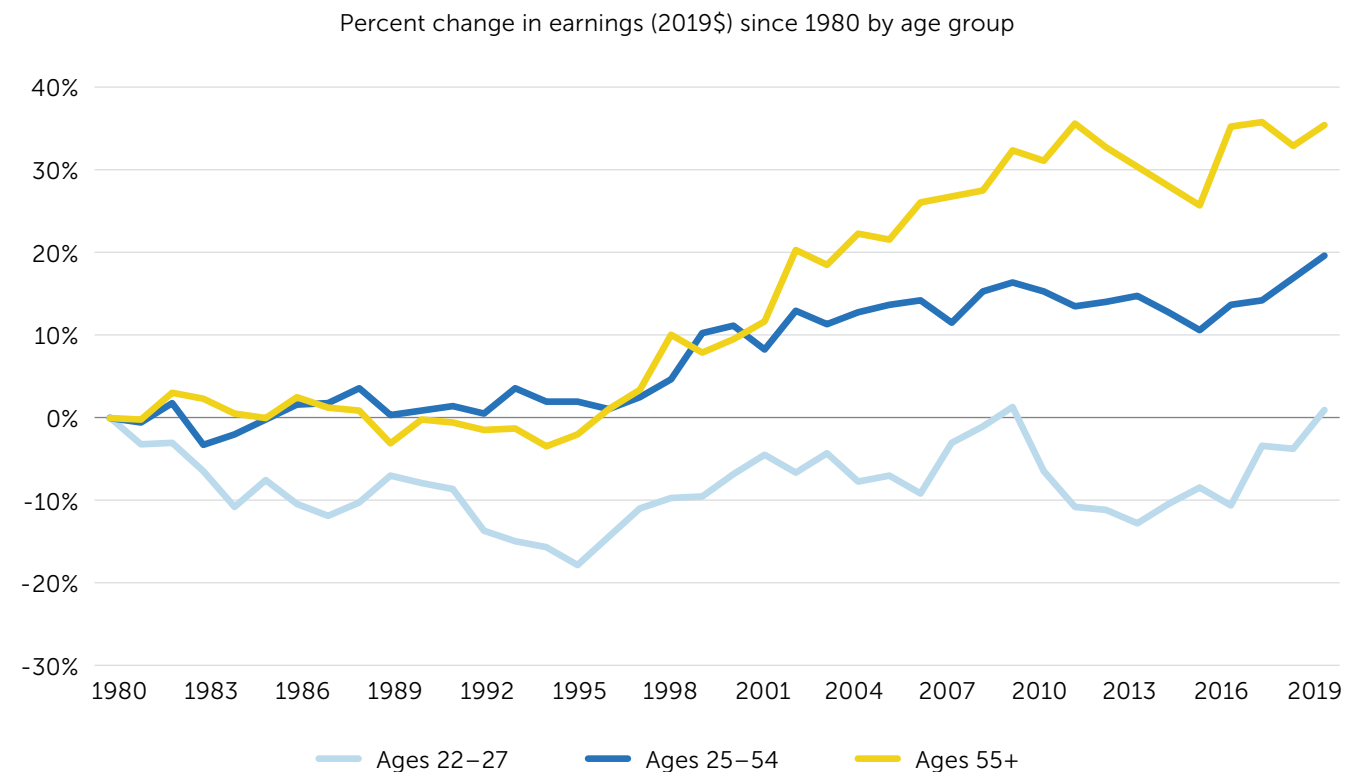
fundamentally altered labor-market demand. In the 1970s, three out of four jobs required a high school diploma or less, whereas presently two out of three jobs require at least some postsecondary education or training.<sup>61</sup> Higher demand for workers with more education and experience has translated into higher demand for older workers, who are more likely to have that experience and the competencies that accompany it. At the same time, demand has fallen for younger workers, who typically have an edge in physical competencies. These changes in demand have also extended the transition to economic independence because it takes young people longer today than in the past to complete the additional education, training, and work-based learning they need to meet the new entry-level job requirements.<sup>62</sup> The college wage premium (the percentage by which the earnings of workers with a bachelor's degree exceed the earnings of workers with a high school diploma) increased

from 36 percent in 1980 to 71 percent in 2017,<sup>63</sup> so college has become an increasingly important pathway to opportunity. This transformation has increased the stratification in our economy by limiting

young adults' opportunities for economic mobility and increasing the divisions between younger workers, especially those without

*We will need to replace the current patchwork quilt of youth policy and practice with a seamless all-one-system approach that covers the needs of young people.*

Figure 8. Earnings for young workers are barely better than they were in 1980, while earnings for prime-age and older workers have improved substantially.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), March Supplement, 1980–2019.

postsecondary education, and older, more educated, and more experienced workers. The earnings of older (ages 55+) and prime-age workers (ages 25 to 54) and the earnings of younger workers (ages 22 to 27) have diverged since 1980, highlighting the contrasting fortunes of younger and older adults (Figure 8).

These trends illustrate the depth of the challenges youth and young adults face

today, as well as the extent to which youth policy has failed to keep up with the times. To reinvigorate young people's prospects and close opportunity gaps among different groups of young adults, we will need to replace the current patchwork quilt of youth policy and practice with a seamless all-one-system approach that covers the needs of young people during the crucial time when they are preparing for and launching their adult lives.

<sup>59</sup> Carnevale et al., *America's Divided Recovery*, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Carnevale et al., *Workplace Basics*, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Carnevale et al., "All One System," 2019; Carnevale et al., *Recovery*, 2013; Carnevale and Rose, *The Economy Goes to College*, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Carnevale et al., *Failure to Launch*, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 1980, 2017.

## Part 2. Today's Youth Policy: A Patchwork Quilt that Lets Too Many Young People Slip Through the Seams

Youth policy in the United States is a vast patchwork quilt of programs, initiatives, and funding streams. It serves few people well

and has particularly detrimental effects for the most vulnerable youth. It does not operate with a unified vision. It lacks connectivity and coherence as it reaches across multiple policy arenas—including

*The system established by current youth policy fails to offer sufficient guidance to youth as they navigate across different silos on their path to economic independence.*

employment, education, criminal justice, national and community service, and social services. It is fragmented across multiple institutional silos—including K–12 education; postsecondary education; federal, state, and local government entities; and private industry. Many individual youth programs lack sufficient funding to make a substantial difference. Thus, on the whole, the system established by current youth policy fails to offer sufficient guidance to youth as they navigate across different silos on their path to economic independence.

These silos result from different funding streams that incentivize different outcomes. The K–12 system was established when the United States had an agricultural economy. Therefore, it lacks a foundational emphasis

on college and career guidance and focuses instead on high school completion and, in some cases, entry into college or the workforce. Selective colleges and universities emphasize the accrual of social, intellectual, and economic capital among their students and research grants among their professors, which translate to prestige and alumni donations. Nonselective public four-year institutions largely concentrate on providing broad access to high-quality, affordable education, with secondary objectives of acquiring research dollars and alumni donations. Community colleges have multiple missions: providing academic preparation for students who hope to transfer and pursue four-year degrees, offering career and technical education for students seeking to enter the workforce, providing training that suits the needs of local employers, and offering enrichment activities for the community.

*This decentralized approach to youth policy contributes to its fragmented and disjointed nature.*

Meanwhile, employers want a highly skilled workforce and a reliable method for distinguishing between qualified and unqualified workers. Many employers in the high-wage, high-skill economy use bachelor's degrees as

a proxy for competence in the 21st century workplace. Nevertheless, they often find this proxy unsatisfying, and they frequently complain that they cannot trust that college graduates are capable of doing the jobs for which they arguably have been educated and trained.

What follows are several examples of current and past youth policies and programs. The ones we mention here are just a sampling of those that are part of the patchwork quilt of youth policy. Many of the policies and programs that are part of youth policy are administered at the state and local levels, though they often receive funding from the federal government in exchange for compliance with broad federal regulations. This decentralized approach to youth policy contributes to its fragmented and disjointed nature.

### Youth employment and training programs have suffered from defunding and disconnection.

Youth employment policy has a long history, starting with the New Deal programs and running through more recent legislation, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). It has taken different forms during different periods, including the New Deal programs in response to the Great Depression, President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, and the evolution toward state and local rather than federal administration

of programs. The latter era began with the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 and continued through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) of 1982, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014.

Modern youth employment and training initiatives trace their roots to New Deal programs developed during the Great Depression. The federal government established the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, with a work plan that included building camps and shelters for more than a million low-income older youth,<sup>64</sup> employing approximately 3 million young men in conservation projects over the course of its nine-year existence.<sup>65</sup> In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order establishing the National Youth Administration (NYA), which opened employment bureaus and provided cash assistance to low-income college and high school students.<sup>66</sup> While youth employment and training policy has evolved considerably, these programs set the precedent for later developments.

Several decades after the New Deal, as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 enacted several major programs focused on employment, education, training, and service opportunities for vulnerable youth. Many of these programs still provide important services. These programs included Job Corps, a residential career training program for youth

<sup>64</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> US National Park Service, "Civilian Conservation Corps," 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

and young adults ages 16 to 24;<sup>67</sup> Upward Bound, which assists low-income high school students and those whose parents do not have bachelor's degrees as they prepare for college; Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), an AmeriCorps program that places volunteers in one-year work assignments with anti-poverty organizations; and Neighborhood Youth Corps, a now-defunct program that provided job training for youth.<sup>68</sup>

About a decade later, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973, along with its later amendments, established several additional employment, work-based learning, and training programs for youth and young adults. These included the Summer Program for Economically Disadvantaged Youth (SPEDY), Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects (YCCIP), Youth Employment and Training Programs (YETP), and Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP).<sup>69</sup> By transferring the responsibility for administering funds from the federal government to state and local governments, CETA fundamentally changed the workforce development system.

