Education At a YouthBuild Program

YouthBuild

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Introduction

YouthBuild Education Philosophy

The United States Department of Labor (DOL) believes that re-engaging youth in innovative alternative education environments that are designed to help them succeed, such as the ones exemplified in well-run YouthBuild programs, is critically important.

For the education component at a YouthBuild program, the most basic requirements are to:

- offer an education program that comprises at least 50 percent of the overall YouthBuild curriculum
- design educational services and activities that provide:
  - basic skills instruction and acceleration to attain a GED or high school diploma
  - bilingual education for individuals with limited English proficiency
  - counseling and assistance in attaining post-secondary education and financial aid

To ensure young people develop a range of skills within a comprehensive structure, all DOL-funded YouthBuild programs must contain five basic components:

- **Education** to acquire literacy and numeracy gains, GED or high school diploma, industry-recognized certificates, and preparation for post-secondary career and education placements and completion
- **Construction** that provides on-site skills training through well-supervised housing rehabilitation or construction work and leads to industry-recognized credentials for young people
- **Counseling and Case Management** to assist students in setting and achieving their goals
- **Leadership Development** through program decision-making, responsible leadership roles, and the study of how to improve the community
- **Transition Services for Graduate Success**, including college and career counseling leading to placement in education or employment and post-graduation follow-up to support retention and completion in these placements

As in all youth development programs, these program components must be led by caring and competent staff, and coordinated by a full-time Program Director. The components should be well integrated through intentional program design, operational policies, staff training, and coordination. Research has shown that combining these components with fidelity to the YouthBuild philosophy of profound respect for the intelligence and value of every student and the building of a caring community of peers and adults committed to each other's success produces a reliable context for personal transformation and generates high outcomes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Read more information on the qualities of a successful YouthBuild program at YouthBuild Program Design and Performance Standards.

Understanding the important role education plays in the ultimate success of young people, the Department of Labor recommends that programs build upon the YouthBuild Final Rule and implement the following key elements:

- experiential and project-based learning which creatively and practically challenge YouthBuild participants and keep them engaged in their own learning
- a multi-faceted student portfolio program to help young people demonstrate their academic and work-based skills
- regular standardized academic testing every three months, starting with from student orientation or "Mental Toughness"
- a strong post-secondary education component that is a core part of the education program

The YouthBuild education model exemplifies many of John Dewey's principles of teaching and learning. For Dewey, the purpose of education was not just the acquisition of a pre-determined set of skills but also each student's realizing his/her full potential and the ability to use those skills for the greater good. This is the fundamental principle that drives the education component at all YouthBuild programs.

Broadly speaking, a well-run and successful education program should achieve the following broad goals:

- enable YouthBuild students to pursue their formal education toward whatever goals they set
- encourage students to embrace the idea that learning extends beyond the classroom and is a life-long process of self-transformation and renewal
- prepare young people with leadership skills and commitment to become permanently engaged in community development and civic life
- help students develop critical thinking skills to address personal and community challenges creatively
- ensure YouthBuild students become economically self-sufficient

In order to achieve these goals, successful YouthBuild programs have:

- built a safe and positive community of peers and adults engaged in one another's success
- provided individualized and caring attention to serve each student
- established high expectations for students and teachers
- focused on a core academic curriculum
- created relevant and tangible service experiences linked to student learning
- involved youth in leadership opportunities
- made resources and opportunities available to students after graduation

The goals and principles of the education component ensure that young people at YouthBuild programs experience education as a social and interactive process.

Program Integration

Because YouthBuild programs integrate education with youth development, community development, and career development, they create opportunities for young people to attain educational and career success as well as transform their lives. Students not only have opportunities to interact with the curriculum, relate information to their own experiences, and take part in their own learning, they are able to apply these skills in the job training and civic engagement components of the program. Construction training allows students to assume an immediately productive role in their community by building affordable housing. Through the leadership development component, they become more civically engaged citizens. This makes their educational experience at YouthBuild vastly different from their past experiences.

But YouthBuild teachers cannot provide this experience alone. The learning is most effective when all program elements and staff work together, each reinforcing and supporting the work of the others and all working together towards a set of common goals and expectations for students. The process of setting common goals requires work and multiple conversations between all program staff, since their core beliefs about student success must be aligned and shared. Once the consensus is reached, the consistency of goals and expectations will make for a smoothly operating program that runs more easily for all staff. For example, if the academic component supports the construction training element and vice versa, and both sets of staff hold students to the same behavior and expectations then all staff are pulling in the same direction and synchronizing their messaging. Similarly, the elements of job readiness, youth leadership, and counseling/case management should support and reinforce the academic construction training parts of the program, with all staff presenting a shared vision of program goals and expectations. For program integration to be successful, these goals should include measurable objectives and competencies that are openly shared with students and consistently communicated by all staff.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on program integration is available in Chapter 5 of the YouthBuild Program Manual: Getting Started As a New DOL YouthBuild Program.

Building a Data-Informed Culture for Continuous Program Improvement

Collecting and using data provide the most effective ways of determining whether the program's objectives are being achieved. Data provides the tools to support Program Directors and staff's passion for seeing their students succeed at improving their lives. Rather than simply a reporting requirement, data should become a tool for staff to tell the story of their young people's success to all stakeholders in the community, including funders, policy makers, donors, partners and especially the young people themselves.

A data-informed culture in which all staff use data effectively to measure student progress, guide the development of curriculum, determine allocation of resources, and report program outcomes has a profound impact on student outcomes. Creating such a data-informed culture at a YouthBuild program involves the following actions by the Program Director and leadership:

- articulating a clear vision for data use and modeling the process of using data to inform decisions
- making data accessible to all staff and encouraging them to use it to understand daily and weekly successes and challenges
- involving all levels of the organization, providing adequate training in data use, and providing the time and opportunities for staff come together to discuss and analyze data at regular intervals – a culture of collaboration that will help to sustain data use over time.
- using student centered data to inform continuous instructional improvement and individualized teaching strategies
- sharing data with students in ways that clarify for them where they are doing well and where they need to try harder to achieve their own goals. (This way of using data will help students see its benefits and give them concrete targets towards which to strive. It will also dispel the notion that data are used primarily as a means to reach funded targets since students can sometimes persuade themselves that staff care more about reaching funders' targets than about helping them.)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on building a data-informed program culture is contained in Chapter 1 of the YouthBuild Program Manual: Getting Started As a New DOL YouthBuild Program.

The Role of Program Directors and Staff in Ensuring Success

Running an effective, creative, and innovative alternative school for students who carry with them a history of having been failed by schools represents hard work. Program directors play an essential role in this process by creating a school climate that empowers instructors to show that they care about the learning of each student while implementing effective teaching strategies and engaging students in their own learning. Since Program Directors are in charge of recruiting and retaining staff, setting the overall tone for the program, creating accountability structures, and managing budgets they have significant responsibility in creating the conditions for success in the educational component of the program.

Staff need not only excellent education credentials and practical experience but also a natural affinity for the YouthBuild education philosophy, and a deep familiarity with and respect for the students' cultural and social backgrounds. Teachers at YouthBuild are more than instructors; they are also counselors and career advisors who work with young people in a more intense and personal manner. Teachers should be prepared to use a range of teaching methodologies that reach different learning styles as well as to focus on academic content and learning-to-learn strategies, time management, critical thinking and study skills in order to prepare students for life after YouthBuild.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about specific strategies that Program Directors and staff can use to create a strong learning environment, see Chapter 5 of this manual.

YouthBuild Student Experiences

YouthBuild students unequivocally acknowledge the positive impact of the YouthBuild approach on their ability to achieve educational success. The unique educational experience inspires many young people to persist towards their educational goals. In fact, the YouthBuild experience motivates many students to aspire beyond the goals and expectations they set for themselves. When discussing their success, YouthBuild students and graduates attribute their success to key elements of the YouthBuild education model.

Safe and Positive Community

"I didn't know how to read well. My class didn't laugh at me. If I had been in a regular school, they would've laughed at me. If I got a word wrong, they helped me. And now, I know how to read. It's a miracle! I love YouthBuild."

"YouthBuild put into my head that I can do something with my life. They made me feel wanted. They made me feel important."

"YouthBuild is a place where we know we are welcome and we know there's knowledge waiting for us."

Individualized Attention

"The difference between high school and YouthBuild is that they sit down with you one-on-one or take you aside to teach you things. In high school, it was different. You had 20 to 30 students in a classroom and they don't care."

"The number one thing about YouthBuild that allowed me to transform my life was the dedicated teachers."

Engaging Students in the Learning Process

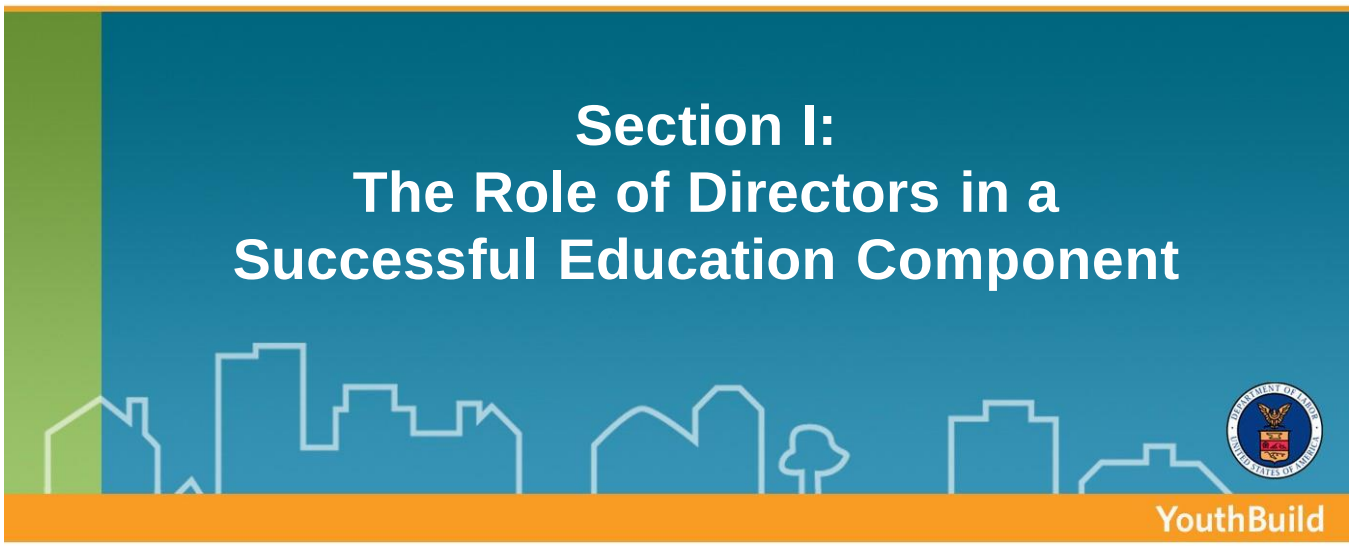
"I know YouthBuild works because it's a different method to learning. It's not about what you have to do. It's about whether you want to better your life."

"I wanted to go back to school. I just didn't know how. So, this program really helped me a lot."

High Expectations

"I got my first acceptance letter. I brought it back to school. I had to show off. They accepted me! I didn't even think I was going to college, at all."

"Now that I'm going to college, I can actually do what I want to do."


Section I:
The Role of Directors in a
Successful Education Component
YouthBuild

Section 1: The Role of Directors in a Successful Education Component

A successful YouthBuild Director is focused on building a strong YouthBuild Education program and employs staff members who are fully committed to the vision and mission of the program, with demonstrated passion for working with YouthBuild students to encourage their holistic growth and development. Continuous constructive feedback, professional growth opportunities, credentialing efforts, fair compensation, and other positive work conditions will promote the retention of effective staff members.

This section will provide guidance to program directors on how they can best develop and sustain a strong education component.

Vision for a Strong Education Component

The foundation of a YouthBuild education program is built on creative curriculum, engaging teaching and learning, traditional and non-traditional testing and assessment, and a lifelong learning vision for youth who may never have thought they had a future before coming to YouthBuild. YouthBuild students left traditional schools because it never made their learning experience a positive one. A good educational foundation ensures that instruction, academic design, and methodologies align with the post-secondary, career and life goals of every student; that education is integrated with the rest of the program components; and that all staff members see themselves as educators and learners responsible for encouraging a life-long love of learning in all students.

Fostering a cooperative and integrated education component with the other YouthBuild components should begin before the program year is underway. A pre-program retreat with all staff will provide an opportunity to highlight the importance of a fully integrated educational component. At this retreat, the director should not only review DOL Performance Measures but lay out the importance of the education component and to discuss staff and Director visions of student learning and success, and developing agreements that will underlie the education work of the program. This is also an opportunity to review DOL performance measures and to clarify how the education component will be structured and delivered – in both the secondary and post-secondary phase – on a daily, monthly, quarterly, and post-exit basis. A pre-program retreat should ideally be conducted with all program staff, including construction and career development staff, leaders, life skills staff and academic instructors, since all staff should see themselves as educators and should have buy-in to the overall student success goals.

Following the pre-program retreat with a post-program retreat and with regularly scheduled weekly, bi-weekly or quarterly meetings among all staff will enable the director to continually reinforce the program vision and the value of daily integration of program components. Professional development trainings on how to create, implement, and assess the initial and ongoing success of program integration should also be offered to staff.

For the program director, the following are significant components of pre-program, program, and post-secondary education.

PRE-PROGRAM PHASE

During the pre-program phase, and Mental Toughness teachers should begin to assess young people's interests, and education-related strengths and gaps. The tone can be set by having each youth participate in a writing and sharing activity where the central question is: What do you want to do when you leave YouthBuild? The writing can form the basis of a young person's individual development plan (also referred to as the life plan) and should be revisited often. This regular reflection and discussion, enables educators and other staff to link planning activities, align their goals, and address the bridge between YouthBuild, post secondary education, and students' life goals.

SECONDARY PHASE

In the secondary phase of the program, the focus should be on delivering a high quality, relevant, and engaging curriculum and on integrating education into all aspects of the program. While integration is important in content, it also extends to the culture, norms and structure of the education component.

For the integration to succeed, the program must make an explicit decision to adhere to a culture of learning that includes critical thinking, research and demonstration of skills. When this occurs in an environment where teachers and youth are engaged in an interactive cycle of teaching and learning that involves thinking, reading, writing, doing and listening, students will become engaged learners, and the program will not only see student success and outcomes improve but will also begin to see declines in disciplinary problems and increases in program attendance and retention.

Furthermore, the development of student-driven academic and professional portfolio plays an important role in linking academic and professional achievements with postsecondary and employment placement opportunities. During the secondary phase, students should also be exposed to post-secondary learning environments and college placement tests early enough in the YouthBuild experience for teachers to identify the gaps in readiness and to accelerate student learning towards placement.

POST-SECONDARY PHASE

Ensuring that all YouthBuild students understand the importance of post-secondary/career credentials is a collaborative effort between all staff. Once students articulate a plan for how education will help them achieve career and life goals, teachers, transition coordinators, and additional staff should be involved in supporting this understanding and assisting students in completing applications and documents relevant to their post-secondary goals, including financial options for students to pursue post-secondary education.

To achieve student placement success, the program director will need to establish, build, and sustain a range of meaningful partnerships which provide resources and support for students. These partnerships may include post-secondary institutions for student services, academic advising, counseling, financial aid, and dual credit opportunities; local businesses for internships, job shadows, apprenticeships and career placements; and local community organizations to support project-based and service-learning activities.

Chapter 1: Planning and Building Your Education Program

Increasingly, education is one of the key determiners of future earnings, quality of life, and even length of life.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2014, 75 percent of all new jobs in the United States will require a post-secondary credential. Data show that young people without a high school diploma or GED earn significantly less than their counterparts with a high school education or higher. As the economy shifts to a skill- and credential-based economy, the U. S. Department of Labor believes that re-engaging youth in innovative alternative education environments that are designed to help young people succeed, such as the ones exemplified in well-run YouthBuild programs, is critically important.

Given this reality, it becomes ever more crucial for Program Directors to design a strong educational component. Because many experiences in school have not been positive for YouthBuild students, a creative challenge is to develop academic programming that is innovative, engaging, relevant, and rigorous, and a program culture that is caring and respectful.

With its comprehensive approach to meeting these goals, the YouthBuild model is different from other GED, youth development, employment, and training programs. YouthBuild offers a highly individualized alternative education environment in which students have opportunities to:

- pursue a high school diploma or GED and, if needed, take remedial classes in preparation
- develop occupational skills through on-site training that can lead to an industry-recognized credential
- develop emotional intelligence, life skills, cultural literacy and a sense of themselves as leaders
- perform community service by building affordable housing for the homeless and other low-income individuals and families
- prepare for post-secondary education and certifications

The overall design and structure of the program impacts the operation of the education component; hence a number of factors need to be considered:

- allocating resources
- hiring and retaining program staff and leadership staff who have an education expertise
- creating and nurturing an organizational culture of continuous improvement and high expectations

Understanding the YouthBuild Model

Planning the education program begins with an understanding of the YouthBuild model. YouthBuild is a comprehensive model that places equal emphasis on education, job training, service, community, and leadership development. All of these parts work together to engage low-income young people in furthering their education and moving on to careers, further training, or post-secondary education. Equally important, each component of the YouthBuild model teaches young people to assume responsibility for their well-being as well as that of their families and communities.

Understanding that a solid education foundation is critical for the students' success in education and career, DOL encourages programs to build upon the elements required by the YouthBuild Final Rule by providing the following:

- **Regular standardized academic testing** should be held every three months, starting from student orientation or "Mental Toughness." The director should establish the use of one approved standardized test such as the TABE or CASAS, using the same test for pre- and post-testing.
- **Experiential and project-based learning** will creatively and practically challenge YouthBuild participants to keep them engaged in their own learning. In addition, project based learning is an excellent way to link the academic and construction elements of YouthBuild.
- **A multifaceted portfolio program** will help youth develop products that will demonstrate their academic and work-based skills. Such portfolios using multimedia formats and creative approaches, can produce multiple projects and products across core academic subject areas, as well as meet professional requirements of employer and postsecondary institutions.
- **A strong post-secondary education component** should be a part of the education program. This should include determining areas of academic and career interest, helping students see how they can access their goals through a range of post-secondary certificates and degrees, building the expectation of college attendance from day one of the program, providing regular college campus visits, offering dual credit courses while students are still at YouthBuild, deepening academic preparation (e.g. essays, curricular alignment, note-taking skills), and providing assistance in completing college application and financial aid forms. Regular standardized post-secondary placement testing options such as the COMPASS and ACCUPLACER tests are an important part of the post-secondary readiness component.

- **Appropriate physical space** in which to conduct classes is another key piece of the education component. It is recommended that the site used for educational programming:
  - be in the same building or close to the administrative offices, for ease of communication and coordination
  - be easily accessible from the construction site if at all possible (this is not always possible, particularly for rural programs), as participants must sometimes travel back and forth for counseling, meetings, and other activities
  - provide both large classroom space and space that is appropriate for and conducive to individual and small group work
  - reflect the values of respect and caring by being kept clean, bright and hospitable, and by allowing the exhibiting of student work and the explicit sharing of class schedules, curricula, learning goals, and positive values through art and posters
  - include room for vocational classroom instruction — either a corner of a large classroom with shop materials or an actual shop classroom nearby

Setting Program Goals

Setting the stage for a strong education program will begin long before the start of a program cycle. Fully understanding the goals set by DOL and by other external funders will help staff and program directors in setting interim internal goals. While it is important to meet DOL outcomes, setting additional internal "big goals" will enable staff to own the goals and paint a clear picture of what the program aims to achieve. Planning with the end in mind helps to determine the "where to go" and "how to get there" of program operations.

Interim measures can help staff track participant progress throughout the program year and may assist with identifying the need for early interventions to improve the quality of the program offered and to increase supportive services that will help students stay on track. Because these interim outcome measures are not tracked through the DOL MIS, program directors will have set up their own system for tracking them. Many programs use an Excel spreadsheet to track attendance, for example.

All program staff, not just the educational members, should play a key role in developing the internal program outcomes. They will be more motivated to achieve goals if they have a role in setting them. A good set of goals will be:

Attainable. Goals must be realistic given existing performance and within the scope of the program.
Measurable. It is important to select achievement goals that can be measured by the data being collected.
Relevant. The data team should identify goals and data points that staff can impact through continuous data use

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Community of Practice provides sample tools that can help with setting a program's goals and tracking multi-year outcomes.

It is not enough to engage staff in developing outcomes; staff should also play an active role in measuring progress towards program goals. After discussing and setting the program's performance goals for the year, staff should have a series of conversations about the strategies for reaching the goals and for collecting the data and information that will enable staff to track success toward the goals. It is important to devote regular time at staff meetings for reviewing student and program progress against these goals and to make such updates a regular part of staff meetings. Because discussions related to test scores and data can make staff feel that their success is boiled down to numbers, it is critical that the focus remains on the young people and ensuring that each student achieves positive outcomes. When couched in these terms, outcomes and measures can become motivational tools and guide the work plan for staff members.

Internal goals must be set early, preferably at the beginning of the program cycle, and limited to variables that leadership and staff can control, so that they do not spend time on aspects that are outside of the program's control. For example, staff might conclude that students are not making strong gains in literacy and numeracy because they arrive in the morning hungry and therefore cannot focus and concentrate on their work. This problem may not be within the control of the program, but staff may be able to find a creative solution in providing students a nutritious breakfast. For example, partnering with local stores that give away their food at the end of the day could result in an agreement to give the food to YouthBuild.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on leading data-focused discussions and activities with frontline staff is available at Using Data for Success, a resource created by Public/Private Ventures.

DOL Outcomes

DOL has established five performance outcomes for which all DOL YouthBuild programs are held accountable. Although all five contribute in a very meaningful way to young people's success, there are two that most directly reflect their success in education:

1. **Literacy and Numeracy Gains.** A young person's increased ability to read and compute is the foundation for the other program outcomes. Unlike the other outcomes, this one measures growth – by measuring the number of participants who were basic skills deficient at enrollment but who increase by one or more educational functioning levels in literacy or numeracy. Basic skills deficient generally means an individual is reading, writing, computing, or speaking English at or below the eighth grade level. This outcome must be achieved within one year of enrollment. For definition of an educational functioning level, one should refer to Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 17-05.

2. **Attainment of Degree or Certificate.** Attaining a high school diploma, GED, or industry-recognized credential is a stepping-stone for young people to higher education, higher earnings, and more meaningful careers. This outcome measures the number of participants who, by the end of the third quarter after exiting the program, attain a degree or skills certificate such as a GED, high school diploma, or industry-recognized occupational skills certificate. This measure does not include certificates awarded by Workforce Investment Boards, work readiness certificates, driver's licenses, CPR certificates, or OSHA certificates.

   Understanding the reality that attaining a degree or certificate is challenging, particularly for young people who enter the program significantly behind in skills, DOL allows programs to take three quarters after students exit to achieve this outcome.

   TEGL 17-05 provides a complete definition of industry-recognized occupational skills certificate.

Since the structure and design of the program impact outcomes, it is important to have an intentional program design for each of the performance outcomes. A design that has been thoughtfully planned to provide the best services for young people should also help reflect the work accomplished by program staff towards strong outcomes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- The Factors and Considerations tool in the Community of Practice will help programs set up a program design for each of the five DOL performance outcomes and become more intentional in capturing them.
- More information on building a data-informed culture in a YouthBuild program is available in Chapter 2 of this manual.

Outcomes in the DOL MIS

The program director and all staff should fully understand DOL and other funders' performance outcomes, how they are measured, and how to enter them accurately into the DOL Case Management and Performance MIS. Whether the expectations set by DOL are achieved or not is determined directly from the data entered into the DOL MIS; it is therefore important to make sure that data is entered correctly into the system.

For example, let's look at the literacy/numeracy gains outcome. First, the goal is for students who tested as basic skills deficient at entry to show a gain in the area of their deficiency (either math or literacy). Additionally, the following factors are important to know about this outcome:

- A program has only two weeks from enrollment to ensure that each student has at least one basic skills pre-test score, or the MIS will lock the youth out and prevent full enrollment at the YouthBuild program.
- Each participant's test scores can be as old as six months prior to the enrollment date.
- Individual gains in literacy or math must be achieved within one year of enrollment, so potentially, they could be achieved after the student graduates.
- The gains of students who exit unsuccessfully can be counted only if achieved before the exit date.

DOL provides many opportunities for training in the DOL MIS system, and multiple staff from each program should be trained.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information about the DOL performance measures, how they integrate with the calendar, and the factors and considerations necessary for program success, may be found in the E-Learning Series #1: Planning for Program Success.

Building a Data-Informed Culture

The Department of Labor requires YouthBuild program to closely track outcomes for each young person to ensure that YouthBuild is meeting its goal of helping young people develop their careers and take their next steps. An effective education component however, requires that programs build a data culture that extends beyond the data collected by the Department of Labor. Recognizing the critical relationship between a strong data-informed culture and positive education outcomes, the education field is adopting data culture as a critical component of an effective learning environment.

Data management is an executive function and must be led from the top. The systems the program director puts in place for managing data should be as thoroughly planned and organized as the other program systems. The program director should articulate a clear vision for data use, champion the use of data to make instructional decisions, and help staff understand and implement sound data practices. This includes creating a data culture in which program staff uses data to inform, educate and communicate with one another. Building in a regular review of educational data into interactions with all direct service staff, both as a group and individually at least once a quarter, will go a long way to implementing a strong data culture.

Students should also have regular opportunities to discuss their challenges with their teachers on a regular basis, both as part of their class work and as part of their case management with the counselors and youth advocates.

Relationship Between Data and Outcomes

A strong data management culture is a powerful tool for program management and improvement, and for telling the story of a program's success. A strong and effective data-informed culture has a profound impact on student outcomes because it helps a program director gauge whether the program is on its way to meeting the established goals for young people. Managing a program without using data is like trying to drive with a blindfold on – one cannot see where one is going, and it is unlikely that one will get there. While managing and using data effectively is one of the primary responsibilities of the Program Director, understanding, using, and talking about data should be a part of life for all staff at a YouthBuild program.

In order to impact outcomes, a strong data culture at a YouthBuild program must be supported by a vision for collecting, analyzing and using data. If at all possible, the program director working with a data team to develop the vision will yield a better-developed data system. This vision should include:

- measurable goals towards which one can use a range of data to assess progress
- a process to evaluate teaching and program practices
- a mechanism to measure whether students' needs are being met
- ways to use data to identify improvement strategies and best practices
- a process on which to base decisions, including resource allocation
- connecting the data directly to the individual students' outcomes to build buy-in from staff

Just as staff encourage young people to become lifelong students, they too must use data to engage in a continuous cycle of program improvement. This includes not only collecting a formal and informal range of data but also analyzing the data and making decisions based on the information. Some of the ways to use data effectively include:

- **Motivating students.** By analyzing data, teachers can identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Thus, they can develop individualized instruction, helping students focus on areas that need improvement. When students can see areas of strength, they feel encouraged to work on other areas. For example, after the pre-test instructors might recognize that a student is strong in reading comprehension but weak in writing. The instructor uses this to tailor classroom lessons that will give the student more opportunities to practice writing skills.
- **Sharing teaching best practices and improving teacher quality.** When reviewing data, a program director might begin to see trends – a particular teacher is able to move her students forward faster on understanding fractions, for example. The teaching strategy of that teacher can now be shared with other instructors. This ensures that the program is implementing the most effective teaching strategies and that staff have opportunities to collaborate and learn from one another. This information can also result in targeted professional development for staff – targeting specific skills that teachers struggle to teach effectively.
- **Improving curriculum development.** Data can also be used to adopt a proactive approach to curriculum design and development by making curriculum decisions that enhance student learning and strengthen teaching practices. For example, tracking data over the program cycle can reveal the effectiveness of a curriculum in improving student outcomes.

It is important to collect a range of data as well as to ensure that the data is of high quality. Data analysis is only as strong as the quality of data from which it is derived. High quality data leads to informed and trustworthy decision-making processes, which helps to create buy-in from all program staff and students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample professional development plan for using data, visit the Community of Practice.

Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes

As part of the educational improvement goal at a YouthBuild program, staff and leadership should develop meaningful questions to assess the effectiveness of the education component. Such questions, when asked within an inquiry-based culture, help staff to address essential questions about the effectiveness of the education program and the improvement students are making towards their educational goals. Below is a sample list of such questions.

- Have students learned what the program intended to teach?
- Is the curriculum appropriate for the skill level of the students?
- Are there specific teaching strategies that help students attain skills?

