



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE OFFICEHOLDERS

From: The JAG *National Thought Leader Event*

“SETTING THE NEXT AGENDA FOR AT-RISK YOUTH”

EDUCATION AND JOB SUCCESS

BACKGROUND

Over the past four years, five “*National Thought Leader Events*” have been convened by a unique group of organizations with decades of experience in working to find *solutions* – both academic and economic – for high-risk youth.

The **National Urban League**, the **National Council of La Raza**, the **Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute**, the **Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies**, and the **Congressional Black Caucus Foundation** have joined with Jobs for America's Graduates in the development of a series of intensive working events to identify solutions “*proven to work, at scale and over time.*” These solutions offer legislative, programmatic, and administrative guidance to State and federal officeholders to meet one of the most intractable challenges that have faced the American economy and society – the great disparities of economic and academic success for at-risk youth, and especially for high-risk minority youth.

Organized into a series of intensive working sessions, through Panels and Roundtables, the *National Thought Leader Events* have each assembled 100 experts drawn from the public and private sectors. These leaders have demonstrated consistent expertise and proven success in overcoming the barriers that lead to academic and economic success for minority youth.

The events have featured Cabinet officers from the Obama Administration (Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack), leaders from the White House Domestic Policy Council, leaders from the Congress (including key staff and Members from both the House and Senate), Governors, Chief State School Officers, various State Cabinet-level individuals, and leaders from major state legislatures.

The recommendations were developed at a time of far more demanding high school graduation and college attainment requirements, and the worst unemployment among youth in American history. In addition, by far, the greatest impact of the recession has been on economically disadvantaged youth, especially minority youth. The following recommendations are the “bottom line” proceeds of those events, with all of that expertise and experience.

We hope that these recommendations will serve to provide important guidance to federal policy makers on what can be done – *NOW* – strategies that have proven to dramatically improve academic and economic outcomes for high-risk youth in general and high-risk minority youth in particular.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

From the research and work that was done, there were several important fundamental conclusions that serve as the foundation for the recommendations:

1. ***We do know what works*** in boosting academic and economic outcomes for high-risk minority youth. Nine different national programs were identified as examples that meet the demanding test of “proven at scale, over time, with independent research.” We also highlighted other programs showing great promise that have not yet been tested at scale and over a lengthy period of time.
2. Given the proven success of many programs (specifically including Jobs for America's Graduates), **there is a great sense of urgency to provide officeholders with a set of cost-effective recommendations in which they can have the highest level of confidence for success**, of course assuming effective execution.
3. **Real and long-term success almost always calls for strong leadership**, *sustained* commitment to a proven course of action, and real and meaningful coordination among multiple agencies. Repeatedly at the **Thought Leader Events** came the phrase “*Break down the silos*” in government that so often become major barriers to success.
4. **States play the central role in providing the legislative, administrative, and programmatic solutions for youth**. That is where most of the money flows and is invested in specific employment strategies. That is where real coordination and successful execution on the ground occurs in concert with local workforce, education, and community organizations. Therefore, the real hope for decisive and long-term change in academic and economic success for high-risk youth lies with the states. Fortunately, that is where most of the proven solutions have been taken to scale over time with sustained success. However, the Federal government can and does provide very important leadership and evaluations that states respond to and follow.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS: *HOW TO TAKE TO SCALE WHAT WORKS WITH HIGH-RISK YOUTH THROUGH POLICY AND FUNDING*

The following are the core recommendations for the consideration of policy makers, philanthropies, and service providers to young people:

1. **Remove the agency silos of funding, and re-prioritize the funding to focus on those strategies that have been proven to work, at scale and over time, to meet overall State goals**. Often politically difficult, the fact remains that if **existing** resources were reprioritized and focused directly and consistently on **the** most proven academic and economic success strategies, then major, sustained improvements and achievements are almost certain. This recommendation applies to the Congress, State Legislatures, the Federal Administration, and Governors.
2. **Set tough, demanding standards and criteria for success for public education and employment and training investments**. By setting demanding criteria for success, policy makers will draw attention and priority to those strategies and programs that meet or exceed tough and demanding criteria by

local school systems, Workforce Investment Boards, and the full range of service providers receiving governmental funding for high-risk minority youth. Again, there is compelling evidence that it can be done – setting high standards and demanding criteria will result, over time, in far better success rates.

3. **Hold people, organizations, and agencies accountable for outcomes.** The corollary to setting tough and demanding standards is to hold those who deliver services accountable against easily measurable process and outcome standards, whether it is school districts, Workforce Investment Boards, non-profit intermediaries, or for-profit deliverers.
4. **Invest, engage, and intervene early.** The evidence is also compelling that early interventions that are **sustained** – including at grade school and middle school levels – are often the least expensive with the highest impact, prevention being always more successful than remediation. Middle schools, for example, were noted as a key "point of no return" in which far too many young people are "lost" in their chances for academic and, ultimately, economic success.
5. **Embed "what works" into core funding formulas tied to clear metrics at the State level to assure consistency and sustainability.** Representatives of the State of Maine highlighted a strategy of embedding specific programmatic required elements that work within the state education funding formulas. This strategy resulted in consistent and sustained improvement in educational outcomes and, in effect, broke down the silos while also concentrating resources on what works.
6. **Simple engagement of young people is undervalued. It offers, potentially, one of the highest returns in improved success at the lowest cost.** The evidence across the spectrum of the programs proven to work is that a central ingredient of success is the *engagement* of young people early and often. That includes organizing classrooms and learning activities in a more engaged and interactive fashion and providing opportunities for more young people to "belong" to something consistently. Such engagement opportunities encourage and enhance their school experience and build self-esteem.
7. **The private sector can play a highly influential and, in many cases, decisive role by joining in the demand for improved outcomes, the setting of tough and demanding criteria, and accountability. It is important to note that the private sector can also be *the example* by taking on the difficult task of shifting its philanthropic and organizational investments and concentrating them on "what works."** Examples were cited of corporations and philanthropies prioritizing such strategies.