During this period, the federal government continued to appropriate funds, but states and localities became responsible for determining how to best use those funds to meet their needs within the bounds of Congressional guidelines.<sup>70</sup> This led to the decentralization

and fragmentation of youth employment and job training programs. CETA also suffered from major funding instabilities, requiring 26 separate appropriations during the eight fiscal years of its existence.<sup>71</sup>

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*Today's youth employment and job training programs have suffered a significant, decades-long erosion in public investment.*

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Then, in 1983, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) of 1982 went into effect, replacing CETA. The JTPA changed the way funds were allocated, providing that federal grants for job training and workforce development would go to the states, and the states would subdivide the grant funds to localities according to a mandatory sub-allocation formula.<sup>72</sup> Localities, in partnership with business organizations, administered many of JTPA's programs, but the states coordinated, reviewed, and monitored performance of the programs across localities. Through the Labor Department, the federal government defined performance goals for the programs, enforceable through funding allocations. The one exception was Job Corps, which remained a nationally administered program.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), which replaced JTPA, cut the funding for summer youth employment programs in favor of funding year-round youth programs. In 2009, the federal stimulus package created in response to the Great Recession—officially titled the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—included new funding for youth summer jobs programs.<sup>73</sup> Then, in 2014, WIA was replaced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

WIOA encompasses three major programs for youth:

1. the enhanced Job Corps program, involving new performance measures and community networks for employers, labor organizations, and state and local workforce development boards;
2. Youth Activities, which funds services that support participants in achieving employment and academic success, such as mentoring and training,<sup>74</sup> as well as incentives for eligible low-income youth (ages 14 to 21); and
3. YouthBuild, which helps disadvantaged youth and young adults attain education and employment skills by building affordable housing for low-income families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

The new act marked a departure from previous laws in its focus on out-of-school youth. WIOA requires states and localities to spend at least 75 percent of the act's Title I funding on out-of-school youth, up from 30 percent under WIA. It also requires localities to spend at least 20 percent of youth funds on work experiences for young people, while providing for training in growing fields and increasing performance and transparency measures.<sup>75</sup> However, the law remains desperately underfunded. WIOA's youth-focused programs serve fewer than 200,000 young people annually.<sup>76</sup>

On the whole, today's youth employment and job training programs have suffered a significant, decades-long erosion in public investment. Spending on youth employment and training programs by the Department of Labor—the primary entity with federal oversight for these programs, including programs administered by states—declined by 53 percent between 1985 and 2017.<sup>77</sup> Concurrent with these funding cuts, broad programs were replaced with more targeted and decentralized programs. As the states gained autonomy over spending, the landscape of program models and service providers became more fragmented, and youth in need of assistance were less likely to be served.

<sup>67</sup> US General Accounting Office (now the US Government Accountability Office, or GAO), "Job Corps," 1986.

<sup>68</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018; Carnevale and Hanson, "Learn and Earn," 2015; Marshall, *The Labor Department in the Carter Administration*, 1981.

<sup>70</sup> McLaughlin, *Effects of Eliminating Public Service Employment*, 1981.

<sup>71</sup> Guttman, "Job Training Partnership Act," 1983.

<sup>72</sup> Guttman, "Job Training Partnership Act," 1983.

<sup>73</sup> Carnevale and Hanson, "Learn and Earn," 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Additional services include opportunities to develop leadership, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and community service competencies.

<sup>75</sup> US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act," n.d.

<sup>76</sup> US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *PY 2018 Data Book*, 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Pollack, "Full Employment for the Young, Too," 2017.



## Educational policy and programs are disjointed and have limited reach.

On the education side, national policy is codified primarily through two bills that have been amended and reauthorized multiple times—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. These federal policies serve as important umbrellas over the many education policies and programs enacted at the state and local levels, which determine the majority of pre-K–12 practices as well as many of the practices in the postsecondary sphere.

At the federal level, ESEA provides supplemental funding to schools that serve children and youth from low-income families, as well as funds for particular programs in the pre-K–12 space. These include programs for specific populations, such as immigrant students, English language learners, students who are “neglected, delinquent, or at-risk,”<sup>78</sup> and children with disabilities. ESEA was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001<sup>79</sup> and as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015.<sup>80</sup> Federal funding amounted to about 8 percent of total K–12 funding in 2018.<sup>81</sup> Local governments are the biggest source of funding for K–12 education, typically basing

allocations on property taxes.<sup>82</sup> This dynamic contributes to inequality in the K–12 education system because schools in neighborhoods with low property values are chronically underresourced.<sup>83</sup>

The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 provides federal financial aid in the form of grants, loans, and work-study payments to eligible students who attend qualified colleges and universities. It also funds many programs focused on higher education and college readiness for vulnerable students, including Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and the TRIO programs,<sup>84</sup> such as Talent Search, Student Support Services, Upward Bound, and Educational Opportunity Centers.<sup>85</sup>

The bulk of these TRIO programs were designed to help low-income and first-generation students—those who are the first in their families to go to college—achieve success in the secondary and postsecondary education pipeline. The services they offer include academic tutoring, course-selection guidance, assistance with college preparation and college

entrance tests, assistance with financial aid applications, information about scholarships and financial aid, financial literacy counseling, and academic instruction in foundational courses. They also provide services for students who are disabled, are experiencing homelessness, or have limited English proficiency.<sup>86</sup> While TRIO programs serve around 800,000 low-income students,<sup>87</sup> they reach only a small fraction of the 6.2 million very low-income and low-income undergraduates who could benefit from them, not to mention the many low-income and first-generation students who never attend college.<sup>88</sup>

Supplemental funding for career and technical education at the secondary and postsecondary levels is provided through the Carl D. Perkins Act, which was first passed in 1984. The Perkins Act also funds career exploration as early as middle school; coordination between secondary and postsecondary education programs, including articulation agreements and dual-enrollment programs, through which students enroll in college-level coursework while finishing secondary school; and some career guidance and academic counseling.<sup>89</sup>

Other educational programs sponsored by the federal government include the McKinney-

Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which authorizes activities and services that promote school enrollment, attendance, and success for children and young adults experiencing homelessness in primary and secondary school.<sup>90</sup> The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides free education and appropriate accommodations for children and youth with disabilities until they reach age 21.<sup>91</sup> As with ESEA and HEA, these are decades-old legislative frameworks. The first version of the McKinney-Vento Act was passed in 1987, and the predecessor to IDEA was passed in 1975.<sup>92</sup>

When first passed, these acts were landmarks. Yet while the federal policies and programs established by these acts remain important, they also represent outdated ways of thinking about the systems that they affect. More importantly, they do not provide the majority of funding devoted to the educational success of young people. States and localities are currently responsible for the lion’s share of public funding for pre-K–12 education, and many policies affecting higher education are enacted at the state level.

<sup>78</sup> Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Klein, “No Child Left Behind,” 2015.

<sup>80</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>81</sup> US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* tables, Table 235.10, 2017–18.

<sup>82</sup> Around 45 percent of K–12 public school funding comes from local resources, typically property taxes. Carnevale et al., *Born to Win*, 2019.

<sup>83</sup> School districts with the highest poverty levels tend to receive roughly 10 percent less state and local funding per student than school districts with the lowest levels of poverty. Carnevale et al., *Born to Win*, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> The Federal TRIO programs received their name from the inclusion of three programs in their original iteration. The number of TRIO programs has since risen to eight. US Department of Education, “50th Anniversary Federal TRIO Programs,” 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> US Department of Education, *Fast Facts Report for the Talent Search Program*, 2016; US Department of Education, *Fast Facts Report for the Student Support Services Program*, 2016; US Department of Education, “Upward Bound Program,” 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Council for Opportunity in Education, “Resources: TRIO,” n.d.

<sup>88</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education analysis of data from Chen and Nunnery, *Profile of Very Low- and Low-Income Undergraduates in 2015–16*, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> US Department of Education, “PRCN,” n.d.; Public Law 88-210, as amended through Public Law 115-224, 2018.

<sup>90</sup> The recently passed American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 included \$800 million for children experiencing homelessness, as well as youth wraparound services and assistance.

<sup>91</sup> The American Rescue Plan included more than \$3 billion in additional funding for IDEA grants and programs. Also, the Biden-Harris administration included \$15.5 billion for IDEA in its discretionary funding request for FY2022, an increase of \$2.6 billion from FY2021 funding levels. Young, “President’s Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Discretionary Funding,” 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

## Programs at the intersections of education and work are not sufficient to bridge the gaps between silos.

A variety of programs integrate educational and employment opportunities. These programs represent attempts on the part of practitioners and policymakers to address the triple deficits of inadequate access to postsecondary education, limited exposure to high-quality work experience and work-based learning, and insufficient counseling to support career navigation. They seek to meld increased educational attainment with greater exposure to experiential learning and career guidance. They include programs that develop occupational awareness beginning in middle school, opportunities for work-based learning

in high school, and postsecondary education and training that connects directly to the workforce. In theory, these programs patch the holes between education and work.

But while they are important bridges for the people they serve, they lack the scale to ensure connectivity across the entire system.

Among these programs at the intersection of education and employment is the Registered Apprenticeship Program, established through the National Apprenticeship Act, which originated in the Fitzgerald Act of 1937 and has

been amended a few times since then.<sup>93</sup> The Registered Apprenticeship Program promotes collaboration among employers, educational institutions, state agencies, and in some cases unions, to develop training for students that combines classroom education and work-based learning. It also establishes standards for registered apprenticeships.

Located at the nexus of work, education, and community service, the Corporation for National and Community Service administers several programs through which youth and young adults can address community needs while developing valuable professional skills. Most of these programs fall under the umbrella of AmeriCorps, which encompasses three major programs—AmeriCorps State and National, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC).<sup>94</sup> The AmeriCorps programs offer qualifying participants an education service award to pay for college or repay qualified student loans. Some of these programs also support disadvantaged youth in the K–12 system by providing tutoring and mentoring services through before- and after-school enrichment programs.

Similar to AmeriCorps but administered separately by an independent agency within the State Department, the Peace Corps provides adults over the age of 18 opportunities to serve communities internationally while

developing valuable career skills.<sup>95</sup> The Peace Corps and AmeriCorps have received intermittent attention over the years, including a proposed expansion under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009.<sup>96</sup> With the number of AmeriCorps enrollments stagnating at around 75,000<sup>97</sup> and around 7,000 current Peace Corps participants,<sup>98</sup> these programs are too small to provide opportunities for the majority of young adults. Access to these programs is also competitive, which can result in their favoring youth from more advantaged backgrounds.