One of the most important measures of effectiveness is student achievement. DOL encourages YouthBuild programs to assess students, at a minimum, every three months. Whether a program follows the DOL recommendations or institutes an assessment schedule that fits their program needs, instructors should use the data to identify gaps in instruction. Students can also use data as a measure to identify areas of strength and weakness and help them prepare for the actual GED or high school diploma exit test.

A strong data-informed culture and a comprehensive assessment of a program's education component extend beyond standardized test scores. By extending data beyond numbers, programs create a data culture that is in-depth and reflective. Below is a sample list of data that can be collected:

- ongoing assessments in the classroom to check for understanding (e.g. exit tickets, journal entries, etc.)
- alternative assessments (e.g. portfolios, work samples, etc.)
- surveys of teachers and students
- teacher logs and diaries
- classroom observations

To create a strong data-informed culture, staff must be actively encouraged by program leadership to make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement. Data can be used to diagnose problems, refine educational practices, and guide decisions in the education component and collaborate across program components. For example, if student attendance is consistently low at certain times of the day, staff can identify causes and solutions.

Consider establishing a data team within the program. This team might consist of senior staff persons, teachers, and other program staff. They can help set the tone for ongoing data use in the program by working with the program director to develop a vision for data use and to model the use of data in their practice. This team can develop a plan for data use, articulate how data will be collected and used to improve student achievement, include specific actions for using data to make instructional decisions, establish deadlines for collecting data and implementing changes, and identify how each data-informed action relates to the overall program goals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample data plan, *Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes*.

Understanding and Using Standards

Learning standards, along with program goals and outcomes, can help programs design an effective education component. Standards are a broad framework of learning and instructional goals. Typically, education standards emphasize learning goals by defining the knowledge, concepts and skills students should achieve. There are two types of standards:

- Content standards state the purpose and direction for the content. Each element within the content standards defines specifically what students should know and understand.
- Performance standards define expectations of what students need to accomplish and how well they must perform to achieve or exceed the standard.

Both content and performance standards function as guiding parameters to help school administrators and teachers align resources to support curriculum development, instructional practices and assessment of student learning. Ideally, a YouthBuild program will build an education component that aligns the content and practices of YouthBuild with state education standards.

All states and the District of Columbia have learning standards for all the basic subjects including math, English, science, social studies, health and fine arts. State Departments of Education cluster standards by subject and grade level. Similarly, state Departments of Education or Departments of Labor set standards and requirements for each subject area of the GED. Whether the program offers a GED or high school diploma, the requirement and standards vary from state to state. Additionally, many states are adopting the common core standards, a set of national content standards.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To learn more about education standards in your state, visit your state Department of Education website at http://www.educationworld.com/standards/state/toc/index.shtml.
- Click to access GED requirements by state and GED Testing Services.

Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is a set of learning standards that define learning expectations, knowledge, and skills that all students should master by the end of each grade level. The main goal of the CCSS is to establish consistent learning standards across states, districts and schools that ensure that young people leaving high school are ready for college and career success. More specifically, the standards:

- align with college and work readiness expectations
- are clear, understandable, and consistent
- include rigorous content application of knowledge through high-order skills
- focus on core conceptual understandings and procedures at each grade level
- build on strengths and lessons of current state standards
- are informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society
- are evidence-based

These standards are not national standards, but rather a voluntary, coordinated effort among states to set common expectations. Currently, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted CCSS standards in math and English. The GED test is undergoing major revisions that are scheduled to be rolled out in January 2014. As part of the revision, the new GED test and requirements will place emphasis on college- and career-ready benchmarks, which will be aligned with the emerging Common Core national content standards.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on whether your state standards are aligned with the CCSS, visit your state education agency at http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states.

Planning and Curriculum Development

Whichever standards apply to an education model – state, local, Common Core, or GED – the standards will help staff to develop and deliver an appropriate curriculum. When teachers use standards to plan their instruction, they base their instructional approach on concepts and focus on helping students develop skills over time. While instructors may cover fewer topics, they are more likely to be in depth and to help students make connections between concepts. Instructors can also use the standards to develop inquiry-based teaching strategies that incorporate problem-solving skills.

When using the standards to plan, staff can think about using them in the following way:

- **What to teach?** The standards guide teachers to identify knowledge and skills that they should teach.
- **What are the needs of students?** Teachers should align their instruction to the educational needs of students. By reviewing the standards and using them to plan, teachers can match the needs of the students with the knowledge they need to gain. It helps them prioritize, organize and deliver the instructional material in a manner that addresses student needs.
- **How should the material be delivered?** Standards also help teachers choose the best instructional approach and curricular resources to utilize to meet student needs.

Professional Development

Standards can play a crucial role in developing a professional development structure. A good starting point for developing a professional development structure and setting the parameters for classroom instruction is a comprehensive review of the program's education component against the learning standards. It is also important to review it against previous student outcomes, particularly on post-program tests (e.g. AccuPlacer). Once the review is complete, program directors can carefully consider necessary changes to the content and pedagogy. Standards can also help identify student learning priorities, so that professional development can be designed to target the best practices to address student needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on building a professional development system in your program, see Chapter 2 of this manual.

Education Pathways for Students

No single achievement will affect a young person's economic future more than gaining a secondary school credential. Without it, economic sustainability is extremely challenging. Numerous studies demonstrate that the lack of a GED or diploma vastly undercuts a person's ability to succeed in the economy. Attaining a high school diploma or GED provides young people with a stepping stone to higher education, higher earnings, and more meaningful careers. In addition, the attainment of such a credential is one of the five outcomes that Department of Labor-funded programs are expected to meet.

There are many factors involved in selecting one of the two primary certificate options – the GED or the high school diploma. This decision should be based on the needs of the students as well as on the available relationships with district school systems and state chartering organizations.

GED

Most YouthBuild programs offer students the opportunity to attain their GED. Because state Departments of Education or Labor, depending on which regulates the GED in any state, set less rigid regulations for delivery systems and qualification standards for teachers in the GED program, YouthBuild programs have greater flexibility in the operation of the education component. For example, state mandated teacher qualifications are less rigid than for a diploma-granting YouthBuild program. For the most part, state education agencies define success solely by the number of students that pass the GED test, so there is also greater flexibility in choosing a curriculum.

There are clear **advantages** to offering the GED as the secondary credential option to students. These include:

Autonomy	Typically, programs offering GED instruction are not bound to fulfill local school district or educational agency requirements. This can be particularly useful in recruiting and hiring instructors. Many excellent instructors able to meet the YouthBuild values and culture may not have the specific qualifications mandated by school districts.
Creativity	Programs have greater flexibility and independence to choose the instructional design that will best prepare students for the GED.
Individualization	With an education component that offers a GED, programs can offer a highly individualized instructional approach.
Motivation	Because students can complete the GED faster, they may be more motivated to pursue a GED than a high school diploma.
Age and credit appropriateness	If students are older and lack adequate credits, the GED may be the most efficient way to move them on to post-secondary options.

There are also some **disadvantages** for programs when they offer only the GED to students, including:

Lower marketability	In most communities there is a general sense that a high school diploma has more value than a GED. Diplomas can carry the implication that students succeeded at school and also "put in the time." However, there is some debate about this perception.
Tendency to "teach to the test"	Teachers may focus solely on the skills needed to pass the GED test, rather than competencies and skills required for broader intellectual development, which can diminish the quality of education students receive. However, if programs design a strong education component with hands-on, project-based learning, incorporate critical thinking skills, and provide frequent and consistent feedback to teachers, any diminishing of quality can easily be avoided.
Lack of program integration	There may be a tendency to think that the knowledge and skills earned in the construction site do not directly apply to passing the GED test. As a result, there may be reluctance to integrate the different program components, particularly the construction component. This can be avoided by establishing a program design that emphasizes program integration.

High School Diploma

Currently, there are approximately 50 YouthBuild programs around the country that offer a high school diploma as a secondary credential. These programs operate as YouthBuild charter or alternative schools or offer diplomas through a partnership with their local school district. The transition to a diploma-granting program creates the opportunity for extensive educational program design work. However, making the decision to become a diploma-granting program and choosing the delivery mechanism for the diploma are complex and time-consuming decision. In fact, any one of those options can take multiple years.

If a program chooses to offer a high school diploma, it must align its education program to the standards set by the state or local education agency. To obtain a high school diploma, students must earn a requisite number of academic credits and pass any exit exams set by the state. Both of these provide the YouthBuild program a unique opportunity to blend state education requirements and standards with YouthBuild content and practice.

As with the GED option, offering students the option to earn their high school diploma has **advantages**. They include:

Credibility	Because local school districts have legitimacy as institutions responsible for providing education, your program might be able to recruit a larger pool of applicants, although recruitment is not generally an issue. A high school diploma could also be perceived as more legitimate than a GED, so the credentials students earn through your program may have greater credibility in the labor market
Sustainable funding	A high school diploma program might be eligible to receive funds through the school district. Depending on the program structure and state guidelines, a program could receive Average Daily Attendance (ADA) or head count funds or alternative schooling funds ranging from $6,000 to $11,000 per student annually. The exact formula for these funds varies by state and local school district. This is an enormous boon for sustainability and for the ability to expand the number of students served by the program.
Diverse funding streams and resources	Diploma granting schools may also be able to leverage additional federal, state, or local funding including specific funding for education resources such as books, classroom technology, transportation meals, special education, and facilities, among others.
Motivation	Students may be more motivated to pursue a high school diploma than a GED.
Innovation	While curriculum and instruction have to align with state education standards, programs also have greater flexibility to implement innovative, engaging and individualized instructional approaches to ensure student success. This is in part because diploma-granting programs are not constrained by a test such as the GED.
Staff hiring and professional development	Diploma-granting schools may have access to professional development for educators from the partnering school district. In order to be competitive, they also have to recruit staff at prevailing wages and benefits and this can be a potential positive influence on hiring practices at the program.
Partnership opportunities	Overall, the diploma-granting school can benefit from the opportunity to develop partnerships with local districts and state Departments of Education and with post-secondary education and training agencies.

There are also some **challenges** in offering a high school diploma, which include:

Less flexibility	To attain a high school diploma, students must earn a set number of credits. Many young people have dropped out of school after earning only a few credits. Therefore, it might be difficult for students to earn the required number of credits with in a program cycle. State education standards may also require students to take specific coursework (e.g. foreign language) or follow pre-designated systems of credit recovery. Some states allow programs such as YouthBuild to offer competency-based diplomas. These focus less on credits and number of hours in the classroom and more on achievement of competencies that are aligned to state education standards. This model may suit YouthBuild students better. For more information, visit Diploma Plus.
Age constraints	Typically, public school funding is limited for grades K-12 and for students between the ages of 5 and 21. Most YouthBuild programs enroll students who are 16 to 24 years old. A program may choose to serve the older age population but cannot use public school funding for that purpose. Check your state's policy statues on age requirements for leveraging ADA funds. It is possible and desirable to organize to change these standards, as programs in California have done, but this is a substantial investment of time and energy.
Motivation	Students may be more motivated to pursue a high school diploma than a GED.
Innovation	The program will be able to choose an appropriate curriculum and instructional practices. While these must be aligned with the state education standards, the program also has greater flexibility to implement innovative, engaging and individualized instructional approaches to ensure student success. This is in part because the program will not be constrained by a test.

Prior to deciding whether to become a diploma-granting school, it is important that the program conduct an internal assessment to ensure this change will benefit the program. Conducting an internal assessment will require the investment of a substantial amount of program and staff leadership time including the executive director (of the YouthBuild program or parent organization if the YouthBuild program is embedded within a larger organization), board members, and teachers. Funding for such a planning process may be available through a charter school planning grant from the school district or a local foundation. Regardless of whether or not the assessment leads to the decision to become a diploma granting school, the process will yield valuable information for strengthening your program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The following are sample tools to conduct the internal assessment:

- NYEC tool
- United Way Organizational Assessment Materials

Additionally, an external assessment will provide important information about:

- the local environment for charter schools, alternative schools, and public school initiatives (e.g. the level of difficulty to obtain a charter, funding sources and resources to support charter schools, etc.)
- an entity that grants and handles charters
- charter school legislation and regulations that will impact the program, which differ by state and local district (e.g. teacher certification, limitations on recruitment, credit hours vs. competency based, special education, etc.)
- recent trends on state and local school district's track record with charter schools

One dedicated staff person may be needed to keep this process moving, which would culminate in a report and presentation to the leadership team and board of directors. Since the process of becoming a diploma-granting program can take several years, the realities of the state or local school district can change in the interim. Therefore, it is important to include as much depth and background as possible on every option available to the program. It is also important to consider the report as a good baseline and to continually update the external assessment as conditions change.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a list of potential federal and state funding for YouthBuild Charter Schools, and a sample list of external elements that your program should research and understand, see here.

Once the internal and external assessments are completed, it is advisable to develop a few budget scenarios. Although the program budget may not be significantly different, public school salaries and benefits have to be factored in if the program is to be competitive in hiring credentialed staff. Additionally, the program's investment in academic education will become a larger percentage of the overall budget. Some elements to be considered are:

- school funding projection
- start-up costs
- enrollment projections
- teachers (number of teachers based on staff/student ratio requirements, salaries, and benefits)
- other staffing
- facility upgrade, compliance, and maintenance costs

Three and five year goals and budget projections for the school and YouthBuild program will provide important guidance during the decision-making process.

Programs should also consider the sequential service strategy when making the decision about which education delivery mechanism to choose.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on school budget recommendations and fiscal management, visit National Charter School Resource Center.
- For more information the sequential service strategy, please see the U.S. Department of Labor YouthBuild Final Rule.
- For more information on technical assistance on becoming a charter school, explore YouthBuild USA's National School Initiative.

Making the determination to offer a high school diploma involves a complex set of decisions that require program staff to consider carefully their goals, strategies, and available resources and to develop a plan for building organizational capacity to handle the transition and build consensus for the forthcoming changes. For some YouthBuild programs, it makes sense to offer both the diploma and GED options to students. These programs see an overall increase in GED and diploma attainment.

College and Career Readiness Skills

The ultimate success for YouthBuild students comes when they are succeeding in a career. Therefore, the education program must incorporate a strong college- and career-readiness component, regardless of which pathway is chosen.

The fundamental values of employability can be taught in every area of the program, and staff should consistently emphasize and model them. Readiness for a career or college includes more than technical skills; it includes behaviors and attitudes (soft skills) essential to securing and holding a job and/or succeeding in a post-secondary institution - skills related to interpersonal relationships and workplace behaviors, as opposed to technical knowledge needed to perform on the job. One of the most important things that all staff can do is help students master basic soft skills. Examples of soft skills include:

- clear and respectful communication
- punctuality
- working effectively on a team
- taking initiative and following through
- problem-solving and critical-thinking skills
- time management and ability to meet deadlines
- goal setting and career planning
- academic behaviors (e.g. note-taking, test-taking, reading a text-book, etc.)

Soft skills, as opposed to technical skills, are most often cited by employers as crucial for employees in entry-level jobs. In a Job Outlook 2008 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE), the top characteristics looked for in new hires by 276 employer respondents (mostly from the service sector) were all soft skills.

The SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Necessary Skills) tool developed by the U.S. Department of Labor can help teachers adapt their instruction and curricula to support the development of skills required by high-skill and high-wage employment sectors. More information on the SCANS can be found at: http://www.academicinnovations.com/report.html.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on college and career readiness, see Section III of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Education Delivery Mechanisms

YouthBuild programs have a range of options on how they will deliver the education component to students. As with choosing the type of secondary education option to offer, the educational delivery mechanism is determined in large part by the needs of students and the design and resources at the program. Most programs offer the GED through an in-house instructional component. Some programs partner with an adult basic education program, the local school district, or local community or technical colleges. For programs choosing to offer a high school diploma, partnering with the local district is also an option. In addition, programs can choose a charter school model. The following section covers the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

GED Granting Options

If a program chooses to offer the GED, it has the option to provide an in-house education program or to partner with an organization or institution that provides an adult basic education program.

In-House Education Component

Maintaining an in-house GED program helps ensure that the education component is integrated with the other components of the program. The education staff are also incorporated into the program and are part of the overall organizational culture and expectations. The YouthBuild program director and staff are able to make decisions regarding the program design, scheduling, staffing, and student assessment and will be able to control the quality of teaching and the overall instructional program. Greater flexibility to change or shape the program design and pace of delivery to meet student needs is also available. Most importantly, the program director can ensure that the teaching staff share and practice the values that form the philosophical core and spirit of a YouthBuild program.

Partnership with Adult Basic Education Programs

Some YouthBuild programs collaborate with other organizations or institutions that operate an adult basic education program. By partnering with other organizations, programs can offer a range of educational options to students and can utilize a resource that already exists in the community and thereby avoid duplicating efforts. It is a viable cost-saving mechanism. In this option, the program's education component is built on an existing educational system.

Because there is a partnership involving another organization, there are also disadvantages. Unless certain conditions are negotiated beforehand, the YouthBuild program may have limited control over important issues concerning the education component, including:

- quality of teachers, curriculum, and educational design
- structure and organization of the education component
- educational philosophy and tone that drive the education component
- YouthBuild peer cohesion because the program's students may be integrated with other students
- integration with other program components

For a comparison of GED attainment rates for programs that outsourced their education component and programs that maintained the education program in-house, see An Analysis of GED Attainment at YouthBuild AmeriCorps Programs.

If a YouthBuild program partners with a local program for the education component, it should be sure to:

- **Investigate the track record of the program.** Elements to consider in such an evaluation of the partner program include the:
  - average reading level of students at enrollment in that program
  - percentage of students that pass the GED
  - profiles of students enrolled in the partner program (if possible talk to alumni of the program)
  - stability, consistency, and quality of their teaching staff
  - philosophy of education and modality of instruction
- **Determine the willingness of the program to collaborate.** Find out if the program has worked with other agencies in the past. If it has, be sure to talk to the partnering organization. Also ask if the program would be comfortable allowing your program to participate in the teacher hiring process or allowing your program to select the teachers. Most YouthBuild programs would not recommend partnering with an organization that does not allow some control over the hiring, evaluation, and firing of teachers.
- **Discuss details.** Be clear about the need to allocate time to coordinate and collaborate with YouthBuild staff. This should happen prior to the beginning of the program cycle and on a regular and continuous basis. Also, details of supervision, evaluation, support for staff development and training, as well as funding need to be clarified. There should also be clarity regarding each organization's cost obligations and sources of funding.

Collaborating with Public Schools

Programs may also collaborate with their local school district for the GED if the system can support an innovative, flexible, and supportive approach to education. Because the school system may have staff, materials and facilities already in place, this could be an advantage to the program, particularly if it is a new program. The school may also have an existing structure to administer the GED tests. YouthBuild students may welcome the opportunity to be associated with a local high school, although there may also be resistance to being located in the physical space of the high school. The connection could also help the program gain credibility with funders and other partners.

While there are some advantages, it is important to consider the serious challenges in collaborating with the local school district. The structure and goals of the high school may differ from the values of the YouthBuild program. As a result, students may feel that their previous educational experiences are being repeated at YouthBuild. The school schedule may not align with the program cycle or, more importantly, the construction cycle. Programs staff may also have to give up control over significant elements of the education component in such a partnership.

If a YouthBuild program partners with a local school district for the education component, it should be sure to:

- **Determine the capabilities of the school.** Research the school district's attempts to bring back young adults who have dropped out of school and their success rate with these students, focusing particularly on whether the system is seeking alternative programs.
- **Highlight the benefits of the YouthBuild program.** Seek out the individual responsible for alternative education and discuss the benefits of an off-site education program (located at the program) with the possibility of pooling funding resources. Also discuss the school district's experience with other alternative education programs. If the school district does not have an alternative education coordinator, find a senior administrator who is willing to explore alternative education.
- **Find a good match with a local school.** With some school district partnerships, the program may be required to partner with a specific school. If this is the case, be sure to determine that the school has:
  - a strong teaching pool that could work with YouthBuild students
  - an innovative and creative principal who is enthusiastic about the YouthBuild model
  - an advocate with a sense of urgency who can push for policy alternatives and address roadblocks that would hinder the implementation of the YouthBuild model

Collaborating with Post-Secondary Institutions

Post-secondary institutions can be excellent collaborating partners – community colleges and technical schools can bring considerable resources while the program can help the schools fulfill their instructional mandate. Choosing this type of partnership will take a significant amount of planning and negotiating.

Many programs partner with post-secondary institutions to provide support and to help students that graduated from YouthBuild to transition to post-secondary education. This section focuses on partnering with post-secondary institutions to deliver the education component during the program cycle.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on post-program collaboration with post-secondary institutions, see Chapter 8 of this manual.

Partnering with a post-secondary education institution has many advantages for YouthBuild students. Immediately upon graduating from YouthBuild, students can be placed in a post-secondary education placement. They may even be eligible to receive local, state, or federal aid from the college. YouthBuild students may have access to college support services, such as career services, libraries, athletic facilities, and computer labs. When first generation college students have the opportunity to spend considerable time on a college campus, it has a powerful effect and helps them envision themselves as succeeding in college.

As with other partnerships, the culture of YouthBuild may differ from the college atmosphere. The staff at the post-secondary institution may not be prepared to work with YouthBuild staff. When designing an education component with a community college or technical school, consider the following issues:

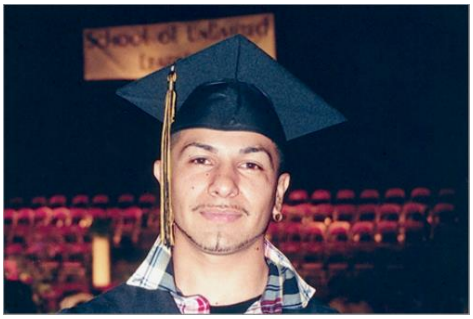
- **Credit.** Ask for an agreement that allows students to receive college credit for the educational component. This can be a big motivator for young people to pursue a post-secondary education after completing the program.
- **Instructors.** Negotiate a hiring structure that allows YouthBuild staff to have input in the hiring process. Effective instructors must demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter, a clear understanding of the YouthBuild model, familiarity with and a willingness to use a range of teaching methodologies, the skills to work with at-risk populations, and a willingness to support the philosophy and youth development commitment of the YouthBuild program.
- **Funding.** Because community colleges receive state funding (full-time equivalent funding), the college will usually pay for the instructor if 20 to 25 YouthBuild students are available to take the class.
- **Location.** The program can request that classes be held at its location. There are advantages to locating the classes on campus, but if transportation and scheduling hinder student participation, the program may consider making this request.
- **Integration.** Make it clear during the negotiation that community college instructors must participate in YouthBuild program activity (e.g. staff meetings, collaboration and planning meetings, etc.). Instructors must also be willing to integrate their curriculum with the other YouthBuild components.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on establishing partnerships with post-secondary institutions, see Section I of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Diploma-Granting School Options

Under the diploma-granting YouthBuild program option, there are three different options to explore. The program can choose to become a public charter school, an alternative school, or a public school initiative.



Charter Schools

While there are many advantages to operating a YouthBuild charter school, it can be an extremely complex, politically nuanced, and expensive effort to expand an existing YouthBuild program into a charter school.

Broadly speaking, charter schools are public schools that may provide education in any of the grades from kindergarten to twelfth grade. As with other charter schools, YouthBuild programs that expand into this area have to pursue a lengthy approval process from a local authorizing public agency such as a school board, board of education, or state department of education. The program will be required to draft an agreement (or charter) between the sponsoring board and the charter organization. This agreement details the school's goals and operating procedures. YouthBuild charter schools, similar to other charter schools, are required to follow many state and local requirements for education. These include:

- following federal, state and local education laws
- implementing selection and enrollment criteria that adhere to explicit state and local regulations
- maintaining clear and transparent policies for:
  - attendance
  - disciplinary actions including expulsion
  - fiscal management

Becoming a charter school can help YouthBuild programs diversify their funding portfolio, reducing the strain of depending on annual competitive grants and allowing the program to serve a larger number of students. It can also help programs focus resources on developing a quality education component. Charter school funding also requires that programs allocate resources differently given the added costs that are incurred to develop and maintain a more complex academic programming.

The size of the charter school matters. Therefore, this should be an important aspect of the consideration. There needs to be existing organizational capacity to serve a greater number of students or a commitment to build greater capacity. We recommend that charter schools enroll at least 60 students, although most programs that operate a charter school find 100 or more students to be an optimal size, based on a budget that supports at least four subject-credentialed teachers plus a few additional staff. The increased student enrollment will also put additional pressures on the program to focus on creating a cohesive community and strong program culture. State or local school districts may also have minimum enrollment requirements.

Before one makes this decision, it is important to understand state laws and parameters for charter schools. Additionally, federal mandates that apply to charter schools must also be met. Most states require charter schools to apply for reauthorization every few years. The frequency of reauthorization varies by state and this information is available on the state Department of Education or local school district website. Some basic questions to consider when making this decision include:

- What would the YouthBuild charter school look like?
- Would all students in the charter school be enrolled in YouthBuild? If not, how would that impact the overall community and program?
- Why would it be desirable for the program to consider becoming a charter school?
- What parts of the program model would have to be changed to become a charter school (e.g. selection process, discipline and dismissal, age restrictions, etc.)?
- What are the challenges to maintaining the integrity of the YouthBuild model in the context of operating a charter school?
- What additional mandates exist within the district, and is there the capacity to meet them (such as addressing special education needs)?
- What are the critical elements of organizational capacity to have in place to ensure success?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can also find more information on state regulations on charter schools at:

- National Charter School Resource Center www.charterschoolcenter.org
- Alliance for School Choice www.allianceforschoolchoice.org
- Education Commission of the States www.ecs.org
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools www.publiccharters.org

Alternative School

Traditionally, school districts have enrolled students who had challenges in mainstream schools (e.g. expulsion, disruptive behavior, etc.) in alternative schools. More recently, some alternative schools have become spaces where school administrators and teachers can explore innovations in pedagogy and curriculum, combining education tenets with youth development principles.

Alternative schools do not have independent school boards and sometimes are exempt from having to meet general school requirements. While alternative schools receive per-pupil funding, they do not have the autonomy in governance, programming, and operations that charter schools enjoy. It is important to note that only some alternative schools are exploring innovative pedagogy and teaching strategies. If a YouthBuild program can forge a positive and mutually beneficial partnership with a school district, an alternative school may be a good option as a diploma-granting partner.

Public School Initiatives

Often, public school initiatives are partnerships between the public school district and community-based organizations, such as a YouthBuild program, that provide a combination of education and social services to students. School districts often launch these initiatives in response to a pressing need in the community, such as a high drop-out rate.

Each partnership will vary based on the needs and constraints of the school district. Depending on the agreement between the YouthBuild program and the school district, the partnering district or state may provide teachers for the YouthBuild program at no cost. In other cases, the program is responsible for hiring and paying for teachers. This system works well for YouthBuild programs, when the program is able to integrate teachers into its staff, retain control over the curriculum, and incorporate the education into other components of the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about this approach:

- Alternative High School Initiative Overview
- High School Graduation Initiative

Education Timeline

An important aspect of planning the education component is developing a timeline for planning and recruitment, testing, and post-secondary education preparation. A timeline will help the program be more organized and goal-oriented. It also could function as a motivational tool for students and staff. With goals outlined and a timeline defined for accomplishing them, students and staff can work collectively towards the goals, whether it is meeting a certain benchmark on standardized tests, applying to college, or even selecting new staff.

Testing

DOL grants require all programs to meet educational outcomes and benchmarks at specified periods of time. For example, students must show gains in literacy or math within one year of enrollment. There are also specific benchmarks that programs have to adhere to in the DOL MIS system. To ensure that the program is compliant with the DOL guidelines and to help students make the most of their educational progression, staff should consider developing a testing timeline.

Programs should implement a testing timeline at Mental Toughness or within the first few days of the program cycle. DOL requires all programs to record at least one pre-test score in the MIS system within two weeks. The initial assessment also becomes the basis to begin developing the individual learning plan with students. Once students complete the pre-test, a two-month hiatus on testing should be considered. This will help students to focus on classroom learning and allow teachers to engage students by cultivating a love of learning.

Starting with the third month, staff can begin testing students regularly for the GED and to measure literacy and numeracy gains. This can take many forms. Because testing needs vary by program, DOL does not require a minimum number of tests. It is important to fulfill the need for testing while not overwhelming students with too many tests. Specific days maybe designated for testing so that all students can take the test the same day, or a time frame can be established that will allow students to follow a more individualized pace. In either case, staff should set a number of tests and a time frame by which students should complete them.