The following specific recommendations from the *National Thought Leader Events* are broken down into three categories:

1. **Administrative** – Actions that can be taken by Governors, state legislatures, or other State-level officeholders that have **proven** to lead to sustained improvements in academic and economic achievement.
2. **Legislative** – Legislative actions that have also proven to create the environment and foster the capacities and direction for success and to create specific processes, programs, and systems that lead to success.
3. **Programmatic** – This section refers to specific programmatic delivery systems that have consistently demonstrated large-scale impacts on academic and economic achievement for high-risk youth in general and minority youth in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. **Administrative Actions by the Executive Branch at the State Level**

- A. **Creation of a Governor's Youth Cabinet.** A consistently important ingredient to long-term success has been the ability of state and local governmental agencies to *coordinate their resources and break down the silos* to provide **the** most effective comprehensive set of services that, in general, have proven to be vital to sustained academic and economic success for youth. Multiple agencies at the state and local levels provide financial and organizational assistance to youth. Creating – and enforcing – effective coordination of these multiple assets and resources, especially at a time when both are and will be limited for the foreseeable future, can be a central ingredient in a strategy that leads to real change in academic and economic outcomes for high-risk youth.
- B. **Governor's Conference on Youth Employment.** Given the extraordinary multiple impacts of high teenage unemployment, especially among the most at-risk youth, affecting so many educational, economic, and social conditions in the state, it is recommended that **Governors convene a special Conference on Strategies for Youth Employment.**
- C. **Create a Strategic and Tactical Plan for Academic and Economic Solutions for Youth.** It is very important to create a strategic and tactical plan for the duration of the term in office. It is also important to establish specific accountable and measurable goals for boosting academic and economic achievement for high-risk youth in general and minority youth in particular. Assignments should be given within the plan for the roles of specific agencies and an overall individual or agency organization held accountable for results. The key is to set goals and measure progress across the agency silos.

It is recommended that the **key goals be set and the Conference be focused on strategies that have been proven to work in reducing youth unemployment**, especially among the most at-risk. It would be very important to have major employer leadership and participation in designing and conducting the Conference and working sessions to identify those preparation, training, credentialing, and other support activities that could expand employment among youth by employers who typically do hire young people. Part of the strategy development should also focus on internships and other techniques to give young people work experience. It is recommended that the public and private sectors, Career and Technical Education systems, state agencies that are focused on education and labor in particular, and appropriate county and city government leaders should all be part of the preparation for the event, along with major employers of youth and large and small business organizations, foundations, and non-profit leaders to help assure the full range of employer and private sector support. Of course, good preparation will be important in identifying those strategies that have been proven to work in the state and elsewhere, the barriers to taking those strategies to scale, and the identification of key issues in hiring and retaining youth (from the perspective of the private sector), in order to make the conference itself as valuable as possible.

II. **Legislative Actions at the State Level**

Similar to the above, legislators can organize events, hearings, and legislation to establish a set of very specific measurable goals for boosting academic and economic achievement for high-risk youth. It is suggested that Reports on progress be required every six months, both orally via

hearings and in written reports. It is very important these goals be taken seriously and monitored regularly, with strong legislative oversight.

An important example cited from Maine is where the state **embedded** in the general education funding formula **required** specific programmatic elements "that work focused on at-risk youth," resulting in consistent scale and sustained improvement in educational outcomes. This, in effect, helps to break down the silos while also concentrating resources on what works.

III. ***Programmatic Actions at the State Level***

A. The following are programmatic solutions that have been "proven to work, at scale, over time, with independent research" identified by the research related to this event. In short, each has stood the test of time and has proven itself consistently able to boost academic or economic achievement – or both.

- **College Summit**
- **Project GRAD**
- **Talent Development High School Model**
- **Talent Search**
- **Career Academies**
- **Job Corps**
- **National Urban League / Urban Youth Empowerment Program**
- **YouthBuild**
- **Jobs for America's Graduates**

B. **Information regarding current and projected near-term availability of jobs in the state should be collected and disseminated** to government agencies (state and local), non-profit, and for-profit employment training organizations, Career and Technical Education systems, and others. This can help to more consistently re-direct training and job preparation programs toward those jobs that exist today – and are most likely to exist in the future. Any additional data on the required skills/credentials for those positions would add further to the ability of the employment and training system to re-direct resources and find ways to fill existing and anticipated future jobs.

C. **Career assessments have been identified as having great value in helping young people and their teachers/instructors** gain a better sense of the kinds of jobs they would be good at, and for which they should carry out their training activities, assuming the labor market demand for such jobs can be identified.

SUMMARY

Jobs for America's Graduates, along with its Co-Hosts and individual leaders from State government at every level who have participated in this work, stand ready to work with State-level teams in the design of and support for the implementation and execution of the strategies.