In addition to specific government programs that link work and learning, there are many promising program models that connect work and education within specific settings. These include career and technical education programs, career academies, Linked Learning, Year Up, and Braven.

- ◆ **Career and technical education (CTE)** is an approach to education that combines academic coursework with training for a range of career options. CTE spans high schools, community and technical colleges, and four-year colleges and universities, and it encompasses pathways to degrees and certifications.<sup>99</sup>

- ◆ **Career academies**, which are intended to prepare students for both college and careers, exist within schools.<sup>100</sup> They link students, teachers, and community partners to provide coursework and experiential work-based learning organized by career themes.
- ◆ **Linked Learning** is a blended approach to high school that combines college preparation and CTE while offering students work-based learning opportunities and comprehensive support services, such as counseling and supplemental instruction.<sup>101</sup>
- ◆ **Year Up** is a one-year program that provides a combination of coursework eligible for college credit and six-month corporate internships to students, along with an educational stipend; support from coaches, mentors, and other staff; and ongoing professional support through an alumni network.<sup>102</sup>
- ◆ **Braven** builds career education into undergraduate college programs for low-income and first-generation students through a one-semester course, mentoring, a support network, and career tools and experiences.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Peace Corps, "About," n.d.

<sup>96</sup> Flanagan and Levine, "Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood," 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, "AmeriCorps," 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Peace Corps, "Fast Facts," 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Association for Career and Technical Education, "What Is CTE?," 2020.

<sup>100</sup> National Career Academies Coalition, "About Career Academies," n.d.

<sup>101</sup> Linked Learning Alliance, "About the Linked Learning Approach," n.d.

<sup>102</sup> Year Up, "What We Offer Students," n.d.

<sup>103</sup> Braven, "A Scalable Model Empowering College Students to Put Education to Work," 2021.

<sup>93</sup> US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "History and Fitzgerald Act," n.d.

<sup>94</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

Building connections between high schools and employers is the goal of many successful networks and programs, including the National Academy Foundation, the Pathways to Prosperity Network, P-TECH, the Urban Alliance, Per Scholas, and Genesys Works.

- ◆ **The National Academy Foundation (NAF)** is a network of education, business, and community leaders who work together to ensure that high school students are college- and career-ready, focusing in particular on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) industry-specific curricula and work-based learning opportunities.<sup>104</sup>
- ◆ **The Pathways to Prosperity Network** is an initiative of Jobs for the Future (JFF) that brings together K–12 and postsecondary educators, employers, and policymakers to develop seamless college and career pathways for young people and help meet employers’ regional talent needs.<sup>105</sup>
- ◆ **P-TECH** is a public-private partnership model developed by IBM that combines high school, college, and workplace learning, including through mentorships and internships, leading to a high school diploma and a two-year postsecondary degree in a STEM field.<sup>106</sup>
- ◆ **Urban Alliance** is a national nonprofit organization that connects economically

disadvantaged high school seniors with paid internships, skills training, mentoring, and ongoing post-program support.<sup>107</sup>

- ◆ **Per Scholas** offers tuition-free boot camp-style courses designed to prepare young people who are traditionally underrepresented in technology careers for high-demand technology jobs while connecting them to employer networks.<sup>108</sup>
- ◆ **Genesys Works** offers eight weeks of training in technical, business, and professional skills to underserved students during the summer before their senior year of high school; year-long internships at partner organizations; college and career coaching; and alumni support.<sup>109</sup>

Other programs are designed to address social issues that touch on both education and employment—for example, juvenile justice and delinquency. Such policies and programs are primarily administered at the state and local levels, but they receive federal support and coordination through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA) of 1974 and its reauthorizations and amendments.<sup>110</sup> The JJJPA funds grants that states can use to improve their juvenile justice systems and prevent juvenile delinquency. It also provides funding for community delinquency prevention and gang intervention programs, along with mentorship programs.<sup>111</sup>

Still other programs provide for education and employment preparation as part of a strategy to support vulnerable youth and young adults. Social and public health programs that serve youth and young adults include programs for children who are in foster care or emancipated (legally declared to be adults before reaching the age of majority), youth who have run away or are experiencing homelessness, those who need mental health or substance abuse services, and those who need pregnancy prevention and support.<sup>112</sup>

Among these, one program that exemplifies the patchwork nature of youth policy is the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). Foster care systems in many states treat foster youth who pass the age of majority (18 in most states, 21 in some)<sup>113</sup> as adults. But few youth today become fully independent adults when they reach age 18 because the transition to adult economic independence is longer and more gradual than it was for previous generations.<sup>114</sup> CFCIP serves as a patch over the hole in public policy that might allow young people to slip through the cracks. It funds services for youth who age out of the foster care system or declare independence at an early age to help them transition to independent adulthood. These services include vouchers to cover the costs of postsecondary education and training.<sup>115</sup>

## The system puts vulnerable young people at a particular disadvantage.

The patchwork approach to youth policy allows too many vulnerable young people to slip through the seams. For example, many first-generation students never receive the career counseling they need to help guide their decisions,<sup>116</sup> although they would benefit strongly from counseling that fills the gaps in their and their families’ knowledge about the postsecondary education system.

Similarly underserved are low-income students who enroll in community colleges with the intention of transferring to a four-year college or university and getting a bachelor’s degree. Only 8 percent of low-income students who start at community colleges attain a bachelor’s degree within six years.<sup>117</sup> These students may find it difficult to advance toward a degree if they get stuck in non-credit developmental coursework or find themselves repeating prerequisite courses. Also, more than a quarter of low-income students work full-time while enrolled, and though work connected with a student’s area of study can be beneficial, working while in college is associated with

<sup>112</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Osgood et al., “Vulnerable Populations and the Transition to Adulthood,” 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Only youth who are receiving education and training vouchers at age 21 are eligible to stay in the voucher program until age 23. Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Among bachelor’s degree recipients whose parents have a high school diploma or less, 80 percent have not accessed career counseling services at the college or university where they received their bachelor’s degree, and 37 percent have not accessed any career planning services. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B): 2016/2017, 2017.

<sup>117</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS): 2012/2017 data, 2017.

<sup>104</sup> National Academy Foundation (NAF), “About Us,” 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Jobs For the Future (JFF), “Pathways to Prosperity Network,” 2021.

<sup>106</sup> P-TECH, “Learn about P-TECH Schools,” n.d.

<sup>107</sup> Urban Alliance, “About Us,” n.d.

<sup>108</sup> Per Scholas, “About,” 2020.

<sup>109</sup> Genesys Works, “We Can Open Up Career Possibilities and Pathways Previously Thought Unattainable,” 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

<sup>111</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018.

lower grades and can hinder completion.<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, too many students drop out with significant student debt but without a credential or significant marketable skills—or, if their coursework consisted of developmental classes, without any college credit at all. Among low-income students who start their postsecondary education at a community college, 8 out of 10 expect to complete a bachelor's degree or higher, but the majority (52 percent) drop out without attaining any credential within six years of their first enrollment. These students who drop out, along with their parents, owe more than \$8,000 on average in principal and interest on their federal student loans six years after their first enrollment.<sup>119</sup>

*Many foster care youth lack familial and social supports and have limited access to support services provided by colleges.*

Young people in the foster care system also face unique challenges in going to college and transitioning to life after college. Many foster care youth lack familial and social supports and have limited access to support services provided by colleges. In addition, some young people age out of foster care, leave college, and exhaust their education vouchers. They may then find themselves entirely on their own, unable to turn either to college student support services or to the foster care system even if they experience housing instability or homelessness.<sup>120</sup>

Young people who face homelessness also need additional support, both while in college and during the transition to the workforce. While in college, they need sufficient financial aid and access to facilities and support services to ensure they can succeed in their studies. Close to half of students at four-year colleges and more than half at two-year colleges report experiencing housing insecurity, and youth who experience homelessness are only half as likely as those who do not to complete at least some college credits. During the transition to the workforce, they need continuous support, including access to safe and secure housing, until they find a job providing enough financial security to guard against future homelessness.<sup>121</sup>

Youth who have experienced incarceration or involvement with the court system face their own set of challenges accessing and succeeding in college and transitioning to the workforce. Many court-involved and formerly incarcerated youth have experienced academic challenges and disengagement from school and work, and many are from high-poverty communities. Résumé gaps and substantial stigma may thwart their attempts to reengage with the educational system or the workforce. They would benefit from such supports as case management and mentoring, as well as programs that develop social capital, a culture of college-going, and work skills to help them transition to school or employment.<sup>122</sup>

## The systemic failures of youth policy affect all youth.

The current approach to youth policy is a disservice to all youth and young adults, although vulnerable youth are the ones who are most negatively affected. Decades of failed reforms have led the country far from the strong public policies and programs that would offer all youth, including the most vulnerable, a chance to thrive in adulthood.

*College- and career-ready rhetoric dominates the K–12 arena, but many youth finish high school unprepared to succeed in either college-level coursework or a career.*

In 1983, following the publication of the seminal report *A Nation at Risk*, the United States adopted a college-for-all approach to youth development. The report ushered in a New Basics curriculum focused on core academic subjects, intended to prepare all students for college.<sup>123</sup> Vocational education, which once played a key role in providing workforce preparation for students who did not intend to go to college, became viewed as a dead-end track to which low-income and disadvantaged students were often relegated. High schools began to de-emphasize it in the curriculum as concerns about academic tracking grew.<sup>124</sup> Yet while college- and career-ready rhetoric dominates the K–12 arena today, many youth finish high school unprepared to

succeed in either college-level coursework or a career. Almost half of college students do not earn a degree or certificate within eight years of graduating from high school.<sup>125</sup> Half a million of the students who graduate in the top half of their class each year do not get a college credential.<sup>126</sup> Those who enter the labor force with no more than a high school diploma face a job market where less than a third of the jobs for which they are qualified provide family-sustaining earnings.<sup>127</sup> Too often, they find themselves caught in a low-wage trap without sufficient opportunities to develop the basic skills they need for advancement.<sup>128</sup>

The current system also results in racial and ethnic inequalities. White students from affluent families tend to attend selective universities, which have high graduation rates and superior long-term employment and earnings outcomes. Black and Latino students and students from low-income families are more likely to attend underfunded community colleges and open-access four-year institutions, which have low graduation

<sup>118</sup> Carnevale and Smith, *Balancing Work and Learning*, 2018.