Because some students might not obtain their GED prior to leaving the program, the program should consider including GED testing after the program cycle in the overall timeline. Doing so can help plan a post-program structure to continue supporting students.

DOL requires all programs to enter post-test data into the MIS system as a measurement of student gains, and careful thought needs to be given to the scheduling of these post-tests. Often, when students leave the program or pass their GED test, they are not motivated to complete the post-test. To counter this challenge, plan a time for the post-test.

The testing timeline should not be limited to the academic tests. Students will also be taking tests for trade certifications, and it is important to build these into the testing timeline in order to avoid testing overlaps and, more importantly, to help keep students on track.

Starting in March, students should be offered the post-secondary placement tests, such as the COMPASS or the ACCUPLACER. For a small subset of students who are planning to enter directly a four-year institution, programs may offer the SAT or ACT. This is an important step in preparing young people for post-secondary education. Programs should encourage all students to take this assessment even if they are not planning to attend a post-secondary institution immediately after leaving the program. This prepares them to go at a later point when they may no longer be engaged with the YouthBuild program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample education timeline, visit here.

Post-Secondary Education

Another aspect of the education timeline should be a post-secondary readiness plan. Post-secondary placement requires very concrete actions by students throughout the program year. No more than midway through the program cycle, staff should help students develop a specialized plan that identifies the institutions to which they intend to apply, the application procedures and costs, entrance examination schedules, interview process, and state and federal financial aid deadlines.

Program staff can help students understand and navigate this process by obtaining information and creating a master time schedule for the post-secondary education placement process. This time schedule should include:

- application deadlines for a variety of local post-secondary education institutions
- SAT/ACT and/or COMPASS/AccuPlacer testing dates
- open house dates at a variety of local post-secondary education institutions
- financial aid application deadlines
- GED testing dates, if applicable

Since most YouthBuild students are first generation college students, they and their parents may not be familiar with completing the financial aid process, including the FAFSA. Be sure to build financial aid deadlines into the education timeline and include blocks of program and staff time to support students' completion of their financial aid applications. This can be a challenging process given the amount of documentation required from students (and parents, if the student is under the age of 23). Providing adequate support to students and clearly communicating with students parents, the program can ensure students complete the financial aid process.

Regardless of the student's post-program placement plans, it is a good idea to encourage all students to complete the FAFSA ahead of state deadlines, which often occur at the beginning of the calendar year. Another reason to encourage students to complete the FAFSA early is that many state and school-based funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Planning and Staff Recruitment

Program directors, teachers and other program staff should plan the education component on an annual basis, using the planning time to structure their classrooms, research and order materials, develop curriculum guidelines and recruit staff. While some of this planning should be ongoing, creating deadlines for each of these activities in the education timeline will be helpful to keep the process on track. Through a well-developed planning schedule, the strengths and weaknesses of the education component will become clear well before the program cycle begins. This will also help guide the program's development of a strategic recruitment plan for teachers and other education staff.

Staff Recruitment and Selection

When asked what is different about YouthBuild, young people often answer, "The staff really care about you." Staff have high expectations for students and encourage and support them in their growth. Another value that students frequently mention as being central to their progress is the fact that the staff do not judge them for what they have done in the past but accept them for who they are now and support their aspirations for who they want to become. The past is the past. The future is the focus.

A caring and dedicated staff clearly committed to student success is a key feature of high- quality youth development programs, and YouthBuild programs are known for adhering to the principles of youth development in all components. However, finding qualified staff to run the education component is not an easy task. Successful YouthBuild teachers should possess a combination of several qualities: knowledge of their role, experience with young people, and a deep respect for their intelligence and capacity for learning. All staff, including instructional staff, must be able to work as part of a team in a way that is creative, energetic, responsible, and open to supervision. Therefore, recruiting and selecting teaching staff is the first step to ensuring that program operations support its vision.

On the flip side, the opportunity to teach at a YouthBuild program is unique and extremely rewarding, and the many advantages should be emphasized in the recruitment process. YouthBuild teachers make a difference in the lives of their students in myriad ways.

A driving force at every YouthBuild program is the strong and positive program culture, which stems from core beliefs, values, rituals, and practices. Research on YouthBuild programs shows that students describe the program in similar ways as a result of the consistency of the program culture. Students report that YouthBuild programs are "like a family," that the "staff care about you and make sure you succeed, and the teachers care that you really learn." This program culture is also supportive of its staff. All great YouthBuild programs should have a strong professional development component that emphasizes continuous feedback and improvement. Excellent programs also foster a culture of collaboration among staff. Teachers at YouthBuild programs are not islands to themselves; they should work in tandem with other teachers and staff to ensure that students succeed.

While student outcomes are important at every program, the program should define student success in a holistic manner. Teachers at YouthBuild programs have the opportunity and should be expected to form strong relationships with students and invest in their overall success. Therefore, each instructional staff person should be evaluated not only in terms of literacy and numeracy gains but also his or her ability to connect with students and help them navigate academic and personal obstacles.

Unlike many other school environments, YouthBuild maintains a low teacher to student ratio. This allows teachers to deliver effective individualized instruction and to ensure student success. For teachers, this is an empowering classroom environment. Teachers at YouthBuild have tremendous flexibility in terms of choosing the best and most appropriate instructional strategies and curriculum. For many teachers who have found school district requirements too rigid, this is an extremely attractive aspect of working in a YouthBuild program.

The positive YouthBuild program culture is a powerful recruitment tool that should be highlighted to potential candidates, and, if at all possible, salaries that are competitive with local school districts should be offered.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on school conditions that support teaching and learning, see Chapter 2 of this manual.

Recruitment Timeline

Schools with highly effective and talented teachers have a sound recruitment timeline and begin and complete their hiring process early. Research indicates that teachers and instructors who are highly effective and more responsive to feedback tend to apply for positions early in the hiring season. Teachers are not likely to wait too late into the summer to make career decisions. This underscores the importance of creating an effective recruitment timeline. Waiting until the end of the school year or the summer to recruit and hire candidates is a common pitfall for many YouthBuild programs. Schools and the local school district, which may have an early hiring process, will compete for talented teachers.

Ideally, a recruitment plan should be ongoing so that there is a strong candidate pool to recruit from even if late notifications of potential vacancies are received. If an ongoing recruitment process is not possible, the program should develop a recruitment calendar that takes into account important benchmarks in the program cycle. For example, if students are enrolled in September, the program should begin recruiting candidates in October and should aim to complete the hiring process by the end of May. Establishing a thorough recruitment process is time consuming since it will take time to review the submitted materials for each teaching position. The scheduling of interviews, including demonstration lessons, should begin in January. Depending on the number of candidates and vacancies, offer letters should go out in March, with the hope of completing the process by the end of May.

An important element of the hiring process is early awareness of the number of vacancies to be filled for the upcoming year. The program director should build this into the program culture and communicate clearly its importance to the success of the program and students. Respecting young people and ensuring their success is every staff person's responsibility and includes early and honest communication with the program director.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on creating a recruitment timeline, see the New Teacher Project and National Charter School Resource Center.

Recruitment Strategies[1]

Preparing for recruitment is almost as important as the search itself. In fact, a Harvard Business School study found that more than 75 percent of staff turnover in any work environment could be tracked to poor hiring practices. Preparing well and expressing the school's vision and expectations clearly and consistently will help identify the best matches among potential candidates. When creating a plan, staff should answer the following questions:

- Whom and what qualities/characteristics does the school need?
- Where should the search take place?
- How should the program position itself for effective recruitment?

Begin the recruitment process by selecting a hiring committee. Consider including members of the board and partner organizations, teachers, and students. The program director should be an integral part of the recruitment team.

When establishing a recruitment committee, consider the following:

- **Student involvement.** Because YouthBuild is not simply an education or workforce development program but also a leadership development program, students should have a voice in the hiring process. In fact, youth involvement is critical. Often, the greatest insight on potential applicants comes from young people. Many programs have found involving young people leads to the selection of stronger candidates and greater student engagement in the education component. Young people do not necessarily have to be involved at every step, however. Most programs include young people in the final selection of candidates after a rigorous interview process and reference checks.

  This is an excellent opportunity to create a culture of respect for the intelligence and leadership potential of young people by allowing them to be involved in the governance of their own program. This is an ideal opportunity to involve the policy committee if one exists within the program. Young people may need to be trained to participate in the process meaningfully, which will require building time into the recruitment timeline. Involving young people in the hiring process also sends a powerful message to potential candidates about the program's approach to leadership development and its philosophical accountability to the beneficiaries of the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on developing a policy committee, see the Leadership Development at a YouthBuild Program.

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[1] This section is adapted from *Mobilizing and Motivating Your Staff to Get Results: A Technical Assistance Guide for Charter School Leaders* developed by the Charter Friends National Network and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/mobilizing%20motivating%20%20staff.pdf

- **Diversity.** It is also important to build a diverse team that includes staff who reflect the student population. Employing staff who can relate to the struggles of the young people sends a strong message to students. Having a diverse group of members in the selection committee can bring different perspectives to the selection process. Various research studies show that identification with teachers and other staff members leads to deeper engagement and confidence on the part of the students.

Recruitment Materials

Developing a well-written and clear description of the position is a crucial aspect of recruitment. A well-written job description articulates the major work area, goals, behavior expectations and competencies for each role including any extra duties generally expected of the position. A job description should include:

- **Standard Qualifications (including youth and leadership development commitment).** Identify required and desired qualifications and characteristics. Consider creating a job description which states the desired qualification or characteristic next to the goals. This will help candidates assess themselves prior to applying for the position. A few examples of categories that the program should consider including in the job description are:
  - technical expertise and skills (e.g. subject matter knowledge, instructional assessment and practice, classroom management skills)
  - deep commitment to youth development principles and skill in implementing these principles in the classroom and across the program
  - respect for young people
  - awareness of typical issues that YouthBuild students face
  - behavioral competencies (e.g. responsiveness to feedback, positive attitude, team orientation, self-awareness and self-development, leadership skills etc.)
  - ability to connect with students and help them navigate academic and personal obstacles
  - commitment to the centrality of leadership development of young people in the classroom and at the program and a desire and skill to implement practices that foster leadership development.

Education and experience are important qualifications to list. However, if there is too much focus on these aspects, it may overpower the underlying knowledge, skills and competencies required. Specific qualifications can also be listed under desirable qualifications to help enlarge the pool of candidates without sacrificing the quality of applicants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample job description for a GED instructor see here.

Selection Process

The selection process should be an opportunity for the recruitment committee to learn about the candidate but also for the candidate to understand and form impressions of the program, staff, and students. To ensure the hiring process is interactive and informative, the program should develop various activities that involve the input of teachers and students and allow potential candidates the opportunity to observe the school in action by inviting them to observe classroom or construction site activity as part of the interview process.

Below is a sample list of activities to include in the process:

- resume review
- application essay and writing sample (e.g. describing a candidate's teaching philosophy)
- teacher portfolio review
- phone interview
- in-person follow-up interview
- teaching sample (e.g. demonstration lesson)
- classroom observation
- group discussion

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For sample interview tools and a sample list of activities along with skills and competencies you can evaluate, see the New Teacher Project's Teacher Talent Toolbox.

Evaluating Candidates

It is important not only to identify the desired activities and competencies in potential candidates but also to develop a method to evaluate the skills and competencies. As with developing rubrics for students, a program should develop indicators that show what each competency should look like within a particular selection activity. This may involve creating a rating system which will help assess and compare each candidate. For example, a rating system may be a scale for answers, such as the following.

Target Response	The materials and answers demonstrate the candidate has experience but also can implement action that will make a difference.
Acceptable Response	Use this rating when the materials meet the minimal criteria set for the role and the candidate has acceptable knowledge of the topic.
Unacceptable Response	Candidates who have no answer or an incorrect response to a question usually receive this rating.

A number rating system to evaluate the experience level of a candidate may look like:

1	2	3	4
No Experience	Limited Experience	Average Experience	Excellent Background Experience

When designing the selection criteria and rating system, keep in mind that an effective and well-designed interview process will be:

- reliable and consistent
- efficient
- low-inference
- non-leading

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For sample rating tools, please visit the Community of Practice.
- For more information on developing an effective recruitment strategies, see the New Teacher Project's Teacher Talent Toolbox: Recruitment and Hiring.

Interview Techniques[2]

Research indicates a strong link between teacher effectiveness and student achievement. An interview is one of the most important and interactive components of the hiring process and also provides an indication of a potential candidate's effectiveness in the classroom. It is an opportunity to learn about the candidate and also for the candidate to learn about the program.

Screening Candidates

The interview should be a multi-step process. The first level of review, the screening process, should begin with an assessment of submitted materials. These should include:

- resumes and cover letters
- academic transcripts, standardized scores, and certifications
- portfolios
- writing samples and teaching philosophy
- video-recording of a sample lesson (if the teacher is not being asked to conduct a demonstration lesson)

The hiring committee should rate each of these materials against the rubric being used.

Invite the highest rated candidates for a phone interview. Prior to conducting the phone interview, the hiring committee should create a set of questions. It is important to ask each candidate the same questions, so that candidates can be considered in an objective manner. A good rule of thumb for phone interviews is five or six questions. Some sample questions you may ask are:

- Tell me about your best teaching situation.
- Name a teaching accomplishment from your previous experience that characterizes your work.
- Describe a typical lesson that you taught in your previous experience.

[2] This section is adapted from *How to Hire the Best New Teachers: Using Behavior-Based Interviewing* developed by Marcy Clement. https://www.nassp.org/portals/0/content/47942.pdf

These questions help to narrow the pool of candidates. The next step is to invite the highest rated candidates for an on-site interview.

On-Site Interviews

Based on the review, invite the highest rated candidates to the next level of assessment to determine whether the candidate possesses the desired skills and will be a good fit with the school environment. A school/teacher fit is extremely important for teacher effectiveness, satisfaction and retention.

Select behavior-based questions to ask candidates. In order to conduct a fair selection and evaluation process, every candidate should receive the same general set of questions. As long as the committee is able to cover a range of the important questions, allow flexibility in taking some questions deeper, based on the candidate's responses. We strongly recommend that the committee build in time for candidates to teach a demonstration lesson either as part of the on-site interview process for all candidates or reserved for the top two or three. Sample demonstration lessons provide insight into how candidates interact with the young people, evaluate their knowledge and skill in the content area and classroom management, determine their instructional approach, and examine each candidate's fit with the school. When evaluating a demonstration lesson, look for flexibility, creativity, ability to communicate ideas, respect for young people, and skill in the candidate's area of expertise.

The lesson will also give students an opportunity to interact with potential candidates. Often, young people have astute insight about adults that interact with and support them well. Be sure to build time into the hiring process for students to share their thoughts on the demonstration lesson. Involving students will make them feel more ownership of the YouthBuild program, and it will demonstrate value and respect for their opinions.

Whether or not teachers are asked to conduct demonstration lessons, consider inviting candidates to observe student and teacher interaction in either the classroom or the construction site. Remember that the interview process is a two-way information-gathering opportunity. Demonstration lessons and classroom observations allow candidates to gain a better understanding of the student population and school culture. This information will help them make a decision on whether they will be a good fit with the program environment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample recruitment process checklist, see the Community of Practice.

Behavior-Based Interview Questions

One emerging best practice in teacher hiring is behavior-based interview questions. These questions go deeper than traditional interview questions because they require candidates to discuss past experiences and apply their knowledge and skills to specific scenarios. It is important to note that behavior-based interview questions are not hypothetical questions. These questions often ask candidates to:

- reflect on a specific time when a candidate used a strategy or skill
- describe an experience
- discuss how a candidate handled a specific situation
- explain his or her approach to an issue

This process of questioning will help your program evaluate candidates' ability to problem-solve, as well as their values and attitudes toward students and their work. For example, the committee could ask a candidate to reflect on a problem she resolved in her teaching experience or ask her to describe a classroom management problem that she resolved by discussing the situation surrounding the problem, the action she took to resolve the issue, and the result of her action. It is also useful to ask about a situation that could not be resolved despite best efforts.

Understanding the YouthBuild model is essential for all staff working in the program. If staff do not exhibit the philosophical core and spirit of YouthBuild, students will not receive the strong support, or experience the caring environment, they need to succeed. Behavior-based questions will help determine the respect and depth of concern teachers have for young people.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample list of questions your program can ask candidates using the behavior-based interviewing method, see the Community of Practice.

Strategic Places for Recruiting Staff

There is a wide range of sources that programs can utilize to recruit teachers, although the effectiveness of recruitment sources will vary by region, state, local district, and by program. Therefore, develop a multi-pronged strategy for recruitment, and track which strategy is most effective.

One of the most effective recruitment tools is word-of-mouth. Consider involving board members and partner organizations, including post-secondary education partners, in the recruiting of instructional staff. If there are colleges and universities, particularly Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU), in the local area, be sure to connect with their education programs. Doing so will help you identify an ongoing pool of highly qualified candidates. Even if no immediate openings exist, connecting with post-secondary institutions and future teachers will help the program build a relationship and reputation. Consider incorporating social media into the recruitment efforts to increase their reach.

Partnerships with local schools, community-based organizations, or local charter school resource centers may provide opportunities to host a job fair or open house. This may yield a larger volume of candidates and will help you raise the program's profile among potential candidates.

Consider recruiting through:

- local media (e.g. newspapers, radio and television)
- Internet sites, particularly sites that specialize on the non-profit sector (e.g. Idealist, Opportunity Knocks, Young Nonprofit Professional Network, etc.)
- education networks with large job banks (e.g. ASCD, AERA, U.S. Charter Schools, etc.)

- national teaching job banks (e.g. National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, Teach.gov, etc.)
- volunteer organizations (e.g. AmeriCorps, VISTA, etc.)

Involve staff and partnership networks in helping you generate effective recruitment strategies and track the recruitment sources of all candidates as they enter the recruitment pipeline in order to determine the most effective sources of recruitment for the future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample teacher recruitment analysis and planning tool, see the Community of Practice.

Chapter 2: School Conditions that Support Teaching and Learning

Ideal school conditions that support teaching and learning in a YouthBuild program will be apparent, regardless of whether the YouthBuild education program provides its own GED program and/or high school diploma program or whether the YouthBuild education program is provided through an education partner such as the local school district or local adult basic education program.

The physical set-up of the school or academic area, high standard of content, school culture, integration of academics with all other YouthBuild components, and partnerships and bridges to post-secondary education and career development will combine to form the conditions that support positive teaching and learning.

Program Integration

YouthBuild programs can utilize basic and complex strategies to integrate education into all program components. Program integration is an opportunity to encourage staff and students to further develop critical thinking skills. If done successfully, program integration can also help programs meet internal and external outcomes, including DOL outcomes.

CREATIVE CLASSROOM LEARNING STRATEGIES: YOUTHBUILD PHILADELPHIA

YouthBuild Philadelphia has implemented some creative classroom learning strategies over the years. In order to make integrated learning immediately relevant to the young people, they took their academic math classroom to the worksite. Morning math lessons were taught on the worksite, where young people would learn the math of a construction concept and moments later apply that concept on the worksite. Following this living classroom concept, the young people would journal about the experience of learning a concept and applying it.

YouthBuild Philadelphia students also participated in a second “living classroom” modality where science classes were held at the Schukyll Center for Environmental Education. Here young people mastered science concepts by testing water levels and measuring the components of the water.

These are great experiential learning ideas that don’t require a lot of effort but can produce big results.

Integration of Education into Construction and Vocational Trades

When integrating education and construction and other vocational trades such as health care, technology, local farming, or other trades as determined by the YouthBuild program, staff can create and give an on-site practical quiz that has both a hands-on and a conceptual component, such as:

- accounting for the angle measurement of a door as it opens or framing a window and accounting for the gap between the window and the wall
- the correct arrangement of crops according to local climate conditions
- how to complete a daily basic care chart at a nursing home

Staff can preview or follow up the quiz with the development of an assessment rubric. A more complex approach to this same assignment/activity would be to involve the students in learning about the context for such a rubric and then about the actual development of the rubric itself, so that they understand the measure of success as well as the practical application of the task.

Some examples of broader and multifaceted approaches to integrating education and construction and vocation trades are:

- helping the youth plan how to set up and grow a carpentry business
- learning elements of architecture and design
- learning about energy efficiency and green construction principles and practices or how to operate a weekly farmer's market business;
- how to apply for and successfully complete a CNA program

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more examples, visit the Community of Practice.

Integration of Education into Leadership, Life Skills and Counseling Groups

There are many ways to combine education with the leadership, life skills and counseling programs. For example:

- writing up and implementing a procedure for giving visitors a tour of the YouthBuild program, complete with focus on vocabulary, history, highlights
- learning about the lives of influential community and world leaders and implementing one of their trademark approaches towards solving a problem in the students' local community
- learning about the structure and process of successful counseling groups and how to meet regularly (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) and successfully. The focus of the group can range from individual to group issues affecting the youth.
- addressing issues that youth are facing in the program as well as larger issues affecting the YouthBuild program, including but not limited to the hiring of staff, and the acceptance of new participants

A YouthBuild program in Lewiston, Maine exemplified this integration method. Students developed a guide called *Yellow Pages of Youth Services for Homeless Youth*. They reviewed, updated, and wrote the content. They also evaluated the guide from a user and usefulness perspective.

Integration of Education into Counseling and Case Management

Utilizing the case conferencing model, counseling and case management staff should meet regularly, either weekly or bi-weekly, with other staff members (construction, education, transition, etc.) to discuss the academic progress of each student. This model of program integration builds on the strong, nurturing and sustained relationships between students and staff emphasized in YouthBuild programs.

Building on strong, nurturing and sustained relationships between students and caring, knowledgeable adults describes the YouthBuild Case Conferencing Model. Using this model between staff members to discuss the progress and challenges each youth is facing and using this model between the instructor and the youth to help him/her determine his/her own progress and challenges can make all the difference to how they move forward in the teaching and learning process. This model states, in part, that the program will promote a set of specific, positive teaching and learning beliefs with the youth, and that all staff believe students are capable of changing behavioral patterns. This last piece is a critical part of creating a transformational environment where students can develop. Finally it is crucial that staff discuss every young person on a regular basis.

Counseling and case management staff should also consider scheduling regular meeting with the student to review (the review led by that youth) the individual development plan. The meeting can focus on academic progress, benchmarks towards program completion, and placement and retention goals. These meetings can then be recapped with case management staff and the director on a quarterly basis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Case Conferencing Model, see the YouthBuild Manual for Counseling, Case Management, and Program Culture.

Integration of Education into Community Service

Integration of community service into all aspects of the program is important. A short-term community based goal should be established, engaging all youth and staff in the endeavor. For instance, young people may decide to rebuild part of an animal shelter for an organization or farm that takes in abused animals. They would need to review academic concepts, including math for budgeting and measuring, and writing for a narrative justification. A review of the successes and challenges of the community service project should be a collaborative effort by the teachers and the students.

INNOVATIVE THINKING: YOUTHBUILD SAN JOAQUIN

Who would have thought that an old battle-scarred ship would become a fabulous community service and education project? Young people from YouthBuild San Joaquin in California restored the USS Lucid, and transformed it into a floating museum.

They not only gave back to the community through their volunteer efforts, but also gained important skills. The project:

- helped young people learn about history in a hands-on way
- provided access to museum and ship staff who served as mentors
- increased the academic skills of young people and allowed them to participate in an experiential learning process

Quality of the Learning Environment

Setting up the School

A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if YouthBuild students are to succeed in their goals, since such an environment makes students feel safe and supported and motivates and engages them to reach their full potential. A positive and supportive learning environment includes everything from the school walls to the set-up of classrooms to the resources available to students. Everything sends a message that either enhances or detracts from students' success. Therefore, school environments should be designed intentionally.

While students need to gain educational skills during their time at YouthBuild, they must also develop social and emotional skills in order to learn to manage their emotions, resolve conflicts, and make responsible decisions. These are key to both their educational and their career success. In order to teach young people strong social and emotional skills, the program has to lay groundwork to create a trusting and respectful school atmosphere.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on social emotional learning, visit Edutopia and the National School Climate Center.

Program standards should be set from day one and should continue to emphasize the principles of the culture and values throughout the program. Starting in Mental Toughness, there should be emphasis on the importance of respect, safety, caring and inclusiveness in the program. It is important to engage staff and students in identifying and cultivating these values. At the most basic level, students and staff should:

- feel safe, comfortable, and accepted
- promote healthy and respectful relationships among all members of the program
- encourage students to be leaders and positive role models
- reinforce positive behavior
- promote a culture of high expectations in which improvement is emphasized
- value diversity
- demonstrate in various ways that they care about one another

Creating a positive learning environment is an ongoing, comprehensive and collaborative process. Everyone, from staff to students has a role to play in building a welcoming, positive and inclusive school environment. Program leadership should promote healthy relationships among staff, among students and between staff and students as well as embed principles of equity and inclusiveness in all program components and in all aspects of the learning environment (for example by prominently displaying the program values throughout the school and referring to them and modeling them in daily activities). Staff can nurture these values by:

- celebrating student and staff success at morning meetings and staff meetings
- sharing stories of accomplishment and collaboration when there is an opportunity
- using clear, shared language to foster a commitment to staff development and student learning

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This section addresses the school environment. For more information on cultivating a positive classroom environment, see Chapter 5 of this manual.

Physical Space

It is helpful if the physical space communicates a culture different from that which the students previously experienced in schools that did not work for them. Display a variety of attractive message posters all over the walls, representing the values, goals, and philosophy of the program, as well as examples of student work that motivates ongoing learning, and copies of GEDs or diplomas obtained by previous students. YouthBuild classrooms should generally be smaller and more informal, individualized in methodology, with students helping one another and teachers using differentiated instruction practices and regular assessments to ensure that students have mastered the material before moving on. Clearly displaying goals, learning objectives, student work, and motivational materials will encourage students to absorb these messages and engage more actively in their learning.

Use the physical space to:

- **Communicate the program values.** Young people and staff should see, hear, and feel the values in the physical space of the program. Provide a warm, welcoming, and encouraging physical environment to ensure that young people gain educational, vocational, social and emotional skills.
- **Focus on the whole person.** YouthBuild programs go beyond educational and vocational training; hence it is important that the physical layout of the school communicates the focus on the whole person. The program should demonstrate the commitment to individualized teaching and learning that can take place in formal and informal ways, and the physical environment should speak not only to the needs of students but also to professional values, such as collaboration amongst staff.
- **Emphasize flexibility and agility.** When selecting and designing the physical space, be sure to emphasize flexibility and agility. If possible, purchase movable furniture and set up classrooms that encourage interaction. Similarly, office spaces should be open and friendly. Schools that convey friendliness, openness, and accessibility help students become more cooperative, interactive, and collaborative. This also applies to staff who are more likely to collaborate and share information with one another in spaces that encourage such interaction. YouthBuild is designed to be a community, and the physical space of the program will play an important role in helping promote a supportive and collaborative program culture.

- **Accessible to students.** Ideally, physical space should be easily accessible to students and close to the construction site. Consider locating your educational component in the same space as the rest of the program. This can not only be invaluable for convenience but also help integrate the education program with other program components. The physical space should:
  - Be large enough to accommodate individual classrooms, offices, and common spaces (e.g. computer lab, student study-area, etc.). Locating all program spaces in one area and close to the construction site reduces barriers for students and ensures they are on a path for success. It also allows staff to work together and collaborate to meet the needs of students.
  - Provide adequate lighting, ventilation, heating and cooling. In order for students to fully engage in the learning process, they must be comfortable. These environmental factors make a dramatic difference to student learning. In particular, they can reduce fatigue, posture and visual problems. If at all possible, the program should secure a space with natural or incandescent lighting.
  - Ensure physical well-being, including meeting fire and safety codes. This is a critical and important element of choosing an appropriate space. A safe school environment is not only welcoming but also helps students and staff to stay focused on learning and teaching.
  - Have good acoustics to ensure an effective instructional environment. The more a program reduces barriers to learning, the more likely students are to be engaged and strive towards their goals. Students and teachers must be able to communicate easily in the classroom. This is vitally important for teachers to manage their classrooms efficiently and engage all students in the learning process.
  - Provide adequate electrical outlets for classroom technology. As education staff integrates technology into their curriculum, this is a simple but essential element to encourage better technological integration and ensure success.
  - Allow space and hardware for a computer learning center and library. Increasingly, it is important for programs to help students to become familiar with technology. This includes opportunities for them to explore and use computers on their own. Creating such a space also provides young people with tools they might not have readily available in their homes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on designing the physical space of your program, visit the American Architectural Foundation and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

Location of Offices

It is important to locate offices in the same building where students spend the majority of their time. For example, classrooms and counseling offices should not be located in separate buildings. Locating the program components together not only ensures students have easy access, but also encourages staff to share information with one another and helps students have a seamless experience as they experience the different components of the program.