<sup>119</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS): 2012/2017 data, 2017.

<sup>120</sup> Ward and Booth, *Homeless and Foster Youth*, 2021.

<sup>121</sup> Ward and Booth, *Homeless and Foster Youth*, 2021.

<sup>122</sup> Nemoy, *Promoting Postsecondary Success of Court-Involved Youth*, 2013.

<sup>123</sup> Gardner et al., *A Nation at Risk*, 1983.

<sup>124</sup> The share of students who took at least three career-related courses in high school fell from 24 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2009. US Department of Education, *National Assessment of Career and Technical Education*, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Carnevale, "The Forgotten 500,000 College-Ready Students," 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Carnevale et al., *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs*, 2018.

<sup>128</sup> Gabe et al., "Can Low-Wage Workers Find Better Jobs?," 2018.

rates and poorer job prospects for graduates.<sup>129</sup> Most of these students start college with the goal of getting a bachelor's degree, but very few actually do.<sup>130</sup> Those who drop out are left with no college credential and generally have no meaningful work experience and no clear career focus.

*Students with children need adequate programmatic support, including accessible and affordable childcare, to give them a fair shot at success.*

Students with children—especially women, who constitute most of this population—are also at a disadvantage. More than one-fifth of undergraduate students are parents or are caring for children, and these students have much lower rates of college success than other students. Six years after enrolling, 37 percent of students with children earn a college degree or certificate, compared to 60 percent of students without children. Students with children need adequate programmatic support, including accessible and affordable childcare, to give them a fair shot at success. Improving opportunity for student parents also will help address racial and ethnic inequities, as Black, Latino, Native American, and Alaska Native students have a

higher likelihood of being parents than their White and Asian peers.<sup>131</sup>

Even for those who can attain a college credential, simply completing a degree or certificate does not guarantee success in the labor market. Majors and programs of study have become more important than the credential level a student completes. The difference in median lifetime earnings between the highest- and lowest-paid bachelor's degree major fields, for example, is \$1.8 million.<sup>132</sup> This means that students need to choose their program of study and career pathway wisely. Yet, the array of options available to students has created a postsecondary selection landscape so vast and complex that even professionals have trouble navigating it, never mind young people with little career exposure who are still in the process of self-discovery. Between 1985 and 2010, the number of postsecondary programs rose from 410 to 2,260; since 1950, the number of colleges and universities has more than doubled and the number of distinct occupations has more than tripled.<sup>133</sup>

Ideally, school guidance counselors would advise students and help them navigate this maze of options. But these counselors are

spread too thin in most public schools to offer the kind of personalized, data-driven guidance that is necessary for students to successfully navigate the tangle of postsecondary and career pathways. The ratio of students to counselors in public schools across the country is 424 to 1, compared to the 250-to-1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.<sup>134</sup> Colleges and universities generally separate academic and career counseling, with many students only receiving career counseling when it is too late for them to change their academic trajectories in response to career planning considerations.

Employers, too, are confused by this vast, complex, and evolving web of credentials and program options. Many avoid sorting it all out by requiring one or two years of in-field experience, even for entry-level positions.<sup>135</sup> This is logical from the employer's perspective—potential employees who have worked in a related field have demonstrated that they already have the requisite skills to perform the job, so the employer does not need to delve into the skills they learned in their postsecondary education programs. For young adults, though, this creates a catch-22—they need work experience in the field to get an entry-level position, but they cannot land an entry-level job so they can acquire the requisite work experience.

Navigating this fragmented and disjointed system without a clear road map is challenging for all students. It is particularly burdensome for students from low-income families and those who are the first in their family to attend college, including many Black, Latino, and Indigenous students. While all students stand to benefit from systemic reforms, those without the resources available to the most affluent students will gain the most from an all-one-system approach.

<sup>129</sup> Carnevale et al., *The Merit Myth*, 2020.

<sup>130</sup> Among Black students, 75 percent of those who first enroll at open-access four-year colleges and universities or two-year colleges expect to complete a bachelor's degree or higher. However, six years after first enrollment, only 6 percent of these students have actually completed a bachelor's degree, and 53 percent have left school with no credential. Among Latino students, 73 percent of those who first enroll at open-access four-year colleges and universities or two-year colleges expect to complete a bachelor's degree or higher; six years after first enrollment, only 8 percent have actually completed a bachelor's degree, and 41 percent have left school with no credential. Among low-income students, 73 percent of those who first enroll at open-access four-year colleges and universities or two-year colleges expect to complete a bachelor's degree or higher; six years after first enrollment, only 7 percent have actually completed a bachelor's degree, and 48 percent have left school with no credential. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS): 2012/2017 data, 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Gault et al., "Understanding the Student Parent Experience," 2020.

<sup>132</sup> Carnevale et al., *The College Payoff*, 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Carnevale et al., *Career Pathways*, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> US Department of Education, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey," 2019–20 v.1a, 2021; American School Counselor Association, "Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2019–2020," n.d.

<sup>135</sup> Carnevale et al., *Failure to Launch*, 2013.

## Part 3. An All-One-System Approach to Modernizing Youth Policy

The current patchwork quilt of youth policy with its mismatched and disjointed segments creates major inefficiencies and allows too many people to slip through the seams. The transitions from K–12 to postsecondary education, from community colleges to four-year universities, between different education and training experiences, and from education to the workforce are fraught with uncertainty for youth, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Tinkering at the margins will be insufficient to stem the huge losses of potential and opportunity that are currently occurring.*

This siloed system evolved in a different era and is not effective at meeting current challenges. In the past, many young people were able to

graduate from high school and immediately find a good job in the industrial economy. Today, young adults need a combination of high-quality postsecondary education and training and high-quality work experience to successfully transition to a good job. As a result, their transitions to adult economic independence take longer.

Furthermore, too many young adults are unable to get the education and work experience they need to build a successful career in today's economy. And while there are a variety of programs designed to bridge the gaps in the system and help vulnerable youth, the decentralized and fragmented nature of

these programs has created a complex and confusing network of possible pathways that is challenging to navigate. On the whole, the youth policy system lacks the integration and communication necessary to establish the smooth and flexible education and career pathways that young people need today.

An all-one-system approach is necessary to modernize education and employment policy so it matches the complex realities of today's transitions from youth to adulthood. Implementing an all-one-system approach will require comprehensive change. Tinkering at the margins will be insufficient to stem the huge losses of potential and opportunity that are currently occurring.

An all-one-system approach to youth policy will require reforms beginning in preschool, with universal access to publicly funded early childhood education. It will require equitable funding for K–12 and postsecondary education so youth and young adults can receive comprehensive support along their education-to-career pathways. It will necessitate expanded data collection, enhanced academic and career counseling, and improved transfer policy, the infrastructure for which is already under construction. Schools, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, employers, and governments will have to work across these areas to create an integrated playbook. They will need to use interconnected outcome metrics to guide their efforts, with all stakeholders looking

beyond incremental outcome measures, such as test results in elementary school, and toward longitudinal results, such as employment and earnings in young adulthood.

### Systemic change requires substantial innovation.

Large systemic changes are needed to fully bridge the silos in the educational and employment systems and establish a continuum of support all along the journey to economic independence. These systemic changes will require a broad career development framework that spans the pre-K–12 system, the postsecondary education system, and the labor market. The framework must encompass four phases:

1. **Career awareness (pre-K through postsecondary).** Students become aware of which careers exist and their requisite education and training through formal activities (such as field trips to local businesses and classroom visits by community members who discuss their professions) and informal activities (such as conversations with family members and community members about their careers).
2. **Career exploration and work exposure (middle school through postsecondary).** Students explore careers that potentially align with their aptitudes, interests, values, and personality traits. This stage includes activities—such as counseling, career fairs,
3. **Career preparation (high school through postsecondary).** Students gain practical work experience and develop occupational and industry-related competencies necessary for success in a given career field. In addition to the educational curriculum, key opportunities at this stage include internships, youth apprenticeships, informal work experiences, and mentorships.<sup>136</sup> Students may also acquire industry-based professional credentials, such as entry-level information technology and healthcare certifications.
4. **Career training (postsecondary through the labor market).** Students and trainees prepare to work in specific occupations, most often through a college degree or a certificate program, but also through apprenticeships, employer- or military-provided training, workforce development programs, private training courses and boot camps, and other programs that blend education and training. They engage in structured, relevant work-based learning experiences that feature reflective learning on the job.

<sup>136</sup> Interesting approaches to career preparation include the Simulated Workplace program in West Virginia, which assists schools in implementing protocols and institutional cultures that mirror those in the workforce to prepare students for what they will find when they seek employment. West Virginia Department of Education, "What Is Simulated Workplace?" n.d.

Such a framework would align with the insights of youth policy experts. In “Pathways to Upward Mobility,” Robert Schwartz and Nancy Hoffman call on educators and employers to collaborate to link school and work systems more closely. For example, they could develop partnerships that offer internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities that familiarize students with various careers.<sup>137</sup> Schwartz and Hoffman call for the development of career pathways spanning the K–12, postsecondary, and workforce systems. These types of initiatives would be consistent with a career development framework and would support an all-one-system approach to youth policy. But as Schwartz and Hoffman acknowledge, creating change on this level involves significant challenges related to bringing together different constituent groups, governance arrangements, and funding streams.

The crucial goal of closing equity gaps complicates the challenge of reforming the system to better serve all students. While the “college for all” approach launched by *A Nation at Risk* aimed to reduce tracking by race, class, and gender in the secondary arena, it has not eliminated inequality.<sup>138</sup> College enrollment rates have increased from less than 26 percent in 1980 to 41 percent in 2018 among young people ages 18 to 24.<sup>139</sup> But completion rates have lagged behind, with only around 6 out of 10 first-time, full-time

students who start at four-year colleges and universities graduating within six years, and only around 44 percent graduating within four years.<sup>140</sup> Today, higher-income students and White students disproportionately attain bachelor’s and graduate degrees, along with the economic benefits that accompany them, while Black, Latino, and low-income students disproportionately pursue sub-baccalaureate education.<sup>141</sup>

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*Complete information would enable counselors to accurately guide students and workers toward economic opportunity that matches their personal interests and priorities.*

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The result is a bifurcated postsecondary system that has revived the specter of academic tracking by race, ethnicity, class, and gender. While sub-baccalaureate education is a valid career pathway and often better than no postsecondary education at all, dichotomous enrollment by race and family income ensures that existing inequalities will persist in the workforce and society at large. We need to provide a wide variety of flexible college and career opportunities that fit the full scope of young people’s needs, while also creating clear on-ramps and off-ramps.

<sup>137</sup> Schwartz and Hoffman, “Pathways to Upward Mobility,” 2015; Carnevale and Smith, *Balancing Work and Learning*, 2018.

<sup>138</sup> Carnevale et al., *Educational Adequacy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2018.

<sup>139</sup> US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* tables, table 302.60, 2019.

<sup>140</sup> US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* tables, table 326.10, 2019.

<sup>141</sup> Carnevale, “White Flight to the Bachelor’s Degree,” 2020; Carnevale et al. *The Overlooked Value of Certificates and Associate’s Degrees*, 2020.

Addressing these challenges through an all-one-system approach will require substantial innovation. As detailed below, it will necessitate creative approaches and reimagined infrastructure across all sectors. These include new ways of collecting and sharing data; new, more holistic approaches to academic and career counseling; a vigorous commitment to educational equity, beginning in pre-K and extending into college; and new on- and off-ramps to facilitate smooth transitions between education and careers. The federal government can incentivize states and institutions to make these changes through new sources of funding and conditions for funding eligibility.

## A national student unit record data system would help to hold institutions accountable.

Some of the infrastructure needed to support an all-one-system approach is being developed already. States have been building longitudinal data systems that connect student data to data on workers’ earnings and industry. The best examples of these State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) draw together data from K–12 education, postsecondary education, and employment. The systems are critical building blocks for an all-one-system approach, although the state reporting goals for which they were constructed restrict the extent to which they can be used across state borders.

Acknowledging these limitations, the Census Bureau has launched the Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) project, which merges state data with national data.<sup>142</sup> This project will enable stakeholders to assess the employment and earnings outcomes of students who enter the national labor market. Alongside this effort, the US Department of Education has continued to expand the College Scorecard by adding earnings data at the institution and program levels for federal financial aid recipients.<sup>143</sup>

These new and emerging data systems can form a solid foundation that with the appropriate legal and regulatory changes could evolve into a national student unit record data system. Such a system would capture and connect information at the level of individual students’ records, while removing personally identifiable information and applying data privacy tools. The information would be used to improve transparency, ensure accountability, and facilitate research. This system would promote the flow of information across silos, representing a first step toward developing an integrated playbook for youth policy and practice. Complete information would enable counselors to accurately guide students and workers toward economic opportunity that matches their personal interests and priorities. It would also allow policymakers to track the experiences and outcomes of students from pre-K–12, through postsecondary education, and into the workforce, providing crucial information about the effectiveness of educational programs and workforce initiatives. Many states already have longitudinal data

<sup>142</sup> US Census Bureau, “Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics: Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO),” n.d.

<sup>143</sup> US Department of Education, *Technical Documentation: College Scorecard Data by Field of Study*, 2019.

systems that connect student data among the pre-K–12 system, the postsecondary system, and the workforce,<sup>144</sup> although their effectiveness is limited by weaknesses in the systems—including missing data for students who move out of state and those who attend private colleges.<sup>145</sup>

A national data system would need to fill in the gaps by incorporating data from pre-K–12, postsecondary education, and employment, as well as data on how successfully youth and young adults are transitioning among the silos. It also would need to incorporate data on how the system as a whole is performing in helping young people transition from youth dependence to adult economic independence. These data should be disaggregated and reported by race, ethnicity, sex, and socioeconomic status for pre-K–12 and postsecondary programs,<sup>146</sup> as well as potentially by industry and occupation for the workforce.

One major challenge to creating a national student unit record data system has been a myriad of federal laws designed to protect

students' privacy and security, particularly their personally identifiable information.<sup>147</sup> While these legal restrictions have complicated the creation of a national student unit record data system, the barriers are not insurmountable. The proposed College Transparency Act (CTA) would pave a way forward to establishing such a system while maintaining legal protections for privacy and security.<sup>148</sup>

The data collected in a national student unit record data system should be made transparent and accessible through tools designed to support data-driven decision-making by all stakeholders. These tools need to be customized for different audiences and different stages of the educational and professional development process so that each group of stakeholders can understand and apply the data in the context that is most appropriate for them.

The US Department of Education's College Scorecard represents an early attempt at a tool developed for students and families seeking to learn about, compare, and choose among

colleges and programs.<sup>149</sup> Developers of future tools should consider the different interests and data literacy levels of various audiences so that tools are designed to promote better decision-making by stakeholders rather than exacerbate their confusion.<sup>150</sup>

## Enhanced counseling would help individuals maximize their use of new information.

While information tools are important, by themselves they do not suffice to meet the needs of youth and young adults, especially those who are most vulnerable. Therefore, a variety of professionals are tasked with helping students and workers make better decisions, including guidance counselors in high schools; advisors and student support professionals in higher education; and case managers, social workers, or career navigators. However, these professionals are usually underpaid and encouraged to focus narrowly on the immediate challenges facing their clients rather than long-term career planning across silos.

Without skilled guidance, the glut of information that may be available in the near future will be no more useful than the information void of the past. Accessible, skilled, credentialed, and independent counseling will be crucial to ensuring that an all-one-system approach optimizes young people's journeys through education and into the early stages of

their careers. Counselors must be empowered to promote the needs and interests of students over the priorities of institutions, whether through professional autonomy within existing institutions or the creation of new professional infrastructures outside of existing institutions.

A holistic, all-one-system approach to counseling should focus on all aspects of students' needs along the full continuum of the youth-to-adulthood transition. This holistic approach should eliminate the barriers between

academic, career, and personal counseling as much as possible, providing comprehensive counseling to students starting in middle school and continuing through postsecondary education and into the early career stages. At all points in the system, guidance and career counselors should have access to data tools that draw on national student unit record data, and they should be trained to use these data to help students make informed decisions that account for possible forks in the road, important milestones, and potential roadblocks. Career counseling should also help strengthen young adults' job search skills.

In this holistic system, counselors would serve a coordinating role that goes beyond advising individual students. Their responsibilities would include training and empowering

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*A well-designed, comprehensive counseling system would help minimize the obstacles that students face when crafting their own personalized routes to successful careers.*

<sup>144</sup> Half of the states and territories link K–12 and workforce data, and 76 percent link K–12 and postsecondary data. The methods for linking these data vary by state and include assigned unique identifiers and Social Security numbers. Bloom-Weltman, "Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Survey Analysis," 2019.

<sup>145</sup> Carnevale et al., *Career Pathways*, 2017.

<sup>146</sup> For postsecondary programs, these metrics should include measures of gainful employment that account for debt repayment rates and students' ability to pay back their loans, median earnings among graduates and non-graduates, median student loan debt, completion rates, median time-to-completion, net price, earnings-to-price returns, earnings-to-debt returns, net present value, institutional value added, and adjustment for actual versus expected outcomes based on the demographics of students in the program. Carnevale et al., "Navigating the College-to-Career Pathway," 2021.

<sup>147</sup> Laws that restrict the collection and dissemination of information about students include the Privacy Act of 1974, which protects information managed by the federal government; the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), which governs K–12 student records; the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which affects college and universities with medical centers that incorporate students' medical records with their educational records; the E-Government Act of 2002, which addresses privacy and security concerns associated with electronic collection and storage of information within federal IT systems; and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999 (GLBA) and the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 (FACTA), which govern institutions' collection, storage, and use of students' financial records. Grama, "Protecting Privacy and Information Security in a Federal Postsecondary Student Data System," 2019.

<sup>148</sup> Grama, "Protecting Privacy and Information Security in a Federal Postsecondary Student Data System," 2019.

<sup>149</sup> For more information on the scope of the data included in the College Scorecard, see Carnevale et al., *A First Try at ROI*, 2019; Carnevale et al., *ROI of Liberal Arts Colleges*, 2020; Carnevale et al., *Buyer Beware*, 2020.

<sup>150</sup> Carnevale et al., *Career Pathways*, 2017.



teachers, coaches, administrators, parents, community groups, and volunteers to use publicly available tools to advise students on their education and training options and potential career pathways. In high school, career counselors would offer courses that expose students to career planning and coaching. In college, each academic department would dedicate a staff member to providing informed academic and career advising to majors or potential majors. This person would have expertise in career counseling and a high-level understanding of the academic discipline. The position would serve as a nexus between academic and career considerations, requiring ongoing communication with the academic faculty and the career counseling office and other relevant campus services. The creation of such staff positions would ensure that students receive advice from someone with knowledge of the academic aspects of their program and an ability to offer career guidance and direct them to applicable resources. This person could help coordinate internship and externship opportunities, applied learning collaborations involving faculty members and employers, and recruitment and outreach activities that connect students to potential jobs.

*The path toward college and a good job begins in preschool.*

A well-designed, comprehensive counseling system would help minimize the obstacles that students face when crafting their own personalized routes to successful careers. Counselors would receive training to ensure that their guidance to students is free of bias and based firmly in individual interests and circumstances. Furthermore, they would be prepared to actively counter societal biases by encouraging and supporting students as they explore courses and career experiences that open doors to unconventional career pathways. Moreover, counselors would help students use on- and off-ramps to navigate between work and school, ensuring that they can easily transfer their credits and smoothly progress toward their educational and professional goals.

In addition, programs that provide counseling, guidance, and mentorship services for vulnerable youth, such as the TRIO and GEAR UP programs, should be funded at levels sufficient to meet the needs of the target populations. These programs should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure desired outcomes.

## Equal access to high-quality education and training throughout the pipeline is essential to address equity gaps in young adults' outcomes.

Improved counseling will help young people make more informed choices, but additional supports and initiatives are needed to address equity gaps. From preschool through college and into careers, we must ensure that students truly have equal access to a high-quality education and training.