Consider locating administrative offices in the same space as classrooms. For example, the program director's office could be located next to a classroom. This will give an opportunity to mingle with the students and get to know them individually and in groups and provide an opportunity to interact with staff. Furthermore, staff who may not interact with students on a daily basis also have the opportunity to get to know students, and staff get to know one another. This can build the sense of community among students and staff.

While access is important, also consider the acoustics of each space. Be sure to find a space that does not carry sound outside of each room. This is important for reducing distractions between classes as well as maintaining student confidentiality. For example, consider locating classrooms and counseling offices in different parts of the building. This way, students feel comfortable communicating with staff openly and honestly without fear of compromising their confidentiality.

Access to Resources

Resources should include classroom, worksite and school-wide resources. In the classroom, young people should have access to a classroom library, manipulatives, and other instructional aides. Students should also have access to all necessary construction tools and equipment.

School-wide resources such as a computer lab or skill development classes should be accessible to all students. Be creative and intentional about planning school-wide resources and identify them prior to the program cycle, adding resources as the need arises.

Low Student-to-teacher Ratio

One of the cornerstones for students' success at a YouthBuild program is the personal attention they receive from staff. Therefore, a low student to teacher ratio is critical to the success of the teaching and learning community in a YouthBuild program. Ideally 14:1 would be the highest youth to instructor ratio. Making this the maximum ensures that the teacher would have a classroom dynamic that would encourage whole group, small group, and individual work, with time for the teacher to work with all youth over the course of either a half or full day of instruction. A 14:1 ratio encourages the success of such non-traditional teaching and learning strategies as differentiated instruction, portfolios, experiential learning, as well as of traditional approaches such as lecture and standardized testing, both of which can be presented effectively within the 14 (or fewer):1 ratio.

Cultivating Staff Voice and Encouraging Involvement

As with students, staff need a professionally supportive environment that empowers them. In order to ensure teachers feel they are a part of the program:

- **Involve them in decision-making.** Research suggests that when teachers have appropriate decision-making power and authority, they are more committed and invested in the school, and this is likely to reduce teacher turnover.

  Allowing teachers to become involved in decision-making enhances program culture and allows the program director to recognize and utilize the skills and expertise of staff. Since students' educational outcomes are not determined solely by the instruction they receive in the classroom, involving teachers in a range of program-wide issues allows teachers to make contributions on a range of issues that impact learning in the classroom. Actively engaging educational staff and bringing them into the decision-making process is one of the unique benefits of teaching at a YouthBuild program.
- **Incorporate feedback.** Create effective mechanisms to solicit and incorporate staff feedback in decisions that impact the program. While it is not realistic to involve all staff in every decision, it is possible to create structures that bring in the voice of at least some into any decision-making process. For example, when developing a budget for a new program cycle, meet with small groups of staff (e.g. teaching staff, counseling staff, etc.) to discuss their priorities for the upcoming year. Take their recommendations into consideration when creating the program budget and after creating the budget, be sure to connect with them to show how their input was utilized or to explain why another item may have been prioritized in the process.

The following list, though not exhaustive, suggests a number of ways that staff can be involved in decision-making. Consider soliciting your staff to build on these ideas:

- **Instructional materials.** Since educational staff will utilize these resources, they should have an opportunity to provide input on the types of instructional materials to be purchased. This can include suggestions for textbooks and classroom technology.
- **Curriculum.** If teachers have the opportunity to help select or develop the curriculum, they are more likely to be invested in implementing it. It also empowers them to utilize the best approaches and strategies to maximize student learning.
- **Staff development opportunities.** As with students, educational staff should also feel empowered to make decisions regarding their professional development. Allowing staff input and involvement in the designing of professional development opportunities will encourage them to commit to growth in their job. It also will help the program to develop relevant and meaningful professional development opportunities.
- **Recruitment and retention policy.** All program staff should be involved in the recruitment process. In fact, all staff should be present and should actively participate in all recruitment activities, including Mental Toughness. This will allow educational staff to connect with students and be invested in their success.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on involving your staff in the recruitment process, see Chapter 2 of the YouthBuild Program Manual: Getting Started As a New DOL YouthBuild Program.

- **Behavioral expectations for students.** Prior to the start of the program cycle, all staff should develop a plan for student behavioral expectations, rewards, and consequences. When the entire staff is involved, they are more likely to buy in to the behavioral expectations and enforce them consistently. Furthermore, when teachers play a meaningful role in developing behavioral standards, they feel more empowered and invested in the success of the school.
- **Program goals.** Teachers are a crucial factor in a program's achievement of its goals, including educational outcomes, and giving them an opportunity to collaborate with other staff to develop program goals allows them to take ownership of the program. Having a staff team create shared goals that cross program components also promotes program integration.

Communicating the Difference Between YouthBuild and Previous Education Experience

When asked why YouthBuild worked for them, YouthBuild students and graduates invariably say, "Because they cared about me. They cared enough to ask me what I wanted to become and to help me make the right choices and follow the right path to my own goals." The YouthBuild program culture is one in which young people quickly feel safe, respected, and cared for. They understand that the adult staff is committed to giving them the tools, skills, support systems, and opportunities that will enable them to define and achieve their highest aspirations.

It is vital that students experience a positive and supportive learning environment that is directly opposite to previous negative experiences. Ensure that staff buy into the values that will contribute to this environment and are adequately trained to embody them. The following are essential qualities to communicate to students.

Respect for young people	• Respect for young people's intelligence • A level of control for young people over their immediate environment • Patient caring for young people's development
Focus on a successful future	• Teaching academic, employment and social skills • A path to future opportunity
Strong and supportive staff	• Staff members who have overcome similar obstacles who can serve as Inspiring and caring role models • Staff who provide support for young people so that the young people can avoid adversity, to the extent possible, and when that is not possible, the support necessary to cope with adversity
High standards and expectations	• High standards and expectations for academic success and belief that all students can succeed

Another important aspect of the difference of the YouthBuild experience is the emphasis on leadership development and continuing education and training. Young people entering YouthBuild are not accustomed to being seen and treated as potential leaders with the ideas and potential to improve their communities. This expression of respect surprises them and brings out the best in them.

Planning

Teachers want work environments that are similar to the classroom environments they strive to create for their students. A strong instructional culture that fosters and prioritizes high-quality teaching practices is an essential element of the work environments teachers prefer. This includes opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, to work towards clearly defined goals, and to receive adequate feedback from school leaders. It also includes opportunities for both long-term and ongoing planning. When teachers have structured time to plan, they are more likely to operate highly effective classrooms.

Program directors can foster a strong instructional culture by providing structured opportunities for teachers to collaborate and integrate program components. Provide opportunities for teachers to engage in several types of planning, including:

- **Annual planning.** Program staff should develop an annual education plan for the program and classroom before the program cycle begins. This is a big-picture plan for the education program and during this planning process, instructional staff should make decisions regarding curricula, determine the sequence of instructional material, and engage other staff to identify program-wide educational goals and priorities.
- **Unit planning.** Staff should have ongoing opportunities to collaborate with one another to check in on the progress towards the annual plan and make adjustments as needed. During this time, teachers can begin to identify objectives and activities to incorporate into weekly or daily plans.
- **Weekly and daily planning.** After teachers develop long-term plans, they need to revisit them on a continuous basis. During this planning process, instructors should develop detailed lesson plans, including instructional activities and flow. This will help them incorporate student needs and knowledge. It will also give them an opportunity to incorporate assessment data.

When planning for a new program cycle, make planning with instructional staff a priority. Build planning time for setting program goals into the annual meeting. This will also give the program an opportunity to engage non-instructional staff in the planning process. Also, ensure that there are adequate opportunities for regular planning during the program cycle. Teachers must have time in their schedule to focus on both individual and collaborative planning.

Integrated Planning

Despite the research that demonstrates learning is a social process, teachers often view and practice their profession in isolation. The YouthBuild education model reflects many of John Dewey's principles of education, including viewing the school as a community that reflects social relations and activities of the larger society. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the program does not create an environment in which classrooms and teachers are isolated from one another.

Research indicates that collaborative planning is an important tool for improving teacher practice and implementing effective teaching strategies. The program director, or principal if it is a charter school model, plays a critical role in facilitating effective collaboration among instructors and other program staff. For collaborative planning to be effective, the staff need essential tools such as relevant data, curricular and planning tools, resources, commitment to continuous improvement, and most importantly structured and protected time for collaboration. When structuring collaborative planning, include the following elements:

- **Effective analysis of student learning strengths and gaps.** Ensure that instructors are using a combination of assessments and student work to evaluate student progress and developing collaborative strategies to improve student skills.
- **Reflective discussion about teaching practice.** Teachers should openly discuss successful teaching strategies as well as practices that are not working. Program leadership should help instructors implement successful strategies and provide trainings where appropriate.
- **Standards-based instructional planning.** Standards can help teachers adopt effective instructional practices and develop strategic learning goals. They can also help develop a culture of collective inquiry and shared responsibility for student progress.
- **High-quality team leadership and facilitation.** It is important to engage all staff but also provide effective leadership for planning and improvement. High-quality leadership will ensure that planning discussions are analytic, reflective, and results-oriented. It will also help develop an improvement-oriented culture that values giving and receiving feedback.

Integrated planning should begin prior to the program cycle and continue throughout the program. Prior to the start of the program cycle, instructional and program staff should plan across all subject areas and program components. It is important for integrated planning to be an interactive process, which will provide opportunities for staff to be not only involved but deeply engaged in the planning process. Once a plan is developed, teachers and program staff must be able to continuously access it, build upon it, and implement improvement strategies. They must also have opportunities to continue to plan collaboratively throughout the program cycle. Integrated planning meetings can take several forms, including:

- **Cluster meetings.** During these meetings, a cluster of instructional staff that teach the same students (e.g. a GED teacher, construction manager, and life skill instructor) meet to discuss specific needs of students and share successful teaching strategies. Staff can also discuss student progress, curricula issues, and opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration.
- **All staff meetings.** It is important to focus on program-wide goals during this meeting, for example reviewing the latest assessment data, identifying areas of strength and weakness, and discussing strategies for improving student skills across program components.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample collaborative planning toolkit, visit the Community of Practice.

Advance Planning

Advance planning can take several forms as the teacher must plan for the program cycle, specific units of study, and daily lessons. This section will focus on yearly and unit planning.

Prior to the start of the program cycle, teachers can work collaboratively to develop an instructional plan for the year. Whether the program offers a GED, High School Diploma or both, instructors should start with the end in mind. First, they should identify the skills and knowledge that students should master by the end of the year. Next, the team breaks down skills and concepts by month and identifies places for cross-curriculum collaboration. The long-range plan should also identify times for assessment. Ideally, the program will have developed a program-wide assessment calendar, which can be integrated into the program-wide plan.

It is important to incorporate standards and objectives into the planning process. They will help instructional staff identify strategic lessons, implement the best teaching strategies, and develop a program-wide instructional plan that will maximize collaboration, for example, aligning the math curriculum to correspond with the skills that are taught in the construction site. This will help staff reinforce skills across program components, and it will also provide opportunities for students to apply skills they are learning in the academic component.

Advance planning helps instructors adopt effective strategies for pacing to give students the time and space they need to master concepts and skills, allows them to be more flexible, and creates opportunities to incorporate student interests and contextualize their learning.

When staff engage in advance planning, they not only collaborate with other staff but also teach effectively and maximize their time. By planning in advance, teachers will have a guide for instruction for the year. The program-wide plan is a skeleton that teachers can and should continue to tweak during the program cycle. By creating a master guide, teachers can be sure they will cover all essential content during the program cycle. It will also allow teachers to incorporate engaging activities into their daily lessons and student interests into lesson plans.

Ongoing Planning

During the ongoing planning process, teachers should tweak their long-term plans and identify specific activities to aid instruction. Lesson planning is a large component of the ongoing planning process. At a minimum, teachers should have dedicated time once a week to concentrate on planning. During this phase of planning teachers should concentrate on:

- **Specifying objectives.** It is vital for the instructor and students to know the objective of instruction on a daily basis. When teachers specify objectives, they identify precise goals for what students should accomplish by the completion of the lesson. During the ongoing planning process, teachers should also identify how students will demonstrate mastery.

- **Selecting and organizing learning activities.** Once teachers identify the objectives, they should select the most effective strategies and activities to teach concepts and skills, organize the activities to accommodate an appropriate level of flow, pace them to help students master the content, and incorporate student experience and knowledge. Thinking strategically about the opening and ending of each lesson will help set the tone and pace for student learning.
- **Specifying evaluation procedures.** It is vital that teachers assess student learning on an ongoing basis. It will help them gauge student progress and continue to plan. These assessments can be informal.

When teachers plan on an ongoing basis, they should do so against the master plan developed at the beginning of the program year. This is also the place for teachers to consider differentiated instruction and identify resources that are needed to conduct a lesson. The following questions can guide teachers in their ongoing planning process:

- How much time can and should I devote to the lesson?
- What skills and content should be covered?
- What is the most effective way to teach the specific skill and content?
- How does this lesson fit into the overall plan for the program cycle?
- How can I differentiate instruction?

For teachers to be effective planners, they should be continuously and consistently reflective. Reflection ensures that teachers adopt the best teaching strategies and build varied assessments into their lesson plans. Additionally, teachers should reflect on the quality of teaching and learning on a daily basis. The following guiding questions can help teachers reflect on daily lessons:

- What went well in the lesson?
- What problems came up during the lesson?
- Are there things that could have been done differently?
- How can future content be built on this lesson?

Providing teachers with appropriate structure, schedule and training to ensure that they plan strategically and effectively is a program leadership function. Teachers should also be able to access resources in and out of the program to help them plan. Below are some resources teachers can use to plan a range of subjects:

- **Edutopia** – provides access to resources on a variety of teaching strategies and online communities for teachers to share ideas and resources
- **Federal Resources for Educational Excellence** – provides a range of teaching and learning resources organized by subject areas
- **Khan Academy** – contains over 3,000 videos on a range of subjects that teachers can integrate into the daily lessons or use to differentiate instruction
- **PBS Teachers** – offers a variety of teaching and professional development resources

Professional Development

Professional development not only improves teaching practices but also contributes to staff retention and program culture. When schools respond to teacher needs, they improve workplace satisfaction and allow teachers to focus on student outcomes. Teachers who have opportunities for meaningful professional development thrive in school environments. It is an investment in building the capacity of the adults in the program, which in turn will ensure that students achieve stronger outcomes. Thus a sound professional development plan should be a cornerstone of the education component.

In order for professional development to be meaningful, directors must create a well thought out and meaningful professional development plan that meets the needs of teachers and communicates expectations for teaching.

Developing a sound professional development plan requires offering professional development in the most effective methods, prioritizing and scheduling time for teacher development, aligning development opportunities to teaching expectations, and providing consistent feedback to teachers. Professional development can take many forms, so programs should offer a range of opportunities. It is also important to create opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration; for example, create a structure that allows teachers to observe each other.

Designing Trainings for Teachers

Teachers value schools with a strong instructional culture that has a clear vision for excellent teaching and a strong plan for helping teachers reach their full potential. A strong instructional culture that is focused on continuous improvement not only helps them grow but also empowers them by valuing their development and growth.

As with any profession, training for teachers should be valuable and applicable. Teachers must be able to translate their training into effective classroom practices. Therefore, offer training within the context of a learning community that nurtures not only student learning but also continuous reflection and analysis by teachers. Creating this culture will help program staff become active participants in the professional development process. Teachers should generate questions and voice challenges they face in the classroom and with students that formal professional development can address. Trainings are effective and valuable if teachers are active participants.

Actively engaging teachers also creates more opportunities for them to collaborate with one another. Encouraging teachers to be responsible for their own learning will foster rich exchanges of ideas, commitment to innovation, and a higher level of engagement in training opportunities. It will also provide an opportunity for teachers to facilitate their own learning and develop a strong instructional culture of collaboration and support.

High-quality and relevant professional development opportunities are:[3]

- **Continuous learning opportunities.** Teachers indicate that one-time seminars are the least effective forms of trainings because they do not have the ability to practice the knowledge gained.
- **Focused on improving classroom practice and increasing student learning.** When trainings are based on the needs of teachers, they are more likely to see the training as relevant and applicable. It also provides them opportunities to implement the practices immediately.
- **Embedded in the daily work of teaching and not relegated to special occasions or separated from the learning needs of students.**
- **Centered on crucial teaching and learning activities.** When trainings are connected to planning lessons, evaluating student work or developing curriculum, it addresses immediate challenges that teachers face. It also helps foster best practices.
- **Cultivated in a culture of collegiality that involves sharing knowledge and experience with the goal of reaching the same student improvement objectives.**
- **Supported by modeling and coaching that teach problem-solving techniques.** As with students, when teachers are given opportunities to model practices and receive supportive feedback and coaching, they are more willing to take risks and implement new practices.

In order for professional development opportunities to be meaningful and improve teaching practices, the program should:[4]

- **Connect professional development to teacher evaluation.** Organizing professional development opportunities according to teacher evaluation criteria will give teachers guidance to focus on improving their teaching practice. This will also help communicate the expectations for teaching.
- **Set individual learning goals.** Students thrive when they have an individualized learning opportunity. Similarly, teachers are likely to strive if their development is individualized and addresses their specific needs. Be sure to set individual professional development goals that align with school-wide goals with each instructional staff person. As with any other goal, track the progress teachers are making.
- **Communicate expectations.** If expectations are clear and specific, teachers can strive towards meeting them.
- **Observe teachers frequently.** Learning is an interactive process, and teachers need consistent feedback. When a program director or principal observes teachers regularly, he or she can help them identify their strengths and weaknesses and target professional development to ensure improvement. Teachers should also have opportunities to observe one another. These opportunities will help them practice, reflect, and receive peer support.
- **Review student data.** As part of a data-informed culture, the program must establish opportunities and protocols for reviewing student data and using it as a guide to help develop an individualized professional development plan.

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[3] This section is adapted from *Teacher Professional Development: A Primer for Parents and Community Members* published by the Public Education Network and the Finance Project.

[4] This section is adapted from *Teacher Talent Toolbox: School Tested Strategies for Growing Great Teaching Teams* published by The New Teacher Project. http://tntp.org/teacher-talent-toolbox

- **Differentiate development.** Teachers, just like students, have different modalities of learning as well as strengths and weaknesses. As much as possible vary your professional development offering to target specific teachers. For example, create different professional development tracks for new and veteran teachers.

Developing Professional Learning Communities

Learning is a social and interactive process. When teachers have opportunities to share knowledge, collaborate to solve problems, and practice effective teaching strategies, they are more likely to implement changes in the classroom. In an educational environment, this practice helps create a culture of continuous inquiry and improvement as teachers can collaboratively focus on improving professional practices. In this context, professional development occurs naturally as teachers collectively pursue professional knowledge and skills as well as take shared responsibility for student outcomes.

While professional learning communities are a valuable tool, they require appropriate structure, time and space for the process to develop. Professional learning communities are most successful when learning is embedded in routine practices. In this case, teachers are organized into teams, meet regularly, and engage in activities that focus on student achievement as well as learning, faculty collaboration, and student and teacher results. Many YouthBuild programs have limited educational staff. Therefore, it is important for such programs to explore creative opportunities to connect with a learning community through the YouthBuild network, local schools, and other community programs.

For a learning community to be successful, it needs to have the following characteristics:

- **Consistent structure.** Teachers need regular time to meet, identify professional challenges, develop effective strategies, and implement them in the classroom. As this process strengthens, teachers begin collaborating and sharing knowledge and practicing with one another beyond the structure of the learning community.
- **An inclusive community.** Although most professional learning communities consist only of teachers, including other program staff will help integrate the different program components and share best practices across program components. Some YouthBuild programs have found success by adding post-secondary faculty to professional learning communities.
- **The teaching of collaborative practices.** Collaboration is key to professional learning communities. Unfortunately, it might not come naturally to staff and program leadership may need to help develop collaborative norms and protocols and model effective collaboration techniques.
- **An atmosphere of trust.** Because many teachers are accustomed to practicing their profession in isolation, sharing practices and inviting peers to provide feedback might be daunting to them. In order to foster a successful learning community, create an environment that is not competitive but supportive.

In addition to program-based learning communities, encourage teachers to participate in online learning communities. With the growth of technology, teachers have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of learning communities and this has the added bonus of encouraging them to better integrate technology into their classrooms as well. The following resources will be helpful:

- **Learning Times.** This is an open community for education and training professionals. Members can access a wide range of resources and connect with peers across the globe.
- **Connexions.** Teachers can access a range of professional development and teaching resources that have been developed collaboratively. They can also connect to large collections of material or courses through specific modules. Teachers are encouraged to contribute to the collaborative process.
- **Edutopia Learning Communities.** Provides opportunities to interact with experts and peers on specific teaching strategies.

Retention

A common challenge for many YouthBuild programs is retaining teaching staff, although retaining highly qualified and effective teaching staff is not a problem unique to YouthBuild programs. School districts and charter schools continue to struggle with retention issues. Low turnover in staff, particularly in the education component, directly correlates with higher student outcomes. For a program to thrive and run an effective education component, high-performing teachers need to be retained so that the program can put their skills to use.

While compensation plays a role, programs can implement a wide-ranging system of rewards, recognition, and growth opportunities to retain their best teachers. In fact, non-monetary forms of recognition can have a significant impact on retention. YouthBuild programs offer a unique and supportive learning and teaching environment. It is important to emphasize the environment during the recruitment process, as this significantly impacts retention. The recruitment strategy impacts a program's ability to retain staff during the program cycle and in subsequent years. By attracting highly effective teachers who are compatible with the program's culture and values, embedding them in a well run program, creating fair compensation, and providing opportunities for learning, program leadership can retain high-performing staff and thus create continuity resulting in improved student performance.

Monetary Compensation

Since YouthBuild programs must compete with local school districts, charter schools, and other non-profit organizations to attract and retain highly-qualified and effective teaching staff, compensation plays a big role in the retention of staff. Often, YouthBuild programs, similar to charter schools and other non-profit organizations, are not able to offer the same level of monetary compensation as local school districts.

One of the first steps in setting your compensation guidelines is to become aware of the compensation rates in the state and local school district. The state or local Department of Education will provide this information, and once the average salaries for teachers in your area is clear, the program director can set a range for compensation and use it as a starting point for salary discussions.

When designing the program's compensation structure, create a framework that rewards teachers for qualities that the program values. Generally, programs will create a salary range and teachers can move up on the range based on qualities valued by the program. Some of these elements could be:

- **Experience.** As with salaries in other sectors, teachers with previous experience may be offered a higher starting salary. Teachers with experience tend to have stronger skills for which they may be rewarded.
- **Teacher performance.** A teacher's prior performance may be considered at the time a salary offer is made.
- **Hard-to-staff subject areas.** In order to attract the best candidates in subjects such as math and science, programs may have to offer a higher salary to these teachers.
- **Certifications.** Some charter schools and non-profit organizations do provide incentives for certifications.

After the initial offer, the compensation structure at your program has to account for the compensation of teachers in the subsequent years. Many charter schools and school districts are adopting performance-based compensation. Often, these are based on the level of student improvement on standardized tests. If performance-based compensation is implemented, a consistent, reliable, and impartial method to evaluate teacher performance will have to be put in place. Teachers may also be rewarded for performance on standardized assessments or achievement based on holistic assessments. While performance-based compensation only modestly impacts retention, it may still be the appropriate approach for a particular program. In this case, the compensation model should be clearly explained and teachers should be given access to all relevant data.

It is also important to take student evaluation into account in performance reviews. Students know which teachers are reaching them, teaching them, caring about their learning, and having a positive impact on the group as a whole.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample student assessment, see Youth on Board: Organizational Assessment Checklist.

Non-Monetary Compensation

While YouthBuild programs may not be able to compete with local districts in terms of monetary compensation, they can offer a range of unique non-financial rewards. It is important for program leadership to understand and articulate these rewards during the recruitment process and throughout the program cycle. Teachers, much like employees in other fields, are attracted to positions for a variety of reasons.

YouthBuild programs offer a unique work environment that includes a supportive program culture and small student-to-teacher ratio. Teaching at a YouthBuild program also allows teachers to get to know students and foster relationships with them. During the hiring process, this advantage must be clearly communicated. It is also important to set accurate expectations about the role of a teacher in a YouthBuild program. Teachers are more than instructors; they are also counselors and career advisors. For many teachers, it is attractive to work with young people in a more intense and personal manner. They find this type of teaching experience more rewarding, but they must feel prepared prior to starting the teaching position. When directors set these expectations early, teachers make informed decisions and are less likely to feel overburdened by the workload.

In addition to highlighting the unique benefits of working at a YouthBuild program, program leadership also needs to recognize and reward teachers and offer meaningful growth opportunities to encourage long-term retention. Some non-monetary rewards that may be effective are:[5]

- **Recognizing exemplary performance.** Create structures, and make time to recognize accomplishments. It is important to reward and recognize the excellent work of teachers as well as that of students. Recognize exemplary performance in formal and informal ways.
- **Managing teacher workload.** In many national surveys, teachers and administrators cite teacher workload as unsustainable. Teachers cite high and unmanageable workload as one of the top reasons for turnover. Therefore, it is important that the program identify efficiencies that will conserve teachers' time, which can greatly reduce high turnover.
- **Providing opportunities for growth.** Unlike other professions, excelling at one's job and learning new skills does not translate to a promotion in teaching. However, it is important that teachers feel there is a path for advancement. This includes encouraging teachers to remain in the classroom but take on responsibilities that help them become instructional leaders in the program.
- **Maintaining multiple lines of communication.** If teachers have multiple channels for both giving and receiving feedback, challenges can be identified and addressed early. Engage teachers in conversations beyond the education component. Strategic communication strategies can foster innovation and be invigorating to teachers.
- **Addressing all aspects of human capital.** Organizations perceived to be strong in all areas of human capital tend to have more satisfied teachers. This includes providing high-quality and meaningful professional development opportunities.

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[5] This section was adapted from the *Teacher Talent Toolbox* developed by the New Teacher Project. http://tntp.org/teacher-talent-toolbox

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on developing a professional culture in your program and providing holistic compensation, visit the New Teacher Project.

Supervision and Evaluation of Performance[6]

YouthBuild programs that maintain high-quality education components develop a strong instructional culture that has solid and consistent leadership and includes an effective evaluation and supervision system. A strong accountability system provides meaningful support to teachers and opportunities for improvement.

As with many other structures in the education component, the supervision and evaluation structure has to be consistent and continuous, with clear guidelines. For example, document in a staff handbook the process for evaluating performance such as the frequency of classroom observations. When creating a supervisory structure, be sure to include the following effective practices:

- **Clear performance expectations.** Develop clear expectations for performance and effectively communicate these expectations, beginning with recruitment and continuing throughout the duration of employment. Work on creating greater buy-in to the expectations.
- **Early identification of performance issues.** Conducting frequent observations and delivering regular feedback will ensure high-quality instruction is taking place in the classroom and that you have an effective education component.
- **Concrete feedback and actionable improvement steps.** Provide teachers with feedback that is clear and actionable, including improvement goals that are measurable and time-bound.
- **Time and resources for improvement.** Regardless of whether a teacher is struggling or not, providing reasonable and sufficient support and resources will encourage continuous growth and improvement.

The primary purpose of supervision and evaluation is to ensure that the most effective teaching practices are being implemented and that there is a continuous process of inquiry and improvement. Because learning is an interactive process, teachers learn just as much through feedback from their peers and students as they do from the program director. Therefore, structures that will allow students and other teachers to provide ongoing feedback will be important.

[6] This section was adapted from *Teacher Evaluation 2.0* published by The New Teacher Project. http://tntp.org/assets/documents/Teacher-Evaluation-Oct10F.pdf.

Supervision and accountability start during the hiring and orientation process. It is important to hire teachers who share the program's vision of instruction and learning because when teachers share a common vision, they are more confident in a school's accountability decisions and are more open to feedback. In addition to sharing the program's instructional vision with them, provide opportunities for teachers to contribute to this vision.