The path toward college and a good job begins in preschool. Expert consensus based on scientific studies has established the critical importance of a young person's earliest years for subsequent academic and life success and the potential of high-quality early childhood education to make a difference, especially for children from disadvantaged households.<sup>151</sup> Publicly funded, high-quality, universal early childhood education is the foundation on which comprehensive youth policy rests. It is also one of the most significant elements of an equitable system because it would help ensure all children an opportunity for a favorable start in life.

Early childhood education is only the beginning, however. Inadequate follow-up in K–12, driven by major inequities in public

school funding, can derail many children's progress on their journey to adulthood. In the United States, funding for public schools, and thereby the quality of schooling, is tied to the neighborhoods in which schools are located.<sup>152</sup> As a result, public schools wind up promoting the intergenerational transfer of privilege and disadvantage by reproducing residential race and class segregation in the quality of children's education.<sup>153</sup>

In the early 1970s, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* gave the US Supreme Court an opportunity to upset this dynamic.<sup>154</sup> Relying on the 14th Amendment and the precedent set in *Brown v. Board of Education*,<sup>155</sup> a group of parents sought to have the Supreme Court declare a Constitutional right to equal educational opportunity that would require equal school funding. Instead, in a 5–4 decision issued in 1973, the Supreme Court handed a major setback to education advocates and everyone who hoped that equal opportunity would become more than a slogan. The Supreme Court found that the US Constitution provides no explicit or implicit right to an adequate education or

<sup>151</sup> Phillips et al., *Puzzling It Out*, 2017.

<sup>152</sup> Almost half of public-school funding comes from local government sources, such as property taxes. School districts with the highest poverty level receive around 10 percent less combined state and local funding per student than schools with the lowest poverty level. Carnevale et al., *Born to Win*, 2019.

<sup>153</sup> For more on the role of schools in contributing to intergenerational inequality, see Carnevale et al., *Born to Win*, 2019.

<sup>154</sup> *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

<sup>155</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

to education in general.<sup>156</sup> The next year, its 5–4 decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* encoded de facto segregation as permissible by law.<sup>157</sup> Yet nothing in either case stops Congress or state legislatures from implementing equitable funding across public schools. In fact, most state constitutions mention education as a state’s obligation to its residents, and plaintiffs who have brought cases in their state courts following *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* have seen some success.<sup>158</sup> While each state’s constitution, legislation, and judicial precedents are different, litigation at the state level remains an important lever to incentivize progress toward systemic improvements.<sup>159</sup>

While these state court cases have focused on educational adequacy in the K–12 system, adequate K–12 education is not enough in the 21st century. Some form of postsecondary education is increasingly key to attaining adult economic independence and securing a good job. Yet college comes with a hefty price tag, as the average costs of college, including tuition, fees, room, and board, have increased 169 percent since 1980.<sup>160</sup> This keeps many students, especially students from low-income families, from pursuing a college education. While financial aid is available for college students at both the state and federal levels, getting that aid often involves navigating a complex web of bureaucratic requirements

and accepting a good deal of opacity about the long-term implications of borrowing. A free-college program would offer students and families a clear message that they do not have to worry about the affordability of postsecondary education. At least 15 states and 200 locales already have some type of free-college program, and while Congress dropped free community college from the Build Back Better Act during negotiations, the debate over a national free-college program will likely continue to be prominent in national policy conversations.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>156</sup> *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973). For more on *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* and its implications for educational equity, see Carnevale et al., *The Merit Myth*, 2020.

<sup>157</sup> *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

<sup>158</sup> Carnevale et al., *Educational Adequacy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2018.

<sup>159</sup> For more specifics on differences in constitutional obligations among states, see Parker, *50 State Review*, 2016.

<sup>160</sup> The college costs used in this analysis include average undergraduate tuition and fees, room, and board at all institutions in constant 2018–19 dollars for academic years 1979–80 through 2018–19. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 330.10, 2019.

<sup>161</sup> Nadworny, “White House Drops Free Community College from Its Spending Bill,” 2021; for more on different free-college models, see Carnevale et al., *The Dollars and Sense of Free College*, 2020.

## State Supreme Courts Have Led the Charge for the Right to Education

Advocates for disadvantaged students in K–12 education latched on to a winning legal strategy in a lawsuit argued before the Kentucky Supreme Court. In its 1989 decision in the case *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, that court struck down the state’s school-financing system based not on the conclusion that it was inequitable but on the conclusion that it was insufficient. “The framers of our constitution intended that each and every child in this state should receive a proper and an adequate education, to be provided for by the General Assembly,” the court said. The *Rose* plaintiffs had proven that the General Assembly had “fallen short of its duty to enact legislation to provide for an efficient system of common schools throughout the state.”<sup>162</sup>

In not focusing narrowly on equity in K–12 financing, and instead returning to a standard of sufficiency based on the perceived purpose and desired outcomes of K–12 education, the Kentucky Supreme Court gave rise to a change in the nation’s thinking about educational adequacy. Under this rubric, to be regarded as adequate, education must prepare students for some level of functioning in society. State courts no longer dwelled on whether school financing complied with state constitutions’ equal-protection and due-process guarantees. Instead, they sought to determine whether state officials had honored provisions in state constitutions related to educational outcomes.

Advocates for educational equity in other states began succeeding in the courts on this basis. Nevertheless, the US Supreme Court has so far failed to affirm education as a right held by all Americans,<sup>163</sup> even though some advocates continue to argue that the Constitution’s equal protection clause guarantees an adequate education.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>162</sup> *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 790 S.W.2d 186 (Ky. 1989).

<sup>163</sup> Hunter, “School Funding Litigation from Coast to Coast,” 2018.

<sup>164</sup> Wong, “The Students Suing for a Constitutional Right to Education,” 2018.

## More flexible approaches to transfer would substantially expand opportunity.

Schools, colleges, and universities need to collaborate with employers and each other to design curricula that meet employers' needs and smooth transitions between different phases of education and different programs. Transfer is one area within the postsecondary education system that could benefit from greater collaboration and smoother transitions. Roughly half of bachelor's degree recipients attend at least two institutions before graduating, and 53 percent of graduates who transfer are unable to apply all their transfer credits toward their bachelor's degrees.<sup>165</sup>

Notably, barriers to transfer represent substantial impediments to racial and economic equity. Black, Latino, and low-income students are more likely to attempt to transfer from a community college to a four-year college than White and higher-income students. They are also less likely to have positive outcomes when they start at community colleges and attempt the transfer route to a bachelor's degree.<sup>166</sup>

Policymakers can bring change to transfer policy at the federal, state, and local levels by supporting (1) credit mobility and financial aid portability, (2) allocation of financial aid for

transfer students, (3) articulation agreements to ensure that students receive credit for coursework completed at other institutions and through dual enrollment, (4) incentives for colleges and universities to collaborate on mapping easily navigable student pathways, and (5) programs that guarantee tuition prices and a maximum time to degree for transfer students who follow a prescribed program of study.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to these reforms, public four-year colleges and universities should be required to reserve 20 percent of their seats in the junior-year class annually for transfer students from community colleges. This amount would be nearly double the current share (around 10 percent) filled by transfer students from two-year colleges.<sup>168</sup> Reserving these seats would ensure that transfer students receive full and fair consideration when they apply to public four-year colleges and universities. Policymakers should allow more community colleges to grant bachelor's degrees through Community College Baccalaureate programs (CCBs) in occupational fields with high demand in their local labor markets.<sup>169</sup> This would give students who start at community colleges an option to complete a baccalaureate degree program in the same college or transfer their

credits to another community college that offers bachelor's degrees. CCBs also provide a logical next step for students who complete associate's degrees in technical fields.<sup>170</sup> On the whole, CCBs can help fill the gaps in transfer, improve equity and access, allow students to save money, and help meet employer demand.

Along with these reforms, a guided pathways approach in community colleges could improve the likelihood of successful completion and transfer by mapping students' curricula to these goals. This approach helps students select and enter a program of study, stay on track until completion or transfer, and achieve specific learning outcomes that align with the employment and further education requirements of their chosen fields.<sup>171</sup>

More broadly, policymakers and educators should undertake efforts to ensure that students receive credit for all prior learning both within and outside the postsecondary education system. For example, a student who begins her postsecondary studies in a Career and Technical Education program should be able to apply credits earned in that program toward a bachelor's degree and use them as proof of learning on the job or in volunteer settings. Ensuring that students' prior learning and experience are fully recognized in both the education system and the labor market

is crucial in view of the multiple, fragmented pathways that young people can take through the stages of education and early career.

Several innovative programs and projects are experimenting with ways to ensure that all postsecondary students receive credit for prior learning, regardless of where it occurred. Attempts at incremental credentialing, such as the Credential as You Go initiative at the State University of New York (SUNY) Empire State College<sup>172</sup> and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)'s Interstate Passport,<sup>173</sup> offer new types of credentials for completing a portion of coursework that students can later apply for credit toward an educational goal or present to employers as evidence of knowledge and skills they developed.

Other approaches seek to break down learning even further—for example, by breaking courses into individual modules that students can complete at their own pace.<sup>174</sup> These initiatives represent attempts to make postsecondary education and training more flexible to ensure that all young adults, especially those who face barriers to degree attainment, have an opportunity to get an education, receive credit for what they learn, and travel as far as they choose on their postsecondary journeys.

<sup>165</sup> Scaling Partners Network, "Transfer and Applicability of Credit," 2020.

<sup>166</sup> Scaling Partners Network, "Transfer and Applicability of Credit," 2020.

<sup>167</sup> Scaling Partners Network, "Transfer and Applicability of Credit," 2020.

<sup>168</sup> Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS): 2012/2017 data, 2017.

<sup>169</sup> Currently, 24 states authorize at least some community colleges to award some bachelor's degrees. Most of these states limit the majors that can be offered or specify that CCBs should have an occupational focus. Meza, "Overcoming the 'Opportunity Mirage' with Community College Baccalaureate Degrees," 2021.

<sup>170</sup> Love and Palmer, *Community College Baccalaureate Programs*, 2020.

<sup>171</sup> Bailey, "Guided Pathways at Community Colleges," 2017.

<sup>172</sup> Credential As You Go is sponsored by Lumina Foundation; SUNY Empire State College, "Credential As You Go Webinar," 2020. Lumina Foundation also provides funding for the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

<sup>173</sup> Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), "Interstate Passport," n.d.