Ongoing Supervision

Teachers, like other staff, need honest feedback in order to improve and reach their full potential. Involve instructional leaders in this process by empowering them to facilitate instructional supervision by modeling exemplary instructional practices, collaborating with peers, and assisting peers through peer observations. Instructional leaders can not only help in the supervision process but also create a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.

Classroom observations should be a factor in any teacher evaluation structure, since they help to develop a fair and accurate understanding of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Prior to observing teachers, develop clear and rigorous criteria that show evidence of student learning. These should include:

- **Clear performance standards.** Establish these standards prior to the program cycle and communicate them with teachers. During observations, evaluate teacher performance against these standards.
- **Common language on instructional practice.** Common language can not only help communicate standards and expectations but also align professional development to the continuous improvement process.
- **High-quality feedback.** Observations should not simply be a tool to record performance but a mechanism to communicate with teachers. After each observation, it is important to provide clear and actionable feedback that includes strengths as well as weaknesses.

The classroom observation process should begin with a pre-planning meeting, followed by an observation and a post-observation meeting to discuss the results. While this model can be helpful for end-of-year evaluations, an ongoing observation process that observes teachers frequently (at least once a month) for short periods (15 minutes or less) and is focused on specific evaluation criteria will yield marked improvements in teacher effectiveness. Follow up the observation with written feedback that includes concrete suggestions for improvement.

When observing classrooms, be sure to evaluate teachers on multiple aspects of instructional practices, including:

- lesson planning, delivery, and strategies
- student management, engagement, and mastery
- assessment design and use, including continuous monitoring of student progress
- physical environment

Establishing concrete connections between supervision and professional development, providing actionable feedback, and recognizing trends among teachers will result in teachers feeling more supported and finding training more helpful. Monthly supervisory meetings, which can become a regular part of the ongoing feedback process, can be used as a tool to facilitate ongoing conversations about best practices. It can also be a time to develop instructional goals and regularly check the progress teachers are making towards them.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For a sample tool to provide regular feedback and a sample teacher observation tool, visit the Community of Practice.
- For more information on structuring classroom observations, visit the New Teacher Project.

Teacher Evaluation

Develop a strong and meaningful teacher evaluation structure that reflects core principles of good instruction and has clear standards to evaluate instructors' ability to connect with students and build strong and supportive relationships with them. A strong evaluation system will not only help teachers but will also help the program to develop a strong education component.

An effective evaluation system requires significant staff capacity to plan and manage the various components of the evaluation system. The following are best practices for effective evaluation systems:

- **Comprehensive evaluation.** Evaluate all teachers using the same standards.
- **Clear communication.** Develop a clear and consistent vision for the purpose of the evaluation system. The purpose and vision should be communicated to all instructional staff.
- **Thorough training.** The program director and other administrators should be familiar with the standards of performance and have adequate training.
- **Purposeful operation.** Ensure that the program has the capacity in terms of staff, technology, and logistics to implement the evaluation fairly and consistently.
- **Constant improvement.** Dedicate regular time to reflect and evaluate priorities and outcomes of the evaluation process on an ongoing basis and also discuss the evaluation system with staff on a regular basis.

In addition to these guidelines, the evaluation system should also have clear and consistent standards:

- **Evaluating teachers, at a minimum annually, regardless of their level of experience.** By conducting regular evaluations, program leadership recognizes that teachers' effectiveness and developmental needs change over time.
- **Setting clear and rigorous expectations.** Base the evaluations on standards of instructional excellence that prioritize student learning. Develop precisely worded criteria so that expectations are consistent across classrooms.
- **Incorporating multiple measures.** Considering multiple measures of performance, primarily the teachers' impact on student academic growth, will yield a more accurate picture of teacher performance.
- **Incorporating multiple ratings.** Evaluations should employ four to five rating levels to describe differences in teacher effectiveness.
- **Providing regular feedback.** Conduct frequent observations and provide constructive critical feedback.
- **Giving the process significance.** Evaluation outcomes must matter; evaluation data should be a major factor in instructional decisions.

Peer and Student Evaluation

It is important to include peer and student feedback in a strong evaluation process. Teachers can learn from one another and their students. This is part of developing an ongoing and reflective culture of instruction.

The evaluation process can be an extension of the collaborative planning and professional development process, providing opportunities for teachers to receive feedback from their peers and encouraging them to take risks in the classroom and implement new teaching strategies. Because teachers can feel apprehensive about evaluations, incorporating peer feedback emphasizes that the evaluation system is designed to improve teaching practice rather than be a tool for punitive measures.

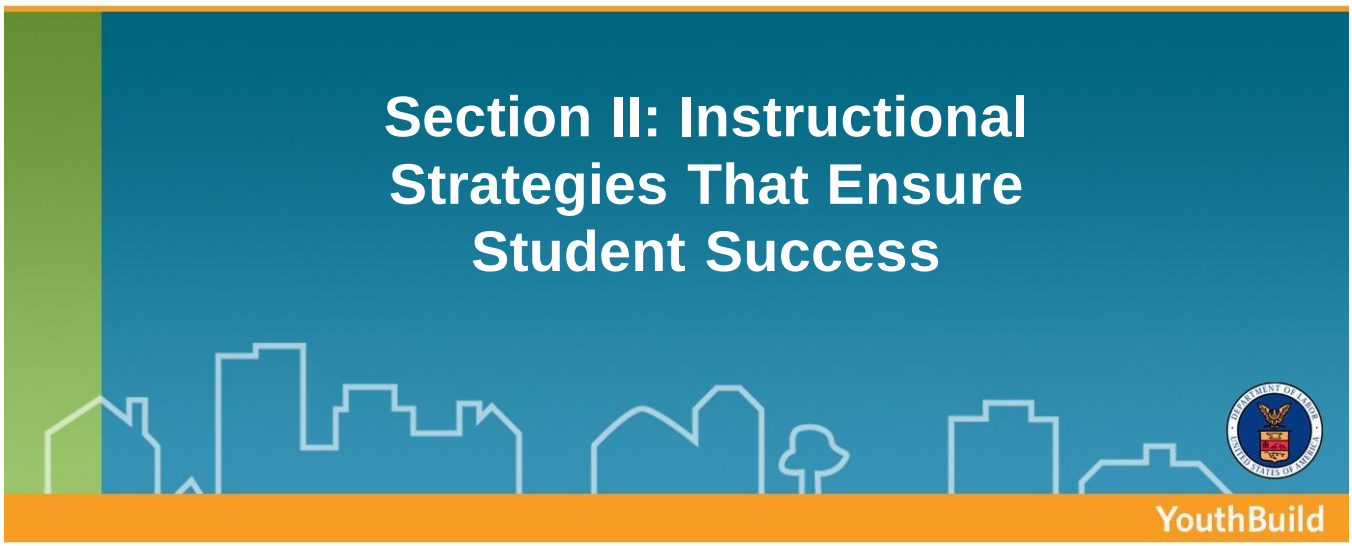
It is also important to involve students in the feedback process. Ideally, teachers should regularly invite student feedback to add to their reflection about their practice, but when formal structures are instituted, teachers are further encouraged to solicit and incorporate student feedback into their instruction. It also emphasizes to students that YouthBuild is different from their previous educational experiences and that an individualized learning experience tailored to their needs is important to the program. Just as the program prepares young people to take regular standardized assessments to demonstrate their progress, it should also prepare them to provide fair and accurate feedback to teachers. Students should understand the implications of their opinions, the manner in which teachers will incorporate their feedback, and how it can improve their outcomes.

Staff Probation

Unless the evaluation process has meaningful implications and is used to make important decisions about compensation, retention, development, promotion, and dismissal, it will not earn sustained support from teachers nor contribute to systematic improvement.

A strong evaluation system will help you identify early issues with teacher performance. Consider establishing a probationary period for teachers with poor performance as well as implementing a probationary period of employment for all new teachers to the program. This, along with a rigorous evaluation system, can help work out kinks and help teachers get acclimated to the program.

Regardless of the reason for probation, it is important to meet with staff regularly during this period and to provide clear expectations, honest oral and written feedback on performance, and actionable steps for improvement. Both should be discussed during these meetings to ensure that teachers are less likely to feel overwhelmed and will be more committed to improvement.


Section II: Instructional Strategies That Ensure Student Success
YouthBuild

Section II: Instructional Strategies That Ensure Student Success

While the YouthBuild program director provides vision for the education component, teachers and other education staff (e.g. principal, curriculum coordinator, etc.) implement an effective education component on the ground. In fact, teachers and education staff drive the education component at every successful YouthBuild program.

Teachers not only interact with students on a daily basis, but also have the responsibility to choose an appropriate curriculum, implement effective instructional strategies, monitor student achievement, and create a safe and productive classroom environment. Each of these elements requires careful thought and consideration. Additionally, teachers must also have knowledge and skill to navigate the classroom environment and student challenges, which can be unpredictable at times.

This section is intended for teachers at a YouthBuild program, and it focuses on how teachers can best support student achievement and success. Chapters three through seven focus on aspects of teaching that include effective teaching strategies, methods that ensure students develop skills, building the appropriate classroom environment and culture, selecting and implementing a successful curriculum, and effectively assessing student progress.

While theses chapters are intended for teachers at a YouthBuild program, we encourage program directors to become familiar with the content, which will help them understand the teaching process and provide guidance on how best to support teachers.

Chapter 3: Teaching Strategies

Instructors have the responsibility to provide the appropriate academic remediation, acceleration and preparation for all students and ensure they are ready to succeed in post-secondary education and careers. However, the students come from diverse backgrounds and possess a range of skills and academic needs, including special education and English language learning needs. In fact, many students in YouthBuild programs are nontraditional students with a history of academic struggles and have faced barriers that are obstacles to learning. These include:

- **Negative self-image.** Students may have experienced failure in their previous educational experiences and hence may be likely to have a negative image and assessment of their educational skills and ability to learn.
- **Content anxiety.** Based on their educational background, students may perceive themselves to be weak or unable to perform in particular subject areas (e.g. math anxiety, reading anxiety, etc.).
- **Skill Differentiation.** Students will exhibit a range of skills, learning rates, and styles. For struggling students, this can be stressful because they may not believe they can keep pace with peers or succeed academically.
- **Academic passivity.** Students may perceive the teacher as controlling all knowledge and may take a passive role in learning.
- **Personal obstacles.** Many young people have to manage competing responsibilities and priorities. As a result, they may struggle to navigate schedules, complete assignments, and stay focused.

Instructional strategies that are well thought out and executed can help address the academic needs of nontraditional students. All barriers cannot be addressed through a single strategy, and even the strongest models lose their effectiveness if used without clarity in purpose and implementation. The most appropriate model is one that engages students, achieves their academic goals, reduces learning barriers, teaches thinking processes that build independence, and ultimately helps students flourish in educational and work settings. Teachers can implement multiple instructional strategies within a range of curricula. At the heart of any instructional strategy should be the commitment to meeting the unique learning styles, abilities and interests of all students. This includes establishing classroom routines and practices will help your students develop independent thinking and learning skills.

Effective Instructional Models

A strong education program that prioritizes effective instruction will include a range of teaching strategies. Because students' learning styles and skills vary, diversity in instructional methods will ensure that all students are able to master the content. Depending on the curriculum, content, and the level of pacing, teachers may choose to follow one strategy or to combine strategies.

Concept Attainment Model[7]

The concept attainment mode is an experiential learning model. Students determine the characteristics of a concept selected by the instructor. The concepts can be abstract or concrete. Students gather, categorize and process data to master the content. Because students' have to use comparing and contrasting skills in this model, instructors often use Venn Diagrams as a tool to assist students to organize their thoughts and master the content.

Once students understand the concept, instructors provide them opportunities to apply the concept. For example, if a teacher were teaching a math concept through this model, he or she might ask students to apply it to additional examples. Asking students to apply the knowledge is also a quick way to determine their mastery of the content. Since applying concepts to examples is a skill tested on many standardized tests, it is an opportunity for teachers to also prepare for students tests that are similar to the GED.

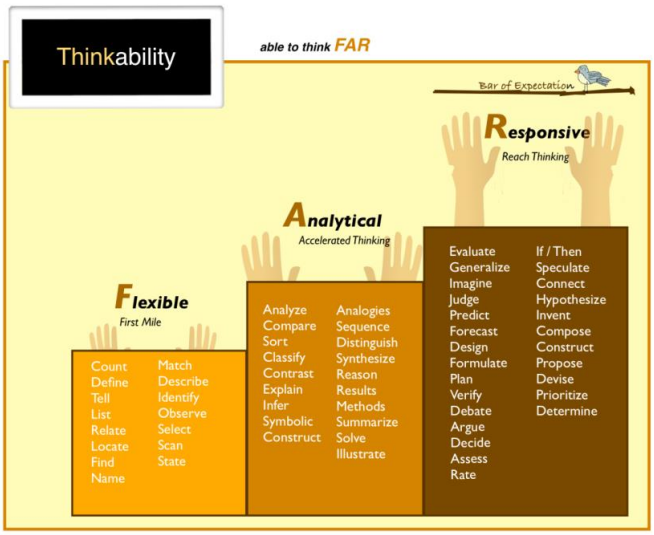
This model requires students to use higher order thinking skills, which tend to utilize internal thinking processes. As a result, it is imperative that teachers model and explicitly share the thinking process. Doing so will ensure that students understand the instructions and actively participate in the learning process. Because they will use higher order thinking skills, it is also an opportunity for students to develop independent learning and critical thinking skills.

The Socratic Method/Questioning Model

This is a student-centered and knowledge-focused model that helps instructors teach complex concepts in a gradual gradient through using questions and dialogue to help students' master content. Students develop meta-cognitive skills because they receive feedback from both peers and instructors. It also provides opportunities for students to build skills in self-reflection and evaluation.

When using this model, teachers can engage students in five different types of questioning. This includes:

- **Clarification.** This type of question is used to elaborate or probe into a subject more deeply. This can also be used to gain more information from a student or understand their feelings, ideas, and thought process. Examples include: Can you give an example? What do you mean by that? Could you put that another way?
- **Perspective.** These questions go deeper than clarification questions. They require students to form opinions about content.



[7] The concept attainment method is adapted from *Instruction a Models Approach* by Mary Alice Gunter, Thomas Estes and Susan L. Mintz

Examples include: What is an alternative? Why did you choose this perspective? How would a different group respond?

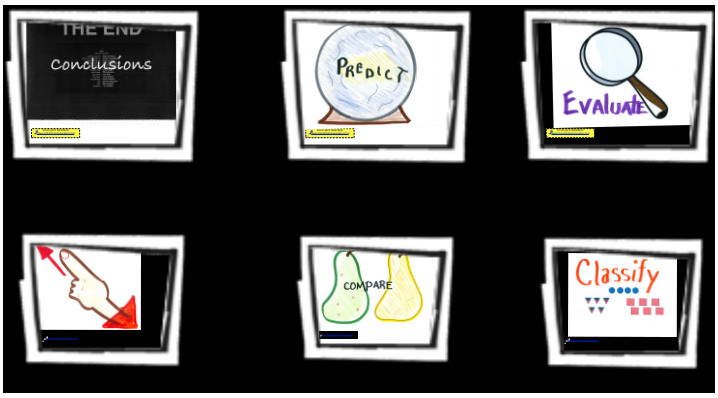
- **Cause and Effect.** When using this type of question, teachers are asking students to draw relationships as well as compare and contrast information. The following are examples of this type of questioning: What effect would that have? What are you implying? Would that necessarily or only probably happen?
- **Reason and Evidence.** While this type of question asks students to evaluate relationships, it also utilizes higher level of skills by requiring them to make judgments. Examples of this type of questioning include: What would be an example? How does that apply to this case? What other information do we need?

The cognitive demand of these questions can vary. Lower domain thinking skills involve concrete data and information. They do not require students to analyze information or engage in abstract thought. Questions that involve upper domain thinking skills ask students to analyze, deconstruct, and synthesize information. Students are more likely to struggle with these questions. Therefore, appropriate structure and support are needed to keep students engaged.

While lower domain questions are easier, they should not be avoided. In fact, these questions can be used to build enthusiasm, differentiate instruction, and help students practice responding to questions. However, it is important to ensure the majority of your questions utilize upper domain skills.

While this model helps young people develop high-order thinking skills, it can also be challenging. Therefore, provide the necessary structure and support for students to feel successful when utilizing this teaching strategy. For example, teachers may consider providing graphic or verbal cues that help students engage in thinking and questioning. Symbols and graphics can also help students with comprehension and memory. To create effective visual concept cues:

- Reduce the learning concept to a pictorial image that allows the student to visualize the concept explicitly
- Enhance the image with additional mnemonics and word play that help the students further organize the information[8]



[8] Mnemonics are often disregarded by educators, but mnemonics can decrease the demand on working memory. Mnemonics organize information, hold facts and seemingly unrelated information in place. Mnemonics provide great enhancements to existing cues of meaning but should be used thoughtfully as the primary focus of the concept cue. Concepts with meanings that are difficult to portray using imagery can be translated into images that focus primarily on word play and mnemonics. A YouthBuild program should consider using mnemonics as the primary focus in symbolic concept cues only when the search for meaning has been exhausted, as the effectiveness of concept cues lies in the pictorial display of meaning.

- Combine the use of visual concept cues with other instructional routines, such as note-taking, discussion, questioning, etc.
- Create cues for knowledge, processes and behaviors that are abstract, complex, or inferred.

When using this model with students, it is important to direct the questions to all students. This strategy engages the entire class and holds all students accountable. It is also important to help direct students' thinking by providing explicit directions. For example, the following statements may be used:

- We are thinking about the paragraph that we just read...
- We are thinking about Mary's statement...
- We are focusing on the second sentence...
- We are directing our attention to John's response...

The teachers' response to students is as critical as the type of questions asked. Resist the temptation to summarize and clarify students' responses; instead, engage students in further questioning. If a response merits a summary, clarification, or expansion, engage the students. This helps students build analytical skills. This method allows the instructor to scaffold the next question or elaborate the next cognitive level. This keeps students engaged and challenged and also allows the instructor to direct differentiate the questions.

To implement this strategy successfully, it is important not only to select the questions carefully but also to establish appropriate classroom practices. Be sure to maintain eye contact with students to encourage and acknowledge their responses. Walking around the room and calling on students randomly and unpredictably to respond to questions will also help to engage all students. Randomly choosing students, helps to distribute questions across the classroom and match students to appropriate questions and this strategy helps the teacher to pace questioning (an important factor in engagement), gauge student reactions, and keep focus and classroom energy positive and upbeat.

The Inquiry Model[9]

Similar to the other models, this experiential model engages students' curiosity and requires them to use their problem-solving skills to learn new content. Because students play a lead role in this learning experience, they can find the inquiry model very empowering.

Typically, the teacher presents a puzzling issue and introduces the inquiry process. Students develop a theory and collect data by taking turns asking the teacher questions. Students must phrase questions so that they are answered with yes or no. Teachers can help students guide the questioning, but students are responsible for developing the hypothesis. Depending on the nature of the problem, the teacher should also direct students to the resources that the students need (lab equipment, textbooks, etc.).

[9] Richard Schuman is credited with developing the Inquiry Method.

Once students verify a theory, they should determine how the theory can be tested and identify rules by which it can be generalized, so that it can apply to other situations. Students should also discuss the learning process, including any aspects they could have done more effectively and efficiently. This step helps students build metacognition skills that help them internalize the inquiry process. Because students may struggle with these skills, teachers will have to provide the appropriate scaffolding and guide the instruction in this phase.

Direct Instruction Model

In the direct instruction model, the teacher delivers the instructional content directly to the student. This model works best when the instructional period is short (an hour or less) and is ideal for teaching basic skills, facts, and knowledge. When utilizing this model, present new materials in chunks beginning with the most basic skill level, which helps build student confidence. Because many YouthBuild students are passive learners and are not inclined to take academic risks, teachers should provide ample opportunities for guided and independent practice for each chunk before moving to another. During the guided practice, the class should practice together while the instructor carefully monitors individual student progress. Also provide structured opportunities for independent practice. Additionally, timely and constructive feedback is critical. Split content into appropriate chunks and allow time for practice. This helps students become increasingly responsible and accountable and allows staff to pace the instruction appropriately.

Most teachers find this model easy to adapt and utilize in the classroom. However, because traditional educational settings frequently utilize this model, YouthBuild students may have negative association with it. As a result, many YouthBuild programs use this model effectively but judiciously.

Student Engagement Through Attention Management

While a well-constructed lesson plan is important for engaging students, instructors should pay attention to students' working memory and attention spans. The best instructional model and the most remarkable lesson plan can fail entirely if an instructor does not recognize these barriers.

Within a 45 minute lesson, a teacher may need to adjust student engagement states from five to fifteen times depending on the content, context, and other learning factors associated with each individual and with the class as a whole. An attention adjustment can be as simple as a change in pace or tone or as large as a momentary reshuffle of student seating. Incorporating attention adjustment routines into classroom instruction keeps students in alert and focused engagement and reduces classroom management issues related to student attention problems.

The following engagement strategies effectively alter mental, physical, or emotional states of attention.

- Effective physical attention changes:
  - rotate seats
  - turn to your neighbor and discuss...
  - gallery walk (two trips around the room) and find a new place to sit
  - stand and take notes
  - rearrange entire room so instruction faces a new wall

- Effective mental and emotional attention changes:
  - change the content or *what* you are saying
  - change the conditions or the *context* of the learning
  - change the pace of the activity
  - change the delivery or *how* you say it -- the excitement of tone, language, and presentation
  - create mystery and intrigue in lesson
    - control and manipulate environment by including props, desk arrangement, posters, music and use of students
    - change the participation expectations
    - change or create new rituals
    - change and alter student games, groups, and interactions

One of the easiest and most effective strategies for incorporating attention management routines into a class is to create a poster that lists the above strategies. Placing this in a prominent place in the classroom will remind teachers to vary their instructional strategies at the moment of instruction.

Developing Independent Students

It is also important to teach students some strategies for staying engaged. Help students think about their posture and physically adjust their bodies to stay alert. This can include:

- **Focusing on the speaker.** The student should find the speaker with his/her eyes and track the speaker's movement.
- **Leaning forward.** The student should adjust his/her body so that the body is physically leaning towards the speaker. This cues the physical response to engagement, when students are naturally curious about a speaker's message, their bodies naturally lean forward.
- **Nodding.** Nodding is a body's mental manifestation of agreement. This powerful signal helps both the student and the speaker, since it encourages the student to mentally follow the speaker's message and sends a signal to the speaker that indicates engagement.
- **Recognizing disengagement.** A student must ask him/herself why he or she is disengaging. This knowledge builds self-awareness and develops metacognitive skills.

Classroom Management

Behavior issues in a classroom are the result of a subtle issue that started small and over time became increasingly problematic due to the inconsistency with which the instructor handled the behavior. In a YouthBuild classroom, ignoring behavior issues creates conditions in which students become disengaged and apathetic. A compromised classroom behavior system leads to multiple breakdowns that individually are small but collectively create large problems that can eventually destroy active participation, atmosphere, and collegiality.

In order to effectively create an atmosphere of high expectations and engagement, a classroom should have a single and common understanding for classroom expectations that allows each individual to navigate academic and behavioral interactions seamlessly. A classroom with clear and visible language of shared expectations moves together fluidly and is able to navigate classroom interactions and dynamics responsively. A behavioral system that operates according to this model is efficient, saving students' and instructors' valuable time and allowing all students to monitor and adjust their own behaviors with independence while the teacher models expected academic and social behaviors. For example, if an instructor expects students to respond to question cues out loud, the instructor should model the response expected continually, consistently, and intentionally, to teach this expected behavior. This provides students ample opportunities to observe and practice classroom routines and behaviors.

Behavior Intervention

In addition to developing expectations for behavior and classroom values, teachers should also develop nonverbal cues for effective classroom management. These allow instructors to communicate with students without interrupting instruction. These simple anchors cue behavior and values, and most students appreciate them as the cues give them the opportunity to redirect their own behavior without drawing the unnecessary attention of their peer group. These non-verbal responses can be used for minor offenses and classroom disruptions.

There are times, even with strong behavioral management systems, when teachers have to address inappropriate or disruptive student behavior in a verbal manner. Develop a gradient of offenses along with the appropriate response to address the behavior. It is important that instructors appropriately match a redirection with the offense. These can include:

- **Positive group interventions.** These are verbal reminders that you can deliver to the entire class. To use this intervention effectively, teachers should focus on what the class should be doing instead of what the individual student should not be doing. This approach avoids directing the focus to the behavior that is off-task. For example, "We are writing in our journals" instead of "Mary, quit talking to Mark."
- **Individual Address.** There will be situations in which a teacher will have to address a student directly. In this case, address the issue quickly and purposefully without prolonged discussion or dialogue. Keep in mind that addressing individuals in a group dynamic compromises the risk and safety of the student. As such, an intervention should be calm, quick and direct and should immediately redirect the class to the task at hand.

- **Immediate Redirection.** It is important to redirect the class to the task at hand after addressing an individual student. Not doing so, increases the level of risk the individual student feels. It also places the teacher in a difficult position with the rest of the class. A student who needs direction should never gain the audience and attention of the group. This only invites a power struggle, which forces the instructor to choose power over purpose, which will always compromise the rapport and atmosphere of the classroom.

When behavior issues extend beyond the classroom, or if a student is not responding to the behavior management system, it is important to understand the cause of the behavior. When students lack clarity or find their work too challenging, they may exhibit inappropriate behaviors. In this case, work with the student on a more individualized basis to help him or her understand the academic content. If the behavior is motivated by something other than difficulty with instruction, the teacher will need to diffuse the situation by addressing the student in a non-threatening manner while respecting the student's space and conveying calmness and passivity through both body language and voice.

After the initial situation is diffused, the behavior should be addressed in a formal manner at the classroom or program level. Many YouthBuild programs use restorative justice methods to address conflict in and out of the classroom. In this model, students not only are held accountable for their behavior but are given an opportunity to discuss their motivation for the behavior, to address the harm they caused, and to work with a staff person to strategize alternative methods to deal with similar situations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on restorative justice, visit www.restorativejustice.org.

Student Goal Setting

Because the YouthBuild model is a comprehensive approach to developing educational and workforce skills, the education component must compliment and build on the skills young people develop in the other components of the program. An essential tool that will help integrate skill development and help young people see the connection between the different parts of the program is the Individual Education Plan or Individual Career Plan (IEP or ICP). This is part of the broader Individual Development Plan (IDP) that is described in the *Program Manual for Counseling, Case Management, and Program Culture*.

Individual Career Plan

The Individual Career Plan is one of the most important tools program staff will develop with young people. When developing the ICP, your staff will help students identify their interests, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics. This should be a dynamic document; young people should be encouraged to "own" it and refer to it frequently to make sure they are still on track. A young person's career plan should be detailed and consist of many parts, including background information, barriers to success, career goals, educational goals, and post-graduate plan. The education section of the ICP should contain:

- educational history
- assessment scores
- gains in literacy and numeracy
- certifications or degrees completed during the program or being considered for the future
  - Steps and deadlines for obtaining the certification or degree

It is essential that program use regular check-in meetings and assessments to ensure that students are progressing along their plan's path and to teach students important skills about measuring growth over a long period. Self-assessment should be a part of this process since it helps students document the progress they are making and honestly identify their shortfalls. Often young people are unflinchingly accurate in their self-assessments, so regularly revisiting this process will be invaluable to them as they move through their ICP. The incremental progress that students make will motivate them to continue working toward their long-term goals and aspirations.

Post-Secondary Education Plan

Part of a student's ICP may be plans for post-secondary education. Post-secondary placement requires very concrete actions by students throughout the program year. No more than midway through the program cycle, students should be helped to develop a specialized plan that identifies the institutions to which they intend to apply, the application procedures and costs, entrance examination schedules, interview process, and state and federal financial aid deadlines.

Program staff can help students understand and navigate this process by also obtaining information and creating a master time schedule for the post-secondary education placement process. This time schedule should include:

- application deadlines for a variety of local post-secondary education institutions
- SAT/ACT and/or COMPASS testing dates
- open house dates at a variety of local post-secondary education institutions
- financial aid application deadlines
- GED testing dates, if applicable

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on post-secondary readiness, see Section II of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Chapter 4: Strategies for Skill Development

A YouthBuild program's education component should be grounded in skills that prepare young people both for life and for successful employment. This chapter will focus on how instructors and other staff can weave together academics—especially literacy and numeracy—and thinking skills throughout the YouthBuild program. This chapter also addresses specific skills necessary for college and career success.

Teaching Students to Learn

Highly successful YouthBuild students clearly understand how education relates both to success in the program and to future employment. They are motivated to improve their current skills and gain new ones. They think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, use technology, and work collaboratively. They can demonstrate their knowledge in core academic subjects—language, mathematics, the arts, economics, science, geography, history, government and civics—and are working toward a high school diploma or GED (or toward significantly improving their literacy and numeracy). Students are knowledgeable about career options. They have considered their abilities and preferences, developed short- and long-term career goals and demonstrated firm commitment to achieving them.

While all aspects of the program will help students develop these skills, classroom teachers have the major responsibility to provide a solid education and vocational training component and help students develop the high-order thinking skills needed for success in post-secondary education, employment, and in life. By carefully designing curricula, teachers lay the foundation for lifelong learning. They should provide activities that prepare students to enter specific careers, attain internships or apprenticeships, or enroll in college or training programs. Equally important, teachers should motivate students to continue learning on the job or in school. Effective YouthBuild teachers—whether they are employed directly by YouthBuild or work at schools, community colleges, or other youth-serving organizations teaching YouthBuild students—should express their enthusiasm for learning and model the benefits of ongoing education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on 21st Century Skills, see Partnership for 21st Century Skills.
- Some YouthBuild programs use an older, but similar, framework for skill development, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS).

Teaching Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Along with mastering the facts and concepts that comprise a secondary education, YouthBuild programs should teach higher-order thinking skills and offer activities for students to learn them. These skills involve critical thinking, problem solving, and metacognition (controlling one's thinking process). When students learn to think, they learn to learn. They can apply their skills to new situations. Teaching these skills—and they should be taught and practiced across the curriculum—requires creative and varied methods of instruction.

Training Critical Thinkers

Critical thinking is an essential skill for making good personal, career-related and societal decisions, and it should be practiced throughout the education and other components of the program. Thinking critically involves using logic to test assumptions. Critical thinkers follow a process for weighing evidence and then deciding what to believe and what to do. The process includes:

- gathering information about a topic or issue
- carefully analyzing the information
- synthesizing or combining the information
- evaluating the information to reach a reasoned judgment

YouthBuild students often erroneously associate difficulty with their lack of ability. Teaching them higher-order thinking skills will help them recognize the different gradients of thinking skills and mental demand required to complete different tasks. As a result, you can help students increase their learning independence, confidence, and motivation for learning.

To be most effective, critical thinking should be taught in the context of students' personal and educational experiences. The most effective way to teach critical thinking is to have students apply it to issues, situations, and decisions that directly affect them. For example, during GED preparation or language classes, students can practice critical thinking by writing persuasive essays on a social issue that interests them. The education and vocational training can be integrated by having students gather information about a jobsite accident, analyze why it happened, synthesize their findings, and recommend ways to prevent further incidents. As part of the assignment, students should be asked to share with their peers how they incorporated the critical thinking process.

It is not only important to provide opportunities for building critical thinking skills but also to build a program and classroom culture that values the thinking process. Because thinking is mostly an internal and abstract process, it might be challenging to build this culture but it can be achieved by explicitly modeling the thinking process, making it visible to students and embedding routines and practices that encourage them to utilize high-order thinking skills on a regular basis. The program can create routines by:

- **Making the process simple.** Use simple and familiar information to teach students high-order thinking skills.
- **Practicing frequently.** Providing ample opportunities for practice, allows students to become familiar with the skills and construct their own processes.
- **Guiding through scaffolding.** Through routines, help students gradually develop essential thinking skills.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To access materials on using critical thinking in everyday life and to study and learn in school, visit CriticalThinking.org.
- The Pros and Cons Form for decision-making can be found in the Community of Practice.

Developing Problem-Solving Skills

In order for students to achieve academic and career success, they also need to learn problem-solving skills which will not only help them with academic challenges but also with navigating problems on the worksite and in their personal lives. Similar to critical thinking, problem solving involves a series of steps, including:

- identifying and understanding the problem
- evaluating information that is competing for attention but is not necessary for solving a problem
- selecting the steps to solve the problem and creating a plan
- carrying out the plan but evaluating whether each step is working
- analyzing and evaluating the solution to determine if it is the appropriate solution for the problem

Developing Metacognition Skills

As part of developing higher-order thinking skills, teachers need to address the skill of "metacognition" or directing one's own thinking, so that knowledge acquired in one situation can be applied to another. Teaching metacognition teaches students how to learn. This requires them to be aware of when they are learning, to recognize their preferred learning style, and to be realistic about the time and effort needed to master complex skills. As a result of learning these skills, students will be better able to balance their work, school and personal lives.

Developing Skills Across the Curriculum

Successful YouthBuild students develop competency not only in reading and writing English, but also in numeracy and solving problems at levels allowing them to function on the job, as family members, and in their communities. Learning that takes place on the worksite should be reinforced in vocational, high school, and GED preparation classrooms and during leadership training and community service. Rather than learning reading and writing only during English classes or math only during math classes, students should have opportunities to practice their skills—including leadership skills—throughout the program. For example, while leadership is addressed directly during leadership training, community meetings, and community service projects, it should be reinforced in the classroom and worksite as students effectively present their opinions, lead and work in teams, and teach and encourage their peers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on cross-curricular approaches to teaching a YouthBuild curriculum, see Chapter 6 of this manual.
- For more information about teaching leaderships skills across the curriculum, see Chapter 7 of the Leadership Development in a YouthBuild Program Manual.
- A sample cross-curricular planning form can be found in the Community of Practice.

Teaching Math Across the Curriculum

YouthBuild programs should strive to build a strong culture of numeracy because students must master mathematical skills to succeed in and out of the program. Many programs find they can easily create this culture by promoting student-centered, hands-on, personalized and inquiry-based instructional practices that make mathematical concepts relevant and approachable.

Along with applying mathematical functions to a wide range of real world settings, students need comprehensive numeracy instruction that promotes proficiency within a wide range of mathematical skills, concepts and operations. Concepts of arithmetic operations, estimating results, assessing the reasonableness of answers, using measurements, reasoning proportionally or nonlinearly, and applying mathematical functions to the real world—all represent critical skills for the workplace and for effective citizenship.

While teachers may have access to abundant materials for teaching math skills, they may also have students with considerable anxiety about their ability to learn math. Aside from learning to manipulate numbers, students need to build confidence, orchestrate success, and recognize that math is a skill they use daily, not just in school, but also on the job and in their personal lives. Teachers can do this by incorporating other skills and subjects into their math lessons.

Introducing Math as a Valuable Skill and Building Students' Confidence

Many students enroll in YouthBuild with painful memories of mathematical failures. They may believe that they "can't do math," that math is a useless subject, and that they can avoid a frustrating experience by avoiding math. To minimize their anxiety, the program should adopt an upfront-get-it-out strategy for exorcising "fear of math" by demonstrating how math is a useful skill.

Acknowledge that math may be difficult and uncomfortable for many people, but that they *will learn* math skills during the program and get the math credits they need for their high school diploma, or pass the GED math test. Be sure to connect classroom math instruction to the work they will be conducting on the worksite. Provide opportunities for students to discuss openly their memories and experiences of learning math. For example, at the beginning of the program cycle, teachers can distribute a "math pain chart" based on the chart medical personnel use to assess their patients' pain and have students identify how painful learning math is for them on a scale of 1-10. Assure them that they will lower their math pain level during the program. They should revisit their charts when they have achieved some success in math.

Tailor your math instruction to the information that students reveal about their experiences with math, which will help teachers and students avoid frustrating math encounters. As with other subjects, math teachers should assess students' "math confidence" routinely. Ask students to identify how they are successfully learning and using math on the jobsite, in the vocational classroom, during career-planning and community service projects, and in their personal lives. In addition, teachers can minimize anxiety by having students break larger math-related goals, such as "I want to get my GED," into smaller, more easily attained ones, such as "I will raise my CASAS score by 10 points by the end of the term." Also, students with good math skills should be encouraged to teach or tutor those needing help. Learning one-on-one from peers can be less anxiety-inducing than participating in a large class or struggling alone at a computer.

Student literacy levels can impact math achievement. Students may be able to solve math problems but may struggle with word problems. Thus teachers should keep students' vocabulary and reading comprehension skills in mind. Especially for students learning English, solving math problems is their chance to shine—while word problems also offer the opportunity to improve reading skills under the guidance of the language teacher or tutor.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

A sample checklist for *Math in Everyday Life* can be found in the Community of Practice.

Starting With the Concrete; Moving to the Abstract

Many students find performing math operations difficult because they don't understand the underlying concepts, nor have they learned the connection between practical applications (How many 12-inch tiles do we need to cover the kitchen floor?) and abstract symbols and formulas (A=L x W). Facilitate hands-on experiences so symbols and formulas become understandable shorthand for mathematical concepts instead of confounding, inscrutable marks. For example, teaching the concept of "area" by first asking students to estimate the length and width of a portion of the classroom floor will allow students to discover the mathematical formula. Have them measure the floor and cut out enough square-foot cardboard "tiles" to cover it. Have them count the tiles needed to determine the floor's area. Then have them consider the relationship between the number of tiles it took to cover the floor and its length and width. Have them produce the formula for figuring area (A=L x W).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the constructive learning approach, see Chapter 6 of this manual.

Introducing Complex Math Skills Early

Learning math skills may be frustrating because students have been taught through a linear approach and have never moved beyond basic skills. YouthBuild teachers should introduce more complex math, algebra, and geometry skills early in the program to pique students' interest in math, build their confidence, and demonstrate the interrelatedness of math concepts.

For example, you can teach the relationships among fractions, decimals, and percentage by having students figure the sales tax on building materials.

Use of Calculators

Calculators can be used to teach high-order thinking skills. Students are allowed to use an approved calculator on the first half of the GED Mathematics Test. Teaching students to use the calculator can significantly reduce the amount of time spent on each problem and allow them to complete the test. Calculators give speedy, accurate answers to complex math problems, both on tests and at the worksite; however, teachers should make certain students understand the underlying mathematical concepts when using calculators.

For example, students should first estimate an answer to a math problem, then use a calculator, and finally use paper and pencil to arrive at a solution. If the estimate is close, and the calculator and paper/pencil answers are the same, students can feel confident they understand the concept. When the estimate is awry, and/or the calculator and paper/pencil solutions don't agree, more learning is required. Arriving at the correct answer is an opportunity for students to work together or for students to teach one another.

Emphasizing the Skill of Estimating

Developing students' ability to "figure it in their heads" and make educated guesses will help them develop meta-cognition and note-taking skills. In many situations, including at construction jobsites, making reasonable estimates of measurements, amounts of materials required, and time needed to complete a task are skills as valuable as arriving at an exact answer. Teachers should offer opportunities for students to estimate answers before seeking the exact answer so they become familiar with mathematical relationships and concepts.

For example, with small teams of students, each team can take turns posing questions that require the other teams to estimate something in the room within a short amount of time. Questions could include: "How wide is the doorway?" "How long is the table?" "What's the total area of all the windows combined?" "How many books are on the bookshelf?" "What's the average age of everyone in the room?" Ask volunteers to measure, count, and/or do the math to arrive at the exact answer. Have the teams with the closest estimate explain to the group how they arrived at their estimate. To complete the activity, ask students to note the best methods for estimating and share their observations.

Teaching Literacy Across the Curriculum

Unlike the teachers in traditional high schools, who concentrate primarily on course content, YouthBuild teachers continuously help students improve their reading skills. Some YouthBuild programs choose to offer a stand-alone "reading class," but, to effectively demonstrate the usefulness of reading, not only in academic classes, but also on the job and in one's personal life, it is important to incorporate reading throughout the program.

Teaching reading requires explicit instruction of reading comprehension processes and strategies. This is called a balanced literacy approach, and it uses mini-lessons, read aloud modeling, and one-on-one student conferencing to introduce students explicitly and directly to strategies that increase their reading comprehension and engagement. Students learn to become active readers when exposed to literature that resonates with them because of their personal struggles and experiences. Consequently, an important component to balanced literacy is developing a library of culturally relevant books responsive to a range of student reading levels. Students read these books regularly and independently throughout their time at the program, while actively employing the strategies introduced by their teachers. Informal, ongoing assessment allows teachers to gauge students' understanding so that they can ultimately provide them with targeted feedback and design appropriate future activities and lessons.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on balanced literacy, see Chapter 6 of this manual.
- For more information on constructing a classroom library, see Chapter 5 of this manual.

Encouraging Silent, Individual Reading

Teachers find that students enjoy reading when they read books of their choice at a scheduled time—perhaps for 20 minutes daily. This approach is called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Setting aside this special time teaches students to appreciate reading and makes a strong statement about the value of incorporating it into daily life. Independent Reading is another approach in which students choose their own material and write in reading journals that teachers review to monitor progress. Incorporating such a strategy helps students gain metcognition skills and increase content knowledge in subject areas.

Developing Reading Skills Through Interactive Activities

Students need to work through texts and workbooks on their own, but because most young people enjoy camaraderie, teachers should teach reading through an interactive approach. For example:

- **Set aside time each day to read aloud either a portion of a high-interest book or brief, complete stories to the class.** Have the students summarize what was read and offer their opinions. Hearing teachers or fellow students read aloud encourages active listening and comprehension of materials that might be too difficult for some students to read independently.
- **Ask pairs or small groups of students to choose a text of which there are multiple copies.** Read portions of the text silently with the students and have them share their feelings and opinions about the material, including the characters, plot, theme, etc. Teachers can introduce comprehension strategies during this informal activity, and students learning English, as well as those with learning difficulties can benefit.
- **Form groups to read and discuss materials related to a shared career or personal interest.** For example, groups of like-minded students can read fashion, music, sports or entertainment publications; cookbooks; articles or books about parenting; or directions on how to fix or maintain vehicles or build things. A program's library should include a variety of practical and motivational reading materials such as drivers' manuals, newspapers, health brochures, and first aid books.
- **Plan a "book talk"** on a regular basis, during which students discuss with each other the themes, plots, and characters of the books they are reading, including the historical and social significance of what they are learning.

Teaching Reading Through Writing

By addressing reading and writing together, teachers can offer activities suitable to readers of all levels. For example:

- Have students reflect on learning to read, their memories of special books or teachers and what they have enjoyed or disliked about reading. Have them write personal histories about their reading experiences. Have them finish the project with photographs of themselves as children and/or copies of works they completed in school. Use the project to discuss the ongoing process of continuing to learn as adults.
- Have students read the poems, plays, stories, and essays by students in your program, the program newsletter, and journal entries written by young people in other programs.
- Motivate students to read by writing a story for them about a special interest they have expressed or by collecting articles for them to read about a topic of interest.
- Write an open-ended story that the students finish writing, or have them read part of a story, write an ending, and then read the original ending and compare it with what they have written.
- Have students write about what they are learning at YouthBuild in the form of children's books for their own or their classmates' children or younger relatives. For example, books might be titled "Mommy Builds a House," or "Uncle Trey Tackles Math."
- Have students read a play to themselves and then read it aloud, each taking a part. Encourage them to interpret their characters as they think about the playwright's intentions.
- Have students read instructions related to materials or equipment they are using on their jobsites, such as how to mix drywall compound, how to read blood pressure or how to load a new operating system onto a computer. Then have them write the directions for other materials or equipment modeled on the directions they have just read. For example, the could write directions on how to mix texture into paint; how to use a stethoscope; or how to troubleshoot a laptop that will not start.
- Have students read comic books about topics they are studying. For example, provide comic books about AIDS and drugs available from local health departments, or biographies of important African-Americans published by Golden Legacy Comics.
- Have students read several paragraphs of text from a history, social studies or science textbook and then develop four multiple-choice questions. The questions should test the reader's ability to:
  - understand the basic meaning of the text
  - apply the information from the text in a different way
  - draw a conclusion about what the author meant
  - make connections among different the parts of the text
- Have students answer the multiple-choice questions their classmates have developed, discuss the answers, and decide which reading skills the various questions were testing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on strategies for teaching reading, visit the Youth Development Institute.
- For more information about teaching reading comprehension, see *Teaching Study Skills* on page 90.

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum

The persuasive essay plays a prominent role in YouthBuild classes, especially in GED preparation. In order for students to meet standards, teachers must help them both develop the necessary written language skills and apply the critical thinking skills to receive a sufficient score on a five-paragraph, 200-word essay—the recommended length. Students must prepare to form an opinion on an assigned topic (the "prompt" in GED language), organize their ideas logically, offer details and examples applicable to the topic, use well-structured sentences, and use Edited American English (standard grammar, punctuation and spelling) and a varied and precise choice of words. However, in real life writing well does not necessarily mean producing a persuasively written argument. Teachers and staff members in all components of YouthBuild should incorporate writing into their curricula just as language teachers incorporate other subjects and skills into writing instruction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on teaching students to write a persuasive essay, see *Training Critical Thinkers* on page 78.

Helping Students Understand the Importance of Writing

Students who write well have learned to communicate clearly and appropriately to different audiences in diverse situations and in various formats. Language teachers should consult with other teachers and staff to identify the writing skills necessary on jobsites, in the construction industry or other careers, in the vocational classroom, and during career planning, leadership training, and service learning. Language teachers can then introduce the concept that writing is important in every facet of education and training.

To introduce the importance of writing, language teachers (and other educators and staff throughout the program) can:

- gather examples of written communication from all components of YouthBuild (Examples might include: work orders from the jobsite, memos, telephone messages, e-mails, resumes, cover letters, job applications, thank you letters, college applications, applications to join the military, fundraising proposals, student research papers, essay test responses, book reports, journals, and creative writing assignments.)
- form small student teams and distribute a few examples to each group (Tell the groups to examine the writing carefully, noting the audience, purpose, length, language and style, and then present their observations to the group.)
- have groups discuss and take notes on the specific writing skills they need in order to get a job, enroll in college, earn a credit in science, or produce a beautifully written poem
- have individual students write a letter or send an e-mail to their teachers identifying the writing skills they, personally, need to develop
- prominently display examples of student writing around the program in ways that honor the creative written voice of young people in the program

Teaching the Writing Process

The process of writing well involves three stages: pre-writing, writing, and revising and proof-reading.

Consider teaching pre-writing as a strategy for thinking about a topic and generating ideas before transforming these into an essay, report, letter, or other structured written work. Pre-writing is important because, even when students have been assigned a topic, they often feel they have "nothing to say." Discussing, brainstorming, listing, outlining, jotting notes, stream-of-consciousness writing, journal writing, and writing to music can stimulate thinking about how to approach a topic. Have students "pre-write" in large and small groups and individually. For example, in a GED class, ask students to develop a pre-writing strategy by:

- reading the directions and understanding the essay question
- jotting down five or six ideas about the topic
- choosing at least three ideas that can be supported with specific examples including personal experiences
- creating an outline for the essay including ordering the examples

Teaching Students to Think for Themselves and Write in Their Own Words

It is important for students to understand the concept and meaning of plagiarism – using another's words, concepts, research data, or other products without appropriate acknowledgement, such as copying another's work, presenting someone else's theories as one's own, or submitting a joint project as one's own. Instead of discussing plagiarism in an entirely negative way (plagiarism is cheating; plagiarism is stealing), emphasize the legitimate use of information to support one's own ideas and demonstrate how this is done. Teach students the difference between plagiarized and original work. For example:

- Have students research and write three short reports on a single topic of their choice. (If they will use the Internet to conduct research, make sure topics appear in Wikipedia or other easily accessed websites.)
- Before they start, tell the students that the first report should be plagiarized because they will copy their source word for word; their second report will also be plagiarized because they will change only a few words or reorganize the information; but, the third report will be written in their own words, crediting their sources or noting if they have used others' ideas.
- Have the students share their plagiarized and original work with the group and discuss what is considered plagiarism and how to avoid it.

In order to demonstrate the real-life consequences of plagiarism, have students research and identify policies regarding plagiarism at local postsecondary institutions—especially those in which they might enroll. Have them present and discuss their findings with the group. Based on the policies that the colleges follow if a student is found guilty of plagiarism, the following penalties may be imposed:

- a written warning
- a grade of "F" or "No Pass" for the assignment, project, or examination
- disciplinary probation for a definite period of time
- suspension or expulsion from the college

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sample worksheets on avoiding plagiarism can be found in the Community of Practice.

Teaching Writing Through Engaging Projects

Along with reinforcing the specific skills and knowledge learned at YouthBuild, writing can be taught through other fun and engaging projects. For example, students could undertake one of the following projects:

- keep a journal
- write for the program's newsletter, website and yearbook
- post to blogs and comment on online articles or discussion groups
- develop a narrative, write and publish a hardcopy or digital literary magazine, and/or comic book
- write and submit a letter to the editor when a controversial topic appears in the newspaper
- write a research paper, perhaps connected with a possible career
- write reviews of books, films, and videos, including videos on YouTube or other websites
- interview family members, community members, local officials and one another and write up the interviews as a presentation to the group or as an article for the program newsletter
- research several forms of poetry and write your own poems, using the forms you have studied, such as ballads, free verse, haiku, hip hop lyrics
- develop a dictionary of slang with words defined in Standard English or a dictionary of construction or other careers, depending upon the vocational training offered in the program

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about writing using other engaging activities, see *Teaching Reading Through Writing* on page 84.

Teaching Students to Write Using the Computer

Most YouthBuild programs—or their education partners—have Internet access and computers available for student use. Along with other computer-assisted learning, (using search engines and career-related software such as CAD (computer aided design) for construction careers or EMR (electronic medical record) for students in programs offering healthcare careers), all YouthBuild students should know how to compose on a computer. Composing written passages on a computer is quickly becoming a core element of standardized test taking at the secondary and postsecondary level.

Students should learn word processing while producing research papers and developing presentations, including using templates to guide their thinking and organization. Program functions, such as grammar and spell check, and immediate access to a dictionary or thesaurus can improve vocabulary and grammar. These features are especially helpful to students learning English or those struggling with writing. Encourage students to actively use these features to improve their writing (and language) skills, rather than passively allowing the software to do the work. For example, students can keep lists of correct spellings, definitions and synonyms and routinely review their lists and use the words in spoken and written communication.

Developing College and Career Readiness Skills

Although some students will find full-time jobs after the program, YouthBuild encourages all students to prepare for and pursue postsecondary education or training, since requirements for all pathways—and for success attaining a high school diploma or GED—are similar. Therefore, YouthBuild teachers can feel confident using the same approaches to teaching and the same curriculum for the college bound, for students entering career-related training, as well as, for those starting a job after finishing the program. Specific college- and career-readiness skills, such as note taking, testing strategies and study skills, should be practiced across the curriculum just as students practice construction skills in math class and their reading skills at their worksites. Furthermore, some postsecondary institutions have started providing “contextualized” skill-building courses where skills like time management, note taking, and team work are taught within the context of specific career pathways. This is not an issue of devaluing careers or those students who choose not to pursue a postsecondary credential. All students, regardless of whether they plan to pursue a post-secondary education should understand the potential of a post-secondary credential.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on preparing students for the transition from YouthBuild to postsecondary education, training or jobs, see the manual Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students.
- For student reflections on college readiness, see videos from Voices members and students from YouthBuild Philadelphia.
- For information about the similarities and differences between skills needed in college and those needed for career readiness, see the article *College and Career Readiness: Same or Different?* by David Conley and Charis McGaughy.

Teaching Students to Listen Actively and Take Notes

Note taking is an essential skill for students planning for college or training programs. The skill can also be used on a job when supervisors are demonstrating how to do something, giving instructions, or assigning tasks. Before tackling the mechanics of note taking, introduce the importance of listening well by offering an interactive listening activity to set the stage.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

A sample *Note-Taking Form* and a sample lesson plan can be found in the Community of Practice.

Teaching Testing Strategies

Teaching test-taking skills helps assure that students who have developed knowledge and skills can effectively demonstrate their competency. Good test-taking strategies are especially important to English Language Learning students and those with learning difficulties, as they may possess a skill but be unable to demonstrate it accurately in writing, on multiple-choice tests, or during interviews. Teachers should help students understand the importance of testing well, which includes what is being tested and why, ways to prepare for tests, and strategies and tips to use when they are unclear about the meaning of a question or need to make an educated guess. Educators should strive to reach a balance between helping students understand the significance and impact of tests and helping relieve test anxiety by recognizing that tests do not represent a full picture of their learning, value, or academic growth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

A handout on *Developing a Multiple Choice Test* can be found in the Community of Practice.

Teaching Time Management Skills

It is important to make certain students understand that college, career training, and jobs present a very different environment in which they must take charge of their own learning, schedules and behaviors. Effectively managing one's time during post-secondary education requires planning, prioritizing, and undoubtedly some creative juggling. YouthBuild teachers can make the experience less overwhelming by encouraging students to set short- and middle-term goals that lead to attaining long-term education and career-related goals. For college-bound students who earn their high school diploma or GED early, programs might consider creating a college preparatory course. However, all YouthBuild students should learn time management and study skills, which are useful not only in postsecondary education but also in employment and family life. Teachers and staff should teach time management skills to students as well as how to plan for enrolling in college or career-training programs.

Teaching Study Skills

YouthBuild teachers should help students understand that their instructors in college and postsecondary training programs will have higher expectations in the amount and difficulty of material they should learn. To meet these high expectations, students must attend every class—whether or not the instructor takes attendance—be well acquainted with the syllabus, and set daily, weekly, monthly, and semester goals for learning. Students must be self-motivated and well organized to get the most out of their classes and study times.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about how YouthBuild programs can prepare students for postsecondary education and training, see tools and resources offered by YouthBuild USA's Postsecondary Education Initiative.

Chapter 5: The Classroom Environment

The quality of the classroom environment sets the tone for the educational component, since the environment can communicate a very powerful message about the program's respect for students and their abilities. It also speaks to the program's investment in both students and teachers. Because the classroom atmosphere significantly impacts student learning, it should be designed to generate enthusiasm and facilitate learning, responsibility, and respect. While the physical arrangement of the space is one component, the classroom environment also consists of the atmosphere, resources available to students, and structure of the classroom.

For each learning space, there should be:

- **Low student-to-teacher ratio.** Typically, in a YouthBuild classroom the ratio is 1 to 14.
- **Hands-on materials and tools that are engaging.** This should include the integration of technology.
- **Adequate staffing.** If the resources exist, this should include full-time instructional staff, teaching assistants, tutors, interns and volunteers. Utilize advanced students as tutors and interns while fostering a sense of community service and developing leadership skills.
- **Quiet and comfortable work spaces.** YouthBuild programs are vibrant and friendly spaces. Within this welcoming environment, ensure there are dedicated spaces that are quiet and have few distractions, so that students and teachers can concentrate.

In addition to the physical attributes, the program should also ensure that there are opportunities in the classroom and other learning spaces for individual and group work, flexible schedules to accommodate differentiated instruction, opportunities for leadership development, dedicated time for teacher planning and collaboration, and meaningful ways to integrate curricula across disciplines. The environment should communicate the program's expectations for young people through the classroom structure. Instructors must provide regular opportunities to measure progress and regularly recognize achievement. Students should work and collaborate with peers. They should also have a clear understanding of the different components of the YouthBuild model (construction, leadership development, education, etc.) and how they connect and contribute to their development.

Everything in the classroom environment sends a message that either enhances or detracts from the success of your students. It is important to pay attention to each element of the environment and foster an atmosphere that supports learning.

Communicating a New and Positive Learning Environment

For many YouthBuild students, traditional learning environments have not led to success. Since every aspect of the environment sends a message, it is important that the YouthBuild classroom not replicate old learning environments.

The program must build an atmosphere that makes students feel welcome, accepted, and comfortable. This process should begin during Mental Toughness by staff modeling appropriate behavior as well as discussing and fostering norms among participants. When staff communicate expectations early in the program, students understand the norms and rules of the program. Staff should also be consistent in upholding rules and applying consequences, since that will help students feel that the rules and consequences are fair, and they are more likely to abide by them.

Communicating expectations for behavior is important, but it is also vital for staff to model these expectations. For example, one of the goals of YouthBuild is to produce young people who are going to become lifelong learners. Thus, it is important for them to see staff modeling their commitment to learning, particularly in areas where they do not have expertise. A GED instructor might join students on the construction site once a month to learn a skill alongside her students. By showing students that teachers and staff can struggle but also learn and progress, teachers model risk taking and send a powerful message that learning can be a trial and error process.

As with many adult students, YouthBuild students are sensitive about failure. In a positive and respectful emotional climate, students will feel it is safe to take risks that will help them progress. It also creates an environment where students feel supported and feel comfortable speaking openly about their challenges.