<sup>174</sup> Current eligibility requirements for Title IV funding under the Higher Education Act—including minimum number of credit or clock hours, minimum number of weeks, and the stipulation that programs generally lead to a degree, a certificate, or gainful employment in a recognized occupation—place some limitations on innovations in this area. Congressional Research Service, *Institutional Eligibility for Participation in Title IV Student Financial Aid Programs*, 2019.

# Conclusion

While young people hold some responsibility for their personal outcomes in the journey from education to work, youth are not fully independent adults, and they should not be left alone to navigate the transitions between different phases and parts of the education and workforce systems. The expectation of early independence hurts vulnerable youth in particular because they may not have parents or relatives with the financial resources or specific social capital, including knowledge of education and employment systems, to help them make these transitions. The country needs to balance this expectation of youth independence with an expectation of shared responsibility, divided among individuals and institutions throughout the education system and the labor market.

The shared responsibility of the pre-K–12 system should not end at graduation but should continue until students enter postsecondary education and training, attain secure employment with sustainable living wages, or take appropriate steps to become entrepreneurs. Likewise, the shared responsibility of colleges and universities should not end at graduation but should continue until students enroll in further education, secure an entry-level job on their chosen career pathway, or take appropriate steps to begin pursuing entrepreneurship.

The shared responsibility of the Department of Labor should include supporting young people who drop out of school or college, age out of foster care, or are released from juvenile justice facilities. Across these groups, young people who do not enroll in college should be referred to the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, which would then be responsible for placing them in an appropriate employment program or helping them secure employment with sustainable living wages.

These systemic reforms would be natural and long-overdue extensions of our country’s longstanding commitment to education in the public interest. The movement to make high schools free began in the 19th century, and all young people now have free access to a high school education. Efforts to make postsecondary education more accessible can be traced to the Morrill Act of 1862 and, later, the GI Bill of 1944, followed by the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the establishment of Pell Grants in 1972.<sup>175</sup> More recently, policymakers at both the federal and state levels have advocated that at least some public colleges be made tuition-free.<sup>176</sup> Ensuring that students receive necessary supports throughout their postsecondary experiences, including during transitions between educational institutions and from education to the workforce, represents the next phase of efforts to ensure that all young people receive

adequate education that prepares them to become self-sufficient adults.<sup>177</sup>

In addition to implementing broad systemic reforms, policymakers and practitioners should expand employment opportunities for youth and young adults and provide them with high-quality work and training experience. High-quality work experience is a crucial supplement to postsecondary education, providing a reliable way for young people to learn new skills and accumulate human capital so they can qualify for decent jobs that pay more than subsistence wages.<sup>178</sup>

As this report has demonstrated, some young adults have now faced three serious employment crises in two decades. The United States spends only 0.1 percent of its GDP on active labor-market policies, such as public employment services, direct job creation, training, employment incentives, and supported employment—less than one-fifth of the average for countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (0.52 percent of GDP).<sup>179</sup> Yet, additional

spending on active labor-market policies has been shown to reduce unemployment and increase labor force participation.<sup>180</sup> Further, youth employment and training programs in the United States, including the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)<sup>181</sup> and its successor, Job Corps,<sup>182</sup> have been shown to have positive effects on both short- and long-term outcomes. These programs raise employment rates, improve health, and increase geographic mobility in the short term, as well as increase lifespans, raise lifetime earnings, and modestly increase educational attainment in the long term for participants who spend sufficient time in them.<sup>183</sup> To capitalize on the benefits of youth employment and training programs and ensure a sustained recovery for young workers, Congress should dramatically expand the kinds of programs that have proven effective—Job Corps and its sibling youth-focused WIOA programs,<sup>184</sup> the AmeriCorps programs,<sup>185</sup> and the Registered Apprenticeship Program.<sup>186</sup>

Ensuring economic opportunity for youth and young adults is an urgent challenge. Affording young people opportunities to attain economic

<sup>177</sup> Carnevale et al., *Educational Adequacy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2018.

<sup>178</sup> Loprest et al. suggest increasing work readiness and occupational skills as well as job training and employment programs for youth as important ways to improve outcomes for disconnected youth; Loprest et al., “Disconnected Young Adults,” 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Public Expenditures on Activation Policies in 2017,” 2017.

<sup>180</sup> Pignatti and Van Belle, *Better Together*, 2018.

<sup>181</sup> The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) program operated during the Great Depression era, 1933–42.

<sup>182</sup> While the costs of Job Corps are fairly high, estimated by previous research to exceed \$23,500 per person annually, the benefits are even higher, estimated conservatively to equal \$27,000 per participant. Pollack, *Full Employment for the Young, Too*, 2017; US General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office, or GAO), *Job Corps*, 1986; McConnell and Glazerman, *National Job Corps Study*, 2001. Notably, evidence for the effectiveness of less intensive interventions such as youth summer programs is generally mixed or insufficient; Pollack, *Full Employment for the Young, Too*, 2017.

<sup>183</sup> Aizer et al., “Do Youth Employment Programs Work?,” 2020.

<sup>184</sup> The Biden-Harris administration requested from Congress \$3.7 billion for WIOA programs for FY2022, a 6 percent increase from FY2021; Young, “President’s Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Discretionary Funding,” 2021.

<sup>185</sup> The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 included \$620 billion for the AmeriCorps State and National programs and an additional \$80 million for the AmeriCorps VISTA program.

<sup>186</sup> The Biden-Harris administration has requested \$285 million from Congress to expand registered apprenticeships, a \$100 million increase from FY2021; Young, “President’s Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Discretionary Funding,” 2021.

<sup>175</sup> Goldrick-Rab, “High School Wasn’t Always Free,” 2016.

<sup>176</sup> Carnevale et al., *The Dollars and Sense of Free College*, 2020.

independence and to contribute their energy, inquisitiveness, and initiative to addressing current problems is imperative not just for their well-being but also for the dynamism of the national economy. The unraveling of youth policy has exacerbated the economic obstacles young people face by weakening social safety nets at a time of successive economic downturns. A modernized youth policy centered on an all-one-system

approach would help mend the holes in the system so all young Americans have their best chance at success. These systemic changes will require collective imagination and political will. Otherwise, the patchwork quilt of youth policy is likely to continue fraying at the seams—with dire consequences for young people, particularly the most vulnerable young Americans.

## Prescriptions for Reform

### 1 We need to invest in education and plant the seeds for labor-market success, beginning at birth.

Early childhood education sets the developmental stage for everything that comes after it. Kindergarten is too late to intervene and ensure that all children have a chance to reach their full potential. We need to provide high-quality, equitably funded, universal pre-kindergarten to interrupt patterns of inequality as early as possible. The recently enacted American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 made progress toward addressing this need with funding for Head Start and childcare, but larger investments are needed.<sup>187</sup> The proposed Build Back Better Act acknowledges this continued need by seeking to establish high-quality universal

preschool, along with a new childcare and early-learning entitlement program that would provide services to children from low-income households from birth through age five.<sup>188</sup>

In conjunction with reforms to early educational funding and policy, we also need to ensure that families have the resources to support their young children, including affordable and accessible childcare, adequate family and medical leave, and family-sustaining wages. Adequate support for children and families beginning at birth sets children up for success as they move through the K–12 system and toward postsecondary education or the workforce. The child tax credit included in the American Rescue Plan Act—which earmarked \$3,000 for children ages 6 to 17 and \$3,600 for children under the age of 6 for families with

<sup>187</sup> The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 allocated \$1 billion to Head Start and nearly \$15 billion to Child Care and Development Block Grants for states to provide childcare assistance to essential workers.

<sup>188</sup> House Committee on Education and Labor, “Build Back Better Act: Education and Labor Committee Print,” 2021; Build Back Better Act, H.R. 5376, 2021.

incomes under \$150,000<sup>189</sup>—was a first step toward providing families with the support they need. Additional action will be necessary to make these programs permanent, however. Comprehensive paid family and medical leave would also enhance the financial stability of families with children.<sup>190</sup>

### 2 We need to imbue inclusive and culturally responsive approaches across our education and workforce systems to improve the experiences of youth from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Approaches like the positive youth development model recognize the importance of the psychosocial and cultural elements of identity formation and emphasize the potential for positive outcomes. By engaging with their communities and peer groups beginning in adolescence and continuing through early adulthood and beyond, young people can acquire the personal and professional competencies that will help them succeed as adults.<sup>191</sup>

For youth from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, exposure to role models with whom they share social identities in educational and professional settings is critical to positive self-development and identity formation. To strengthen opportunities for all young people to build such relationships, we need to ensure that the teaching, training,

and counseling workforces better reflect the student body. We need to provide professionals in these fields with training in culturally responsive teaching<sup>192</sup> and counseling. We also need to promote engagement with communities that can connect young people with role models and imbue them with a sense of purpose in their pursuits.

Reforms in these areas would represent key investments in strong relationships between students and caring professionals. Current policy proposals recognize the importance of such investments. The Build Back Better Act seeks to strengthen the support network for students through “Grow Your Own Programs” grants, which would aim to address shortages of teachers and administrators in high-need schools and subjects and to increase diversity in these professions.<sup>193</sup>

### 3 From kindergarten through college, we need to recognize and build on the complementarity among classroom learning, occupational exploration, and work-based learning.

Beginning in elementary school and continuing through middle school, students should have ample opportunities to explore a wide range of occupations through field trips, career days, and other educational activities. In high school and college, students should be exposed to various forms of work-based learning, including internships, work-study programs,

<sup>189</sup> American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, 2021.

<sup>190</sup> Four weeks of paid family and medical leave are included in the House version of the Build Back Better Act. It remains uncertain whether this provision or the bill will be enacted by Congress.

<sup>191</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth*, 2018; Arnold, “Supporting Adolescent Exploration and Commitment,” 2017.

<sup>192</sup> Muñiz, “Culturally Responsive Teaching,” 2019.