Fostering a Culture of Student Empowerment, Support, and Respect

Many students acknowledge YouthBuild is a “like a family.” This is in part because of the core YouthBuild value of respecting young people. By respecting young people’s intelligence, recognizing their strengths and talents, and providing patient and caring development opportunities, YouthBuild programs provide a positive educational experience that is directly opposite to any previous negative experiences they may have encountered. As a result, young people feel supported and empowered to transform and rebuild their lives through educational and vocational success. In order to achieve this success, the program must intentionally foster a culture of student empowerment and respect by:

- **Identifying program values.** Prior to the beginning of each program cycle, we recommend that program leadership work with staff to identify the values of the program in a staff retreat. After identifying values, staff can discuss rituals and practices that will be put into place to reinforce and reflect these values. Share examples and common elements established in other programs, so that it is not necessary to start from scratch. The values of the program should also be consistently communicated to new staff and students.
- **Modeling program values in staff behavior.** Once all staff have bought in to the values of the program, they should consistently model it for their students. In the beginning, students might not internalize these values, but they will be able to articulate them and eventually internalize them. Refer to how these values are being reinforced when case conferencing students throughout the year, keeping them at the forefront of programmatic decisions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on building a positive program culture, see Chapter 4 of the YouthBuild Program Manual: Getting Started as a New DOL YouthBuild Program.

- **Creating a culture of respect and support.** A culture of empowerment is not simply respecting young people, but supporting them and building their confidence. Often, this involves the practicing of simple acts of kindness by staff, which might have been missing in their previous educational experiences. Through a positive program culture, all program components should validate the experience and knowledge that students possess, foster awareness and respect, and provide opportunities for student voice and choice.

It is important to ensure that these principles are consistently and uniformly applied throughout all program components, especially in the education component, where young people often feel the most insecure.

Validating Students' Experience and Knowledge

YouthBuild students come with a broad range of personalities and backgrounds and from a variety of racial, ethnic, cultural, and family origins. The common factor among them is that most have been raised in poverty and have suffered resulting gaps in opportunity, education, and confidence. Most also have enormous strengths that are revealed by their intelligence and resilience and are reflective of their cultural backgrounds.

Teachers can validate their students' experience and knowledge by:

- **Making students' experience central to the learning process.** By integrating students' experience and knowledge in authentic ways, teachers draw connections between the education component and the communities of students. For example, a component of a project-based learning could be a community service project based in the students' own community. As a result, students feel comfortable and see themselves as represented in the curriculum and classroom environment. They also feel validated, which can function as a bridge to help them move from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Thus, they are more likely to show greater interest in learning, to actively engage in their education, and to achieve educational outcomes.
- **Creating culturally responsive education opportunities.** Incorporating students' experiences, knowledge, and interests into the curriculum is also an excellent opportunity for education staff to develop and incorporate diverse and culturally responsive education material. Program staff can get to know students at the beginning of the program cycle by engaging them in activities that help identify student interests and knowledge, for example, asking students to complete an interest inventory with their application materials. Regardless of the subject, education staff should incorporate student interests and experiences into their curriculum. For example, a math instructor can incorporate students' interest in sports by including sports-related examples to illustrate concepts.
- **Creating classroom materials that engage students.** By making strategic connections, the program creates a sense of belonging for students and acknowledges that young people bring worthwhile intellectual and cultural resources to the learning process. Personalizing instruction in this way hooks students into the classroom, engages them in their schoolwork, and encourages inquiry.

- **Building personal relationships with students.** Knowing students personally, understanding some of the outside factors and barriers that they may be facing as well as their successes and important life experiences is another key way to build this sense of community and to value their experiences and each student as a whole person. Sometimes the sensitivity and understanding that staff demonstrate towards students as they encounter situations in their lives and through the program, play a crucial part in promoting student learning. Validating students' experience and knowledge is just as much about empathetic behaviors as it is about formal inclusion into the curriculum.

Fostering Awareness and Respect in the Classroom[10]

An effective learning environment needs to encourage mature and responsible behavior, foster self-discipline, and minimize punitive action. This begins with a positive and strong program culture which has been clearly and consistently communicated with staff and young people. An indication of a strong program culture is that students are able to articulate the program's beliefs and values even if they haven't internalized them yet. For example, students may be able to articulate that all students in the YouthBuild program are treated with respect, even if they haven't yet learned to fully respect themselves and their peers.

Many YouthBuild students are shy and lack confidence, especially in the education realm because they have not experienced success in the past. For students to feel safe in taking risks, there needs to be a climate of trust between and among adults and students.

In order to create a safe and pleasant school and classroom community, the program must do the following:

Set High Expectations

Setting high expectations and providing the supports necessary to achieve them conveys respect to young people. Beginning with the recruitment phase, emphasize that the program will require young people to think and plan for the long term. Be sure to remind young people that YouthBuild is just the beginning of a pathway to define and fulfill their highest aspirations for a career and for contributing to the well-being of their families and communities. Emphasize the importance of post-secondary education, so that while students may enter the program hoping for a GED, they quickly learn that staff believe that they can go much further than that, that the GED is only the first step. The value placed on education is internalized by the students. When they go on to college, many of them will be the first in their families to do so. At the same time, programs need to value explicitly the pathways that lead not necessarily to college, but into the trades and to well-paying careers in responsible roles. All pathways to responsible adulthood and community engagement should be respected.

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[10] This section is adapted from *The Classroom Mosaic: Culture and Learning*. Linda Darling-Hammond and Kim Austin, Ira Lit, and Na'ilah Nasir. Stanford University School of Education. https://www.learner.org/courses/learningclassroom/support/06_culture.pdf

Similarly, teachers must also set high expectations for young people and provide them challenging, complex, and relevant activities and tasks. The program and instructional staff can convey these expectations in a range of ways, including recognizing student strengths, experience and knowledge, and providing the appropriate support to help young people succeed. Students are far more likely to become engaged and perceive themselves as learners and thinkers when they are challenged and supported appropriately.

High expectations are not only related to young people's goals but also to their responsibilities when they are in the program. YouthBuild is a partnership between the program and the young person. Therefore, the students must meet their responsibilities. Emphasize to young people that, because they receive stipends, YouthBuild is like a job and requires a commitment similar to that of the workplace. They must adhere to rules and high standards relating to punctuality, consistent attendance, and zero drug use.

Communicate Norms for Respectful and Caring Behavior

Within a culture of respect, caring and high expectations, negative behaviors tend to disappear. However, it is important to explicitly discuss behavioral norms with students. Many programs use a basic contract between the program and each student, defining the expectations and agreements, and the consequences for violating agreements. It is also critical to be consistent in upholding these rules and following through on consequences. YouthBuild is engaged in teaching habits that will enable students to obtain and keep a job. Foster those habits while the students are in the program by being firm and consistent with the rules.

Begin establishing clear expectations and rules of conduct. With student input, decide what the community's behavior norms are and the consequences for each infraction. Plan to follow through immediately and appropriately for every infraction. Students learn right away whether staff can be trusted to enforce the rules and whether or not they can be manipulated. Erratic, uneven, or unjustified enforcement of rules can undermine the best program. If the rules are appropriately enforced, students—even if they protest—will learn to take the staff at their word and make decisions accordingly. Additionally, through staff relationships, students can learn from their mistakes and grow. Rules and expectations provide a platform for learning and growth by encouraging students to analyze their behavior and consider consequences for their actions.

Following through on consequences for rule violation is respectful of students. It tells them that staff believe students are making choices, and, since they are adults, they must take the consequences of those choices. Following through on consequences for rule violation also teaches responsibility. It tells students that there are certain behaviors that are unacceptable and will undermine their ability to achieve their goals.

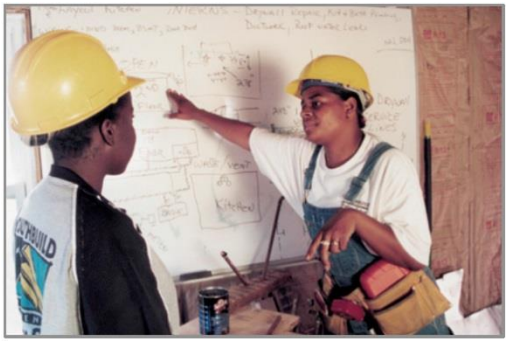
Emphasize Peer Support and Respect

Treating each student with respect and maintaining an atmosphere of mutual support among students creates a classroom culture of trust and dignity, and increases student engagement and participation. Students will bring their frustrations and setbacks to the classroom, and acknowledging these feelings while actively cultivating a positive and supportive classroom culture will help staff to model the caring and respect central to YouthBuild programs. For example, teachers might consider setting aside a few minutes at the beginning of each class to check in with students. This could be an open time when students can write in a journal or discuss their lives. This time will provide opportunities for teachers to learn about their students and examples to use as teachable moments to model constructive and supportive behavior. Opportunities such as this allow staff to connect with young people in meaningful ways and demonstrate their dedication and patience.

It is important to start from day one emphasizing a culture of support throughout the program cycle. In fact, many programs incorporate trust-building exercises into their Mental Toughness schedule to communicate these values to young people. “Home Court Advantage” is an example of an activity that can be incorporated into Mental Toughness: Gather all potential students and ask each of them to shoot a basketball. Instruct all students to cheer for the young person attempting to shoot the basketball, regardless of the result. After each young person has had the opportunity to take part in the activity, ask students to reflect on how they felt when their peers were cheering for them. Emphasize that students should feel the same level of support and encouragement from one another in the classroom, worksite and all other parts of the YouthBuild program. This will help to create a supportive culture in the program and in the classroom, which will encourage students to take risks. Staff can also show the classroom to be a safe place to share and learn by modeling - taking risks themselves and publicly acknowledging their mistakes. For example, a GED instructor might spend a few days during the program cycle at the construction site and demonstrate how making mistakes can help one learn.

Hold Students Accountable

Students should have opportunities to learn, grow, and make mistakes. They also need to know that they bear responsibility for maintaining the supportive culture of YouthBuild. Staff play a critical role in holding students accountable and maintaining a supportive and safe environment, since students must trust that program staff and leaders will maintain the safety of the program and follow through on any infractions. When trust is broken among students or the environment becomes unsafe (e.g. disrespectful and hurtful comments), prompt, fair, and respectful, and proactive actions will help to turn the tone around.



Cultivating Student Voice and Providing Opportunities for Student Choice[11]

Many YouthBuild students approach education with fear of failure and low expectations for their own success. Often, this is a reflection of the failure they experienced in previous educational settings. They are familiar with education environments that told them how to behave, what to learn, when and how to learn it, and to demonstrate their mastery of content. Many students also struggle with motivation and teachers may struggle with motivating their students.

[11] This section was adapted from *Classroom of Choice: Giving Students What They Need and Getting What You Want* by Jonathan Erwin. www.ascd.org/publications/books/104020.aspx.

When students have opportunities to integrate their interests and make choices, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their learning process. Students seek learning environments in which they feel safe and secure, where they feel a sense of belonging, can experience success and feel important, and where they have a degree of independence and can have fun. YouthBuild students are no different, and because YouthBuild allows students to experience each of these elements, they are more likely to achieve educational success. By offering students the opportunity to make choices regarding their education, instructional staff can cultivate student voice, which can empower students.

At the beginning of the program cycle, be sure to conduct interest inventories and assessment of learning styles. Teachers can also assess students' knowledge and interest at the beginning of each unit. For example, students can complete a "KWL (Know, Want to Know, and Learned) Chart" at the beginning of each unit. These assessments can serve as a guide to help teachers to create appropriate opportunities for integrating student choice into their teaching strategies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a sample *KWL Chart*, see the Community of Practice.

Choice is a powerful motivator, and students need to be taught to make choices strategically, but it is not the cure-all, and it can have an adverse impact if it is not implemented in a thoughtful and meaningful manner. Program staff should develop opportunities for choice that help create a sense of:

- **Control.** When students make effective choices, they must feel in control. If students feel they have control over their education, they are more likely to be more motivated. For example, instructional staff can include students in the development of classroom rules at the beginning of the program cycle.
- **Purpose.** Students will engage in their education if they feel there is a purpose and they have opportunities to engage meaningfully in their education. When teaching an abstract concept, instructors can allow students to demonstrate the skill through an activity that interests them. For example, a GED instructor could allow students to demonstrate math concepts using a sports activity of students' choosing.
- **Competence.** When students make effective choices, they should also feel a sense of competence, particularly if they are undertaking a challenging task. For example, if students are discussing literature, allow them to write the discussion questions, which will likely be at an appropriate level of difficulty.

In addition to offering students the opportunity to make choices, the following eight principles will also help the program motivate students both in and out of the education component:

- **Believe in students.** It is important to have high expectations but also to understand the students' past school experiences and their feelings of academic failure and anxiety. By believing in students' abilities to succeed, teachers can help young people develop faith in their own abilities to learn and help them confront, rather than avoid, academic difficulties. Teachers can also assist students to set realistic goals for academic progress, so that students do not become frustrated or disappointed.

- **Maintain an atmosphere of respect.** As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is important for staff to foster a culture of respect. They must not only model this behavior by praising and appreciating student effort, but also foster respect among one another.
- **Encourage responsibility.** One of the core principles of YouthBuild is empowering young people to take responsibility for their own lives and learning. Staff should establish structures that allow young people to make responsible choices. This will allow students to participate in a decision-making process and help them hold themselves accountable.
- **Encourage interdependence.** YouthBuild students succeed because they experience a sense of community. Young people must feel that they can depend on each other and staff can help create this culture by modeling such behaviors through exercises and activities that reinforce relying on and trusting one another.
- **Establish routines and structure.** Students and teachers both benefit from regular routines because there is less possibility of chaos, confusion, and idleness (all of which can foster disruptive behavior). When the program has routines, it can help establish trust and a sense of security.
- **Respond to students' needs.** Students will possess a wide range of experiences and abilities. It is important that educational staff offer differentiated instruction that supplements the needs of struggling students while offering additional opportunities for students with advanced skills.
- **Be creative all the time.** It is important for staff to be creative and innovative, and it is also crucial to offer opportunities for students to be creative. This will ensure that the education program is relevant and engaging to students.
- **Utilize the YouthBuild Policy Committee.** The YouthBuild policy committee is an integral part of the academic and training curriculum of a YouthBuild program. It gives an opportunity for students to build critical-thinking and communication skills but also provides a tool for directors and teachers to engage students and foster student input in the operation of the program.

By cultivating students' voice and offering them opportunities to make choices, the program encourages young people to develop leadership skills. Leadership development should be a thread that runs across all program components, including the education program. Be sure to provide opportunities for decision-making only in areas where program leadership and staff are prepared to accept the results of the decision. The process can be counter-productive if students are offered the ability to make a decision, and then they are overruled without specific cause or pre-existing reasons. Teachers should actively participate in helping young people develop these skills in the classroom. For example, teachers can partner students with strong and weak skills together so young people can serve as peer tutors, set up leadership roles within the classroom to report on current events, create opportunities to give presentations in front of the class, or even guest teach a class.

Culture of Motivation

Student motivation and engagement is high when the learning materials have a clear and direct application to the lives of students and recognize the value and purpose of a learning topic. Because young people often have complicated personal lives, staff may have to state explicitly both the short-term and long-term value, benefits, and function of each lesson.

Student motivation is also directly connected to their confidence, which can vary from student to student and from task to task. For example, a student may feel confident tackling math topics but lack confidence in a subtopic such as fractions. Therefore, it is important to monitor student confidence routinely and incorporate instructional strategies that build confidence. A simple method to address confidence is to establish class rituals that celebrate student progress frequently. Other strategies include:

- creating a progress wall that displays learning concepts as they are covered
- closing rituals that allow students to articulate their daily progress
- checking in with students weekly to review their goals
- reviewing content frequently with students to demonstrate progress
- adjusting the amount of time for learning
- providing more practice
- acknowledging small successes and having students acknowledge their own successes during instruction by articulating in unison or individually “got it!”
- initiating a student learning log where students track their daily successes
- adjusting the challenges of each learning chunk and each activity(remember that too little challenge is just as damaging as too much)
- teaching students positive self talk and how to block negative self talk; teach affirmations and integrate these into the fabric of the classroom (see got it! example above)

While it is important to boost student confidence, it is also important to remind students that learning new skills and knowledge can be challenging. Scaffolding and differentiation are critical strategies for achieving a balance between challenge and student ability. When students are challenged for too long or not long enough, student motivation can decrease.

Addressing Student Lack of Motivation

All students will occasionally experience temporary periods where they lack motivation and engagement. These are moments when a student loses his or her joy, engagement, and enthusiasm for learning, no matter how well instruction is orchestrated by an instructor. Notice and monitor these situations to ensure that temporary states do not become chronic and episodic.

Chronic Motivation Issues

When a student’s lack of motivation becomes chronic, it can lead to student apathy, indifference and impassivity. Often, students in this state expect to perform poorly and as a result, contribute little or no effort to even the smallest challenge. To address chronic issues of lack of motivation and engagement, regularly acknowledge progress and actively engage students in instruction.

While no single instructional strategy will restore motivation and engagement, trying a range of strategies can be helpful. These include:

- **Avoiding passive instructional models.** Instructor-centered teaching models increase opportunities for students to detach and it can remind them of past educational experiences. Use this model carefully and sparingly.
- **Offering short, independent practice time when introducing new material.** If students are not familiar with content, they can become overwhelmed and disengage. Vary the practice and include guided and group practice.
- **Increasing the visibility of abstract and internal thinking processes.** By modeling these processes, you provide greater structure and clarity for students to understand and practice difficult skills.
- **Building accountability.** Include accountability structures in the classroom, allowing students to take responsibility for their learning gradually.

Setting-Up the Classroom

Through careful classroom set-up, teachers can purposefully create an atmosphere that promotes learning while providing a sense of safety, belonging, and support.

Begin to set the tone for learning through the physical arrangement of the classroom. While a number of factors will determine the physical layout, if at all possible, locate the classrooms in the same space as the rest of the program. To enhance the sense of community, program directors and leadership should get to know students individually and in groups. Teachers should also feel the sense of community by having opportunities to mingle with the program director, students, and other program staff. It is also important to consider the proximity of the worksite. A close work site can be invaluable for convenience and to promote teamwork among staff.

While classrooms should maintain orderliness and cleanliness, they should also facilitate organized chaos and should provide flexible arrangements and furniture that are easy to move. Because such space can easily facilitate small group work, large gatherings, and individual work time, it encourages cooperation and collaboration among students. It also encourages teachers to implement a range of teaching strategies.

Physical Environment

Many programs are limited in resources and in their ability to secure the ideal physical environment. However, they can still create a warm and welcoming physical environment through other creative means, such as bright paint colors and live plants. This is also an opportunity to showcase student strengths and talents and develop leadership skills. Solicit students to paint murals or contribute art to hang on the walls to make it a more lively space. The temperature and lighting of the classroom can also impact student success. When possible, ensure that temperatures are at a comfortable level and classrooms have windows that allow natural lighting or full spectrum or incandescent lights.

The physical environment should also contain plenty of wall space, so that teachers can hang art, photographs, positive messages and affirmations, and display student work. Classroom resources, such as computers and books, should be prominently displayed and easily accessible to students. Students should feel welcome to use the resources of the classroom. There will be more information on how teachers can use classroom walls and resources to facilitate learning later in this chapter.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The following are sample videos of classroom set-up:

- The Mentor Teacher: Setting Up Your Classroom
- Classroom Layout!
- Classroom Tour '10 - '11

Classroom Atmosphere

Since many YouthBuild students fear making mistakes in front of their peers and would rather not risk failure, the atmosphere of the classroom should promote a sense of safety, belonging and supportiveness. The appropriate atmosphere can encourage students to take risks and to learn from mistakes. A positive climate begins during Mental Toughness where students learn that they are one another's support system and should encourage and support one another.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on activities that programs can implement during Mental Toughness that promote a positive and supportive climate can be found in Chapter 2 of the YouthBuild Program Manual: Getting Started as a New DOL YouthBuild Program.

Teachers can also model and set the tone in the classroom from day one by being supportive and respectful, acknowledging all students' efforts, celebrating all learning and achievement, and helping students to buy in to the tone of the classroom.

Maintaining a low teacher-to-student ratio can be an important tool in building the appropriate classroom atmosphere, since it allows teachers to provide adequate individual instruction and enables students to feel respected, supported, and "heard" by staff. When the teacher-to-student ratio is low, teachers can build strong relationships with students, who see their instructors as competent, caring, and committed. Students also feel they can count on staff for ongoing support.

Instructors can also cultivate an inviting and safe environment by instituting consistent practices. At the beginning of each lesson, teachers should provide students with a clear agenda that describes objectives. Making eye contact with students, standing at the classroom door to welcome students in, thanking them for turning in their work, and showing that the teacher knows all students and notices and appreciates their presence can go a long way towards building an inviting learning environment. Teachers, and in fact all program staff, should respect the time of students. Classes should start and end on time. This not only shows respect for students but also help them develop career and post-secondary readiness skills. Students should have the opportunity to participate in small group work on a regular basis, and teachers should help students establish norms for collaboration. This should include encouraging all students to participate and acknowledging their participation.

Walls

Classroom walls play an important role in facilitating learning. They can be used to stimulate visual modality, display important concepts, exhibit student work, organize the classroom, and inspire students.

Instructors should use wall space to aid instruction. Visual cues initiate learning by stimulating the visual modality to ignite neural pathways and help make connections in students' consciousness. It can also help students build comprehension, remember new content, and reinforce concepts they previously learned. Visual concepts also help students become independent students. Instructors can use classroom walls to simplify complex concepts or abstract ideas by translating them into visual images.

Teachers should also use the classroom walls to exhibit student work and celebrate their achievements. Because many YouthBuild students have not succeeded in their previous educational endeavors, they are not likely to recognize their own progress. Therefore, it is important for teachers to celebrate and acknowledge the small and big educational successes. Student progress that is displayed does not have to be perfect to celebrate different types of success and levels of development. For example, you might display individual student testing goals and the progress each student is making. On the other hand, it is also important to celebrate and acknowledge successes, such as displaying the final draft of an essay. By using classroom walls to celebrate student work, instructors can improve students' confidence, inspire them to work harder, and create a culture of support among peers.

Program staff can also use wall space to track progress towards goals. For example, some programs create reading walls. Students and program staff post brief descriptions of current reading material. This helps create conversations among students and staff and allows staff to model life-long learning and reading.

Because many YouthBuild students have not experienced educational success, they are more likely to get discouraged with even a small setback. In addition to helping young people to learn from their setbacks, instructors can ensure that they create a positive and supportive classroom from the beginning. This includes using the classroom walls to display affirmations that contain positive and inspiring messages. Although it might sound clichéd, students unconsciously absorb positive message. Consider hanging or posting these messages at eye level, so students can see them when they are seated.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on how to set-up the classroom wall, watch this video.

Seating

Seating configurations can play an important role in the orchestration of learning. When instructors implement good teaching strategies, they will vary the type of activities and interactions students have with one another. Seating arrangements can also communicate a teacher's classroom values and teaching philosophies. For example, regularly organizing a class in groups indicates the teacher values collaboration among students.

Flexibility should be the guiding principle of organizing classroom seating. Students should be able to easily manipulate the physical arrangements to support different learning objectives. For example, one assignment might require group work where students need to face one another, while another may involve individual writing, and require more distance between students and their peers.

The seating arrangement can also aid overall instruction and be an important aspect of differentiated instruction. For example, the teacher might group all English Language Learner (ELL) students together for a particular assignment or create groups of mixed-level students. Seating arrangements also have an impact on classroom management. This is especially relevant for new and inexperienced teachers. While collaboration among students is important, teachers must also be able to see the classroom at all times. These strategies can help new or inexperienced teachers gain confidence in their ability to manage a classroom while also helping them institute effective teaching strategies. Encourage teachers to experiment with different seating arrangements, and help them to integrate seating into their instructional practices.

Resources

Every classroom should contain a range of resources that are easily accessible to students, and that aid their learning and instruction. In a YouthBuild classroom, resources can range from books, reference material, technology, and manipulatives, to construction tools.

Your program might also consider establishing a college and career readiness resource center. This should be a space dedicated to providing information on future planning for college and career pathways as well as for successful transition out of YouthBuild. This type of resource space contributes to a positive program culture and can improve the physical environment of the program.

Classroom Library

A library should be a vital component of any GED or English classroom. Easily accessible books at varying levels of reading send the message that reading and exploration are an important aspect of learning.

Many YouthBuild students gravitate towards workbooks because they replicate familiar learning environments. If there is a robust and vibrant array of books for students to explore and choose from, it will encourage them to move away from workbooks and help them become independent students. As with other activities that encourage students to think about their interests and make choices that make sense for them personally, a classroom library can help students connect to books that interest them. Thus, it can foster a love of reading and learning. This is especially important for students who do not enjoy reading or struggle with their reading skills. Giving students choice in selecting reading materials empowers them to take learning risks and become independent readers.

Provide books that are culturally relevant and age appropriate and which explore topics that students can relate to. This is particularly important for books at lower reading levels. These books, known as "hi-low books," essentially contain topics that are highly interesting, but the content is expressed in easily accessible vocabulary suitable for low reading levels. When structuring a classroom library, be sure to label clearly the reading level of each book. If students have to struggle to identify books at the appropriate reading level, they are likely to make the wrong choices and become frustrated.

Ideally, instructors will have created a classroom culture of respect, support and tolerance, which will reduce the stigma for struggling readers. To further ensure students do not feel stigmatized in the library, arrange the books by topic or author. It is important to choose a library arrangement system and stick with the organization method for the entire program cycle. Consistency is an important classroom principle that extends to the library as well.

The following resources can help your instructors arrange their classroom libraries:

- **Creating a Classroom Library.** Although this resource features an elementary classroom, the principles discussed have universal application. This website provides strategies for organizing and structuring the library. It also contains pictures that will help teachers visualize this space of the classroom.
- **Tips for Teachers: Creating a Classroom Library.** This site contains information on how to organize the classroom library and provides tips and strategies for acquiring books.
- **Resource Room: Hi-Low Books.** This site provides a list of books and publishers that focus on reading materials for reluctant and struggling readers.
- **School on Wheels Hi-Low Book List.** This list provides a list of books that are appropriate for reluctant readers. It guides teachers' selection by listing the reading and interest level of the book.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

See the Community of Practice for a list of additional High-Low books (Independent Reading Library and
"High Interest" Book List)

Tools and Manipulatives

One easy way to draw students out of their comfort zone and help them engage in their learning is through manipulatives. Although they are often used in lower grades, older students enjoy using manipulatives as well. Use almost any physical object as a manipulative in the classroom – it can range from cubes, dice, pattern blocks, and tiles, to spinners and other materials. Manipulatives are particularly useful for the GED or math classroom and also provide excellent opportunities for curriculum integration. Instructors can teach math in the context of construction and can utilize construction equipment in conjunction with manipulatives.

These physical objects help teachers to demonstrate abstract concepts and help students to easily visualize the lesson. By using manipulatives, teachers can easily reach students with different learning styles. Students will be able to easily understand the relationships between math concepts, which is important for higher-level math and thinking skills. Manipulatives can also help instructors reach students who are struggling with basic math concepts or have a learning disability.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

A sample math lesson utilizing manipulatives is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cG3NPpEiM6k

When using manipulatives and tools in the classroom, instructors should:

- **Introduce the manipulatives and allow students time to explore them.** Discuss the use of manipulatives and the ways they will help students learn.
- **Set ground rules.** As with many other classroom resources, set norms and guidelines for using tools and manipulatives. Develop the rules with students, which will increase their ownership of and respect for classroom resources.
- **Discuss safety.** This is particularly important for construction tools. If students practice proper safety procedures in the classroom, they are far more likely to follow them in the worksite.

We highly recommend creating a vocational education classroom. This can be a space to integrate construction and academic components by using construction tools and materials. Students can use tools and materials to tackle small projects, prior to using these tools in the construction site. In so doing, instructors can emphasize safety practices and ensure that students are confident around construction tools and equipment.

Technology

As technology becomes an integral part of the world, including the work world, it is important to integrate technology into the YouthBuild classrooms. It is undeniable that your students interact with technology on a daily basis. Based on their living situation, their opportunity to integrate technology and learning may occur only in the context of the program. Technology use in the classroom increases student achievement, academic performance, and motivation; promotes higher-order thinking; and prepares young people for the workforce.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on providing digital equity, access and inclusion see the *Digital Divide Resource Roundup* in the Community of Practice.