<sup>193</sup> Build Back Better Act, H.R. 5376, 2021.

apprenticeships, and cooperative education. Paying young people for their participation in internships and other intensive work-based learning opportunities helps ensure that low-income students can participate in valuable professional development opportunities.<sup>194</sup> The Department of Education should encourage the use of Federal Work-Study funds to pay low-income students who participate in internships related to academic programs that could otherwise be unpaid under the Department of Labor’s guidance.<sup>195</sup>

K–12 school systems in all states should take seriously the responsibility of ensuring that all students are college- and career-ready. State courts should hold policymakers and school system administrators accountable for providing adequate funding to all schools, including those in low-income neighborhoods with large shares of students from traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. State Longitudinal Data Systems make it possible to clearly establish whether states are living up to the commitment to equitable educational opportunity that is articulated in many state constitutions and statutes.

In the postsecondary system, work-based learning programs should parallel fields of study. In addition, both high schools and postsecondary institutions should offer credit-bearing career-preparation courses that allow individual students

to formulate their own data-informed plans for their education and career pathways.

The Build Back Better Act plans to expand work-based learning by increasing funding for registered apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships, Job Corps, YouthBuild, AmeriCorps, and Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Activities programs.<sup>196</sup>

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#### **4 We need to continue to break down the artificial barriers between secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and labor markets.**

Practices like dual enrollment—including early-college high school and dual-credit programs—let young people start their postsecondary education before they even leave high school. These programs have been found to enhance college access, enrollment, and completion, as well as academic achievement in high school.<sup>197</sup> Recognizing the effectiveness of models that connect high school and college, some policymakers have proposed allowing Pell Grants to be used for dual-enrollment programs. They have also proposed investing in partnerships among high schools, community colleges, and employers that would allow high school students to graduate with an industry-recognized credential that offers access to a good job and

opportunities to pursue continued education and training.<sup>198</sup>

To discourage tracking in postsecondary institutions, we also need to build bridges that better connect public community colleges and public four-year institutions. The Build Back Better Act calls for states to develop and implement transfer pathway plans that include the following: assurance that students who earn associate’s degrees from community colleges will receive full credit for the first two years of related bachelor’s degree programs at public four-year colleges and universities, improved transferability of individual courses taken at community colleges, expanded policies supporting reverse transfer,<sup>199</sup> and access to comprehensive counseling and support to facilitate transfer from two-year to four-year colleges and universities.

These changes would be a good start, but policymakers should go further. To encourage transfer, all public four-year colleges should enroll at least 20 percent of their junior-year cohort as transfers from community colleges. In addition, community colleges should be allowed to grant bachelor’s degrees, especially in fields tied to local and regional labor markets, as is already done in 24 states.<sup>200</sup>

Finally, we need to strengthen the connections between education and training. While short-term training cannot substitute for comprehensive educational programs that have a rich mix of general and specific education, it can nonetheless boost the employment prospects of adults seeking an upskilling program requiring smaller investments of time and money. The federal government should provide funding for short-term training to low-income young adults, similar to Pell Grants provided for educational programs, as long as the covered programs follow clear standards of transparency and accountability that include completion and earning metrics. These short-term training programs should also create pathways to additional education for those who wish to pursue it.

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#### **5 We need free college to help low-income students access postsecondary education.**

College affordability is another barrier for students transitioning to postsecondary education. The average price tag for undergraduate education, including tuition, fees, room, and board, has increased by 169 percent since 1980.<sup>201</sup> A free-college program would send students and parents a clear message that they don’t have to worry about

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<sup>194</sup> This is especially important because low-income students are more likely than high-income students to work in jobs unrelated to their fields of study. Carnevale and Smith, *Balancing Work and Learning*, 2018.

<sup>195</sup> US Department of Labor, “Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act,” 2018.

<sup>196</sup> House Committee on Education and Labor, “*Build Back Better Act*: Education and Labor Committee Print,” 2021; Build Back Better Act, H.R. 5376, 2021.

<sup>197</sup> US Department of Education, *Dual Enrollment Programs*, 2017.

<sup>198</sup> The Biden-Harris Campaign endorsed such partnerships and supported the use of Pell Grants for dual-enrollment programs in 2020. In addition, it proposed a new competitive grant program for low-income communities and communities of color to incentivize reinvention of the high school experience to meet the demands of the modern economy. Biden-Harris Campaign, “The Biden Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future,” 2020.

<sup>199</sup> Reverse transfer involves applying credits earned at four-year institutions toward degrees and certificates from two-year institutions.

<sup>200</sup> Meza, “Overcoming the ‘Opportunity Mirage’ with Community College Baccalaureate Degrees,” 2021.

<sup>201</sup> The college costs used in this analysis include average undergraduate tuition and fees, room, and board at all institutions in constant 2018–19 dollars for academic years 1979–80 through 2018–19; Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 330.10, 2019.

affordability.<sup>202</sup> A first-dollar free community college program was originally proposed for inclusion in the Build Back Better Act but was dropped during Congressional negotiations.<sup>203</sup>

If free community college were to become national policy in the future, it would mark a major milestone in efforts to make college more accessible. However, it would deepen the imperative to confront the race, class, and gender tracking that continues in our postsecondary education system.<sup>204</sup>

While neither free community college nor a broader plan for free college would independently change the separate and unequal dynamics of American higher education, offering a tuition-free option only to those at community colleges could accentuate existing educational inequalities. Low-income students and students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds often attend poorly resourced K–12 schools due to residential segregation. At the postsecondary level, they are concentrated in two-year colleges, while affluent White students are concentrated in selective four-year colleges and universities.<sup>205</sup> A free community college program would risk further solidifying this pattern unless it is combined with strong wraparound support services, robust transfer pathways, and additional supports to aid bachelor's degree attainment for traditionally underrepresented students.

## **6 We need to create a career counseling system that provides the information and mentorship that students need to plan and pursue their educational and career goals.**

In a society like ours—in which race, class, and gender profoundly influence young people's pathways to adulthood—we need counseling, mentoring, and work-based learning that expand young people's horizons beyond their previous experiences and their personal networks beyond their existing social connections.

Positive developmental relationships between young people and adult role models who can connect them to opportunities and mentorship are a key ingredient in successful youth programs.<sup>206</sup> We need to make sure that all youth programs foster these relationships with culturally responsive program staff and community members who reflect and understand young people's social identities and experiences.

The missing link in the education-to-work transition is career counseling provided by professionally certified career counselors. It should begin in middle school and be accompanied by comprehensive student services. Such counseling should be provided by professionals whose duty is to serve the best interests of the students rather than the institutions where they work, similar to the

professional responsibility that doctors owe their patients rather than the hospitals at which they practice. These counselors will need the expertise to provide reliable information and the interpersonal skills to gain the trust of the young people they advise. They will also need the training necessary to interrupt systemic racial biases as they help students make informed choices about their futures.

Community schools offer one promising model for comprehensive support services. These schools bring together students, families, teachers, and community organizations to identify families' unmet needs and provide wraparound services to address them.<sup>207</sup>

## **7 We need transparency, accountability, and coordination in evaluating, regulating, and administering postsecondary education and workforce training programs.**

All publicly funded postsecondary education and training programs should be transparent about completion rates and the earnings of program completers. Years of investments in State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) have resulted in significant infrastructure at the state level to support such transparency and accountability. In addition, the US Department of Education's College Scorecard continues to expand the data that are publicly available.

Information alone is not sufficient to regulate the marketplace, however. Gainful employment regulations should apply to programs that are narrowly designed to prepare students for work in a specific occupation or field. Information about program outcomes also should be used when advising students and coordinating initiatives involving K–12 schools, employers, and higher education stakeholders. This will help ensure that the data are translated into continuous improvements that enhance students' chances for success.

We should unify federal workforce education and training policy by coordinating and combining efforts led by the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and those led by the US Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education.

## **8 To the extent possible, we need to involve employers in developing and providing work-based education.**

Successfully connecting education to the workforce requires collaboration with the people who best understand the demands of the labor market—employers. Unlike the European apprenticeship systems that are administered jointly by governments, educators, unions, and employers, the American education system has had limited direct employer involvement.<sup>208</sup> At the same

<sup>202</sup> For more on the costs and benefits of free-college programs and President Biden's free-college plan, see Carnevale et al., *The Dollars and Sense of Free College*, 2020.

<sup>203</sup> Nadworny, "White House Drops Free Community College from Its Spending Bill," 2021.

<sup>204</sup> Carnevale and Strohl, *Separate and Unequal*, 2013; Carnevale et al., *Our Separate and Unequal Public Colleges*, 2018; Carnevale et al., *The Merit Myth*, 2020.

<sup>205</sup> Carnevale and Strohl, *Separate and Unequal*, 2013; Carnevale et al., *Our Separate and Unequal Public Colleges*, 2018; Carnevale et al., *The Merit Myth*, 2020.

<sup>206</sup> Ross et al., *Work-Based Learning Can Advance Equity and Opportunity for America's Young People*, 2020.

<sup>207</sup> President Biden's Budget for FY2022 includes \$443 million for full-service community schools; Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the U.S. Government*, 2021. During his 2020 campaign, President Biden proposed expanding community schools to enable them to serve an additional 300,000 students; Biden-Harris Campaign, "The Biden Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future," 2020.

<sup>208</sup> While the United States does not have an extensive European-style apprenticeship system, policymakers have recently shown increased interest in expanding the American Registered Apprenticeship Program. For example, in the American Jobs Plan, the Biden-Harris administration called for creating 1 to 2 million new registered apprenticeships and improving the apprenticeship pipeline to offer more access to women and members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. White House, "Fact Sheet: The American Jobs Plan," 2021.

time, employer involvement is extremely valuable today for helping young adults apply their learning from school and college to the workplace as they develop additional occupational skills. Stakeholders generally acknowledge the need for employer involvement, but there is never enough of it to go around, and employers can be fickle in their commitments to training the future workforce.

Nonetheless, models like the **National Academy Foundation**, the **Pathways to**

**Prosperity Network**, **P-Tech**, the **Urban Alliance**, **Genesys Works**, and **Per Scholas** suggest that there is room for growth in the amount of employer involvement in education in the United States.

With these changes, we can start building a comprehensive system that will ensure broad access to smooth pathways from youth to adulthood. The time is right to build the new modern networks necessary to prepare the next generation for success in the 21st century.

*Note: These recommendations originally appeared in Carnevale et al., If Not Now, When?, 2021.*

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