Teaching basic computer skills in the context of your classroom is important. However, technology integration in the classroom must extend beyond this. As with many other teaching strategies, technology can support learning if instructors ensure that students are actively engaged, participate in groups, have frequent interaction and feedback, and connect to the real world. If trained and given the right tools, teachers can use technology to enhance their teaching practices, but the program cannot successfully integrate technology into the classroom without a program-wide strategy. Therefore, program directors and instruction staff should come together to plan a strategy for incorporating technology into program and instructional practices.

Instructors can use the following resources to learn about best practices for integrating technology into their classroom:

- **Free Technology for Teachers** provides a list of resources, lesson plans and teaching ideas for incorporating technology into the classroom.
- **Digital Learning Day** includes several toolkits that instructors can use to integrate technology into their classroom in meaningful ways.

- **Edutopia** provides resources that instructors can use and highlights best practices with examples that teachers can implement in the classroom.
- **Digital Learning** video, produced by the Alliance for Excellent Education, provides an overview of the importance of integrating technology into the classroom and best practices for implementation.

One of the primary goals of the YouthBuild education component is to teach students to become life-long students. Meaningful integration of technology in the classroom can help the program achieve this goal by transforming young people from passive to active students. Technology can empower students to think about the information they receive, make choices, and execute skills. If the program utilizes technology in a meaningful way, the typical teacher/student role can be transformed. While teachers guide and facilitate the learning process, students take responsibility for their learning. Teachers set project goals and provide guidelines and access to resources, but students work through the technology-supported projects.

Teachers can use technology in the following areas:

- **Computer skills.** Instructors can incorporate basic computer skills into classroom practices by providing opportunities to use and interact with technology in the context of classroom assignments.
- **Differentiated instruction.** Computers are an important tool to help teachers meet the needs of students who are struggling, who possess a learning disability, or who are ELL students. For example, if a student is dyslexic, using a computer for writing may help him or her gain vital writing skills while minimizing the frustrations with spelling. Technology can help students feel a sense of mastery over concepts, so a wider range of students can excel, thereby enhancing their self-esteem.
- **Student engagement.** Instructors can provide opportunities for students to utilize multi-media tools to transform classroom projects. By utilizing multi-media technology, teachers can challenge students to exhibit a range of skills, including technology and higher-order skills. Technology may also increase student motivation, and students may show greater willingness to work on assigned tasks. Because peer feedback occurs often and organically, students are more likely to collaborate with and tutor one another. Below is a sample list of tools that can be used to engage students:
- **Wikis for Students.** Instructors can use this site for a range of activities, including presentations. Wiki spaces are particularly helpful in promoting collaboration among students. See this tool to learn about a range of ways instructors can use Wiki in their classroom. Below is a sample list of spaces where instructors can host Wiki pages:
  - Wetpaint www.wetpaint.com
  - Wikispaces wikispaces.com
  - Google sites sites.google.com
  - pbwiki pbwiki.com

- **Social bookmarking.** Students can search, store, organize, and manage web pages through data tags. They can also collaborative create tags to manage and categorize materials. This strategy allows students and instructors to conduct research and create working bibliographies. This is particularly helpful if students are working on a group research project. Below is a sample list of social bookmarking tools:
  - Delicious www.delicious.com
  - Reddit www.reddit.com
  - Knowledge Plaza www.knowledgeplaza.net

- **Audio and video presentations.** Students and teachers can share recorded audio and video. This site allows students to create presentations and instructors to demonstrate concepts. For example, construction managers can use the site to demonstrate the use of a particular tool before young people come to the work site. A sample list includes:
  - **Audacity.** This site contains a recorder and sound editor that allows students and teachers to create audio clips and podcasts.
  - **Animoto.** Teachers and students can create videos using still images, music and text. A free account is available for educators.
  - **Xtra Normal.** Students can create animated and narrated movies by using characters and typing dialogue. This sample video shows how teachers can use this site in the classroom.
  - **Wordle.** This site creates word clouds that teachers can use to build literacy and learning skills (e.g. summarizing, comparing, etc.).
- **Foliospaces.** YouthBuild programs use portfolios as an assessment tool, organization technique, and readiness tool. With this site, students can use technology to create and present their portfolios.
- **Flipped classrooms.** Students view the "lecture" portion of the class at home. During class, they will apply the concepts and lessons by working on projects and activities.
  - **Moodle** is an application that allows educators to create online courses by uploading and managing resources, add forums for student discussion, host wikis and blogs, and post assignments, quizzes, and polls.
  - **Ted-Ed** contains a library of instruction videos. Teachers can also customize existing lessons using a range of tools the site provides.
  - **Khan Academy** contains over 3,000 lectures on a range of subject areas and levels. Teachers can utilize the resources to supplement classroom instruction or as a way to conduct a "flipped classroom."

Be sure to locate classroom technology in an easily accessible area of the classroom. As with other classroom resources, staff should set classroom norms and guidelines for using technological resources and provide training, preferably at the beginning of the program cycle, to familiarize young people with the technological equipment. Giving young people access to technology in the context of the program also sends a message to students. Young people understand the value and cost of technology in our culture, and by giving them access to technological tools, the program communicates the importance of their learning.

Chapter 6: Curriculum Development

In traditional high school classrooms, the lecture approach to teaching causes many young people to disconnect from education and, therefore, forfeit their chance for well-paying jobs. With this in mind, YouthBuild programs must develop a relevant curriculum—a program-wide course of study—that allows students to resume and finish their secondary education, gain employment skills, and transition to college or career-related training. This chapter focuses on developing or adapting a curriculum, choosing an approach to teaching, and implementing the curriculum across YouthBuild components.

Choosing and Developing Curriculum

The YouthBuild design includes the following components: academic instruction leading to a high school diploma or GED, construction or other job-related training, community service, and leadership. Within this framework, each YouthBuild program decides on the curricula to use in its classrooms, on its worksite, and during other learning activities that support the program-wide course of study. YouthBuild graduates successfully complete not just their GED or worksite training but the encompassing YouthBuild curriculum. When deciding what students will learn and what materials will be used, curriculum planners should select materials that:

- **Are culturally relevant.** When considering an existing curriculum, teachers need to analyze it carefully, making certain it and its accompanying materials are relevant to the cultural experiences of the program's students. Relevant curricula, whether for math, reading, writing, or other academic subjects—must address life issues important to students in the program. If an existing curriculum is not appropriate, the program's teachers should adapt it for greater student engagement and learning.

  For example, the program could revise or include reading and writing assignments or mathematical word problems that reflect the experiences of their students and are relevant to young people growing up in economically impoverished communities, immigrant communities, urban or rural communities, or on tribal lands.

- **Integrate all YouthBuild program components.** Identify the skills being taught on the worksite or during community service and develop or adapt the reading, writing, mathematics, and other academic course curricula to support career-related skills and leadership development. Likewise, worksite learning and community service activities should teach or reinforce what students are learning in their high school, GED preparation, and vocational classrooms.

  For example, readings about environmental issues during high school science classes or preparation for the GED could expand learning that takes place during a community recycling project. Squaring up a wall on the worksite can reinforce what students have learned in their math class about geometry or computing square roots.

- **Meet postsecondary and career-readiness standards.** A YouthBuild curriculum should reflect the program's high expectations of all students by preparing them for postsecondary education. It should include activities that explicitly address key skills for college or career success, such as note taking, time management, study skills, and goal setting. Learning objectives for each component should aim for levels of competency that allow students to enroll in credit-bearing classes or career-related training, including prerequisites for apprenticeships.
- **Include appropriate assessments.** Pre- and post- assessment tools should be part of each component so that progress can be monitored and adjustments can be made, including adding to the curriculum elements that enhance student success. Enhancements may include engaging more tutors for struggling students; offering activities that expand students' understanding of career options, or helping students develop relationships with faculty, staff and other students on campus.
- **Facilitate, do not direct, learning.** YouthBuild programs are filled with students with diverse learning styles; however, many are likely to learn best through hands-on activities, rather than lecture. Although instructors will need to explain concepts or how to carry out tasks, an effective YouthBuild curriculum allows teachers to practice a constructivist theory of learning, encouraging students to construct their own knowledge. With this in mind, the curriculum should include strategies and materials that promote student initiative and autonomy, activities that build on the students' prior experiences, opportunities for discussion, and questioning. Importantly, the curriculum should allow time for students to learn through information they discover themselves in class, on the worksite, at home, and in their communities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on preparing students for postsecondary education and career-readiness, see Chapter 4 and Chapter 8 of this manual.
- For a sample curriculum, see the YouthBuild Charter School of California ACE *Sample Manual Academics and Leadership Development Integration* in the Community of Practice.
- For more information about student assessment, see Chapter 7 of this manual.

Planning Across Program Components

Effectively teaching across the curriculum requires teachers in all YouthBuild components to reinforce skills learned in other areas and to help students make connections between what they learn and how it can be applied in different situations. Opportunities and connections may happen serendipitously; however, many more opportunities will be created and more connections made when teachers and other staff coordinate their curricula, understand one another's learning objectives, and plan projects and activities together.

Teachers and staff should meet at the beginning of each program year to plan cross-curricular learning and then periodically to update one another on changes to their curricula and schedules and to discuss how students are practicing skills and applying their knowledge across the curriculum. During these meetings, share your curricula and syllabi, so colleagues know what topics are addressed and what skills are being learned on what schedule. Worksite instructors should identify which skills will be taught and practiced in each phase of construction projects. By cross-referencing the various curricula, teachers and instructors can coordinate their efforts and pinpoint opportunities to reinforce learning and help students make connections. For example, when vocational teachers address safety on the job the first week of the program, classroom teachers can have students read about the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and write about how its regulations affect them as workers.

Teachers should also share with one another the learning objectives for each course and for learning activities. When they understand specifically what knowledge, skills and attitudes students should be able to demonstrate, they can informally assess whether students have learned specific skills and offer feedback. For example, if students are being taught to read for details that support a main idea, a worksite instructor can report to a teacher or tutor that a student can successfully assemble pre-fabricated cabinets by reading the instructions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information about adequate planning time for teachers and staff, see Chapter 2 of this manual.
- A sample *Cross-Curricular Planning Form* can be found in the Community of Practice.

Effective Curriculum Delivery

While developing the program's curriculum, YouthBuild administrators, teachers, and staff members should educate themselves about effective approaches to educating and training young people. They can then compare approaches and make informed decisions about which are likely to be the most effective for their students. As part of this decision, they should also consider the staffing, time, and other resources needed to implement particular approaches. In general, programs should make choices by discussing questions similar to those below:

- How well does this approach support the program's goals for its students? For example, "Does a project-based approach provide the experiences and practices that students with learning difficulties need to improve literacy skills?" "Will a computer-based approach enhance or detract from student collaboration and a family atmosphere?"
- Does the program have the resources to adopt or adapt the approach? For example, "Can staff identify willing partners to help organize and implement a service-learning approach that develops skills for green jobs?" "Does a balanced literacy approach offer enough physical activity for the many students who are tactile students?"

Project-Based Approach

Project-based learning allows students to explore a topic and related issues in depth, learning what they need to know as they address a challenging question. This approach requires students to think critically, work collaboratively, and effectively communicate the result of their project to an outside audience. To complete a project successfully, they must also manage time and practice leadership. A project-based approach reflects how people learn and apply their knowledge in their lives outside the classroom.

Simply doing a project is different from learning through a project. A project-based approach requires careful planning and implementation in order to provide an engaging learning experience aligned with the program's learning objectives. When designing a project-based curriculum:

- **Choose a broad topic and pose a driving question for students to explore.** The project topic and accompanying question should provide opportunities for students at multiple skill levels to develop knowledge and skills identified across the YouthBuild curriculum. Although students will be involved in identifying topics, a team of teachers, staff and, if possible, experts on the topic, should develop the guiding question, refining it until it is:
  - relevant and engaging to students
  - challenging enough to significantly expand the knowledge and skills already identified in the program's learning objectives, including higher-order thinking skills
  - complex enough to demand intense, prolonged involvement
  - applicable to issues and audiences outside the YouthBuild program
  - encompassing enough that there is no single "right" answer, but the opportunity to discover several possible, defensible ones
  - specific enough to focus the students' work
- **Identify learning objectives and assessment methods.** Written learning objectives that specify what the students should know and be able to do at the end of the project should align with the program's overall objectives; however, a project-based approach inevitably offers opportunities to develop additional or different skills that can also be assessed and recorded.
- **Select activities that are related to the project's driving question as well as its learning objectives.** Keep in mind that the project outcome is not to solve the problem, but for students to add to their knowledge and the knowledge of others. Decide upon a culminating product(s) so that students can demonstrate their achievement.
- **Manage the project.** Engage students in these tasks as much as is feasible: Decide upon the responsibilities teachers and staff members will assume for guiding activities, supporting student learning, assessing progress, and keeping records. Determine how the project will be coordinated, including when teachers, staff and experts/mentors will meet as the project unfolds. Create a timeline for the project from launch to debrief and celebration, allowing students plenty of time to plan, change their plans, carry out their activities and complete the project. Develop a sequence of activities with deadlines for completion; however, be flexible, as projects seldom come off like clockwork.

While project-based curricula are engaging and allow students to take responsibility for their learning, they take considerable time, extensive planning and flexibility to implement. Directors should work with teachers to lead classrooms that are productive yet appear more chaotic and "messier" than traditional classrooms. Teachers may also find the curriculum more challenging to align with defined program learning objectives. Therefore, they should have adequate time dedicated for continuous monitoring and problem solving

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- A project-based learning example, including example activities, can be found in the Community of Practice.
- A sample list of topics and questions to explore during project-based learning activities and an example of a project-based approach to teaching can be found in the Community of Practice.
- For more information about project-based learning, go to Project Based Learning, a website sponsored by the Buck Institute for Education and Boise State University, Department of Educational Technology. The site offers many resources for planning and implementing project-based learning experiences.

Service-Learning

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Because YouthBuild programs with construction training are already engaged in service-learning, the approach is a natural choice.

When designing a service learning project, be sure to:

- **Allow students to identify community needs.** Make certain they understand that the project will include researching and addressing complex problems, not just temporarily fixing an isolated one such as a one-time clean up of a littered park or a single fundraiser to purchase playground equipment. For example, they might explore the problem of childhood obesity in their community while sponsoring a health fair, organizing weekly activities for children in the local park, or helping children establish a garden to grow healthy foods.
- **Plan the project with students.** Help students build and identify opportunities to gain and practice skills. Help students identify the resources needed to carry out the project and how they will access or acquire them. Schedule time throughout the project for students to reflect on their experience and the ongoing benefit to the community.
- **Implement the project collaboratively with students.** Depending on the length of the project, have students create a daily, weekly, and/or monthly schedule of activities with assigned responsibilities for each group member.
- **Create a venue to share student work.** Allowing students to share their work with the larger community is a way to celebrate their accomplishment and develop career-ready skills.
- **Assess student learning.** Utilize journals, reflection activities, project outcome and student effort to assess students. Consider incorporating opportunities for students to assess their own learning and experience.

While this can be an opportunity to integrate many different program components including leadership development, instructors will need time to plan and manage. Adequately assessing skill development can be a challenge, and hence instructors need to develop rubrics and have clarity about the learning objectives and the culminating projects that will demonstrate student learning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about service-learning as well as resources and examples of projects, see the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.

Balanced Literacy

Although a balanced literacy approach is usually used in the early grades, this is a suitable approach for students who failed to develop critical literacy skills, or who have English as a second language, or learning difficulties that require intensive attention to language skills. Balanced literacy incorporates four strategies for reading and writing instruction, so that teachers have multiple ways to develop proficient readers and writers.

A balanced literacy program includes:

- **Reading aloud and modeling writing for students.** When teachers read aloud, students develop a sense of story structure and increase their vocabulary. Writing for students helps them understand the writing conventions such as spelling, punctuation and capitalization as well as the connections between reading and writing. Both activities can motivate students to read and write.
- **Sharing reading and sharing writing.** By reading and writing together, teachers help students develop good strategies through modeling and immediate feedback. Sharing the learning experience helps build a community of students.
- **Guiding students' reading and writing.** Teachers can guide individual students as they read or write or work with small groups, learning or practicing specific skills.
- **Providing opportunities to read and write independently.** Teachers can build their students' confidence through independent reading and writing. Reading and writing independently provide practice in applying the strategies modeled and developed during the other elements of a balanced literacy approach.

As it has been for many other YouthBuild programs, a balanced literacy approach can be effective for your program. However, you should be aware that much of the guidance and materials available are more appropriate for primary and middle school teachers and their students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional information on balanced literacy, *Teaching Literacy Across the Curriculum*, in Chapter 4 of this manual.

Competency-Based Approach

A competency-based approach uses specific, measurable, pre-determined learning benchmarks that clearly gauge a student's acquisition of skills and knowledge. Because students work at their own pace toward gaining competencies, the approach works well with students working at different levels of proficiency. However, some will take less or more time than others to master materials. Although a competency-based approach is structured around measureable learning objectives, it does not dictate the way in which teachers actually teach, nor the materials they use. Therefore, teachers can individualize instruction taking into account students' skill levels and learning styles. A competency-based approach can be motivating to students because it offers frequent measures of their progress on short-term, easily attained benchmarks. These benchmarks are often listed on checklists that may include academic skills, employment-related skills, life skills, and leadership skills. Students know which objectives they are working to achieve and what stage they are at in gaining competency. Because learning is measured through established benchmarks, programs that adopt a competency-based approach may improve their accountability.

Drawbacks and Challenges to the Competency-based Approach

As with other hands-on or individualized curricula, the competency-based approach can challenge teachers and students accustomed to the more traditional "seat time" approach to acquiring knowledge. It also requires more intense classroom management and attention to record-keeping because, although students have the same goal, they work at varying paces with materials appropriate to their skill levels and may demonstrate competency in diverse ways. Teachers also have to spend time to develop competency statements, identify appropriate materials, and develop skill assessments that are provided in purchased curricula or educational materials

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Sample sets of construction and leadership competencies can be found in the Community of Practice.
- For information about DiplomaPlus, a competency-based approach used in schools serving overage students lacking enough credits for graduation, see Diploma Plus.

Blended Approach

A number of YouthBuild programs have adopted a computer-based approach because it is efficient and develops important computer skills. In a computer-based approach, instruction, review and assessment are provided through a computer program and managed by the teacher. Instruction is individually paced so that students in a multi-level group are working at appropriate levels.

If the program has access to extensive technology or plans to work closely with a partner that uses this approach, such as a community college offering basic adult education, then this option would be ideal. However, keep in mind that a computer-based approach is most effective when it is integrated with other teaching strategies, including large- and small-group teaching, tutoring, and hands-on learning activities. In addition, teachers, tutors or knowledgeable peers should be on hand to guide students as they use computers and, if students have access to the Internet, to ensure they are using the technology appropriately.

The approach described above integrates face-to-face classroom instruction or other educational activities with the computer playing a supporting role. However, as an increasing number of online classes and educational materials are developed, many schools and programs are using a blended learning approach, which relies on computer-based instruction, while the classroom teacher reinforces and supplements what students learn in online courses.

As with other curricula, the computer-based approach also has drawbacks. These include:

- **Less interactive classrooms.** Because a computer-based approach reduces interaction between students and instructors, it can prevent teachers from running an active classroom that values camaraderie.
- **Unequal appeal to all learning modalities.** It is likely it will fail to engage students who learn best through hands-on experiences. Although programs for ELL students require students to practice speaking, and more video is being incorporated in all programs, many programs are comprised of text-based multiple-choice questions—not an optimal way for hands-on students to acquire and practice their skills.

- **Reduced ability to differentiate instruction.** It is more difficult for teachers to tailor materials specifically to their program objectives or the special needs of individual students because of complex technology.
- **Monetary investment.** This approach is also highly expensive to purchase, upgrade and maintain.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the appropriate use of technology, see Digital Citizenship.

Academic and Vocational Integration

Integrating all program components is essential to the success of every YouthBuild program. It is especially important to integrate the construction and education components because skills learned in the classroom can be reinforced with the skills students are learning on the worksite. Likewise, academic skills are applied and reinforced on the worksite. When integrating academic instruction with vocational training, teachers and worksite instructors should consider:

- **Informing the construction and academic curricula.** While construction and academic components are taught separately, they should inform and support both curricula. Informing and supporting require that teachers learn about the skills required and taught at the worksite, while worksite instructors learn about the curricula used in classrooms. This requires regularly scheduled meetings designed to update one another and to coordinate efforts.

  EXAMPLE: *When students are learning to use generators to run power tools on the worksite, teachers preparing students for the GED science exam could present material on electricity. Because the teachers and worksite instructors have coordinated their efforts, teachers can refer specifically to the students' worksite experience and use generators in their examples of energy conversion.*
  Worksite instructors can refer to the students' knowledge of electricity when teaching safety issues connected with grounding.

- **Using material relevant for vocational and academic classrooms.** Teachers use vocationally relevant materials to teach academic subjects while vocational teachers and worksite instructors reinforce academic knowledge on the job. Vocational teachers should make suggestions for reading and writing subjects; academic teachers suggest materials and methods for reinforcing their curricula in the vocational classroom or on the job. The academic and vocational teachers together assess student work.

  EXAMPLE: *Teachers building students' dictionary skills can use words related to construction or other careers for which YouthBuild provides training. Or, after learning how to frame a wall on the construction site, students can describe the process in writing during their English class.*

- **Connecting academic and construction skills.** YouthBuild academic teachers and vocational and worksite instructors together choose lessons, develop supplementary materials, teach, and assess student progress. Through this most highly cooperative approach, staff demonstrate to students how their respective fields are related.

  EXAMPLE: *The academic teacher goes to the worksite to teach the math skills needed to do the next phase of the project or teaches the reading skills needed to understand the directions for loading and operating a nail gun. Likewise, worksite instructors and vocational teachers go into the classroom to review the terms associated with framing a wall or the names of tools used, after a worksite skill demonstration. Academic and vocational instructors can team teach or assist each other in the classroom or on the worksite.*

Integration of Different Approaches

Few YouthBuild programs adopt a single approach exclusively and forego the advantages of all other approaches. Integrating approaches makes sense for YouthBuild because programs that enroll a mix of students with multiple skill levels and learning styles who could benefit from one approach over another—or two approaches. However, haphazardly picking and choosing elements from various approaches will likely result in a disorganized, unfocused program whose students are not able to settle into a routine, clearly understand what is expected of them, set goals within a stable structure, and recognize what they've accomplished. Instead, teachers might consider combining two compatible approaches.

For example, project-based learning and balanced literacy could be appropriate for a program enrolling students who stand to gain from a student-centered approach where learning takes place outside the classroom, but who require focused attention to their language skills. The materials needed for in-depth exploration of a topic could be read during balanced literacy shared reading activities, while project reports could be the subject of writing activities. Because balanced literacy also includes attention to listening and speaking skills, interactions with experts, mentors and interviewees, and presentations about the project to audiences outside of YouthBuild offer authentic opportunities to practice skills developed during balanced literacy sessions.

Effective Assessment of the Program's Curriculum and Approach

YouthBuild programs will agree that it is a time-consuming, arduous task to develop a curriculum and implement an approach to delivering it. However, because the issues that young people face and the knowledge and skills they need for employment change and become more complex, programs must continuously evaluate their curriculum and approach.

A YouthBuild student body will transform, perhaps subtly, over time. For example, if local public education is reformed and school retention rates increase, students enrolling in YouthBuild may bring more severe academic challenges. Or, if there is change within the community the program serves, the curriculum may need adjustments to meet new needs. Even in the short term, changes to the curriculum may be necessary as teachers determine that it should be expanded or reduced to be more effective, that the pace of learning should be sped up or slowed down, or that materials must be modified to better engage students. In addition, program administrators, teachers, or other staff members may discover that their initial approach is not producing the learning outcomes they predicted, or that the approach cannot be effectively implemented or maintained because it is too time consuming or too resource-intensive.

Specific information for sustaining a data-driven culture and assessing both program and student outcomes appears elsewhere in this manual; however, take care to record developments and changes in the curriculum and teaching approaches. This informal documentation can then be considered during program evaluation and the refinements or the changes cross-referenced with program outcomes to ensure an effective program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on using data to improve educational outcomes, see Chapter 2 of this manual.
- For more information on assessing student learning and assessment tools, see Chapter 7 of this manual.

Chapter 7: Assessment

Regular assessments and systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the education component, performance of education staff, and the academic progress of students are crucial to the success of any YouthBuild program. The purpose of any evaluation is to help improve the performance of individuals, teams, and the organization. Therefore, all assessments or evaluations should highlight assets and strengths, as well as offer recommendations to improve deficiencies. For staff and students alike, effective assessments can facilitate planning and decision-making, improve performance, identify priorities, increase self-awareness, and document progress and accomplishments. This chapter will focus on tools and resources that will help staff evaluate students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information on developing a data-informed culture at your YouthBuild program and tools for evaluating the education component and staff performance, see Chapter 2 of this manual.

Most programs use two types of assessments:

- **Ongoing assessments** (or formative assessments) are ongoing and informal. They are built into lessons as a way to monitor student progress and can also be used as vehicles for regular feedback that can guide and motivate students to achieve their educational goals.
- **Cumulative assessments** (or summative assessments) measure final outcomes or impact and are conducted infrequently.

Whether it is a formative or summative assessment, a program should design fair, clean, and useful assessments. Below are a few basic elements that staff can use to guide their development of assessments:

- clear purpose
- good planning
- appropriate indicators to measure progress or outcomes
- effective data gathering systems
- transparent methods of conveying results

When young people are comfortable with the purpose and process of the assessment, it can become a valuable tool. However, assessments, even informal ones, can be stressful, so young people need to be prepared to receive feedback. Staff should openly and honestly discuss what will be assessed and how the information will be used. In addition, staff can help students understand that effective students use assessments as an important source of information to improve performance and become life-long learners. It is also an important career-readiness skill. The guidelines below can help structure conversations about evaluations.

- **Make expectations explicit.** Share the skills and behaviors students need to exhibit, as well as the frequency of assessments and performance expectations.
- **Make outcomes explicit.** Discuss performance standards along with rewards for fulfilling them and actions for failing to meet them.
- **Follow-through on final evaluations and recognition.** Decide who will follow through on recognition, consequences, and commitments to make changes based on the evaluation findings. Plan carefully, and be consistent.

As your program plans the cycle of assessment, keep in mind that a fair assessment includes both qualitative and quantitative measures. Be sure to keep accurate records of statistical information, but also include narrative explanations and samples of student work.

Initial Assessment

DOL YouthBuild grantees are required to conduct an initial assessment of their students' literacy and numeracy skills using an approved standardized assessment. Many programs conduct this initial assessment during the application process or as a Mental Toughness activity to obtain a grade-equivalent score. The grade-equivalent score received will help staff gauge the abilities of incoming students as well as help determine the eligibility of young people to participate in the program. There is a limited window of two weeks from the date of enrollment to enter at least one pre-test score in the DOL MIS system.

While YouthBuild programs must serve young people who have dropped out of school, the YouthBuild Transfer Act does include a 25 percent exemption rule. Up to, but no more than, 25 percent of participants in the program can be youth with a high school diploma or GED and/or youth who are not members of a disadvantaged population. However, to qualify for this exemption, the youth must be basic skills deficient, which means they test at or below an eighth grade level in reading or math on an accepted standardized assessment. Therefore, the initial assessment can help the program determine the eligibility of each applicant to participate in the program.

The most commonly used assessments include:

- **TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education)**. The TABE assesses the skills and knowledge of adult students. This assessment can be given to students in the traditional paper and pencil format or in a computerized format. There is also a range of scoring options.
- **ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Examination).** ABLE is appropriate for a range of adult education programs and accommodates a range of students, including non-readers.
- **CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems)**. CASAS assesses adult students' abilities in reading, math, listening, writing, and speaking skills.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a list of other acceptable tests, see the U.S. Department of Education guidelines in the Community of Practice.

The initial assessment will also help the program adopt the best strategy for supporting the success of your students. Experience has shown that most students entering the program with reading levels below seventh grade will not be able to get their GED in 12 months, although there are also data indicating that the single strongest predictor of GED acquisition is not incoming reading level but the dedication and skill of the teachers. Many programs accept students with lower reading levels and are very successful with them through a combination of teaching strategy, program culture, teacher and staff dedication, and the belief that all students deserve a second chance in a loving and caring environment such as a YouthBuild program. Sometimes students with very low reading levels will need extended study for the GED or diploma. Under the DOL statute, students can be enrolled full time for up to two years, with an additional year of part-time follow-up services. Also, under the DOL performance measures, young people have up to nine months following exit to earn their GED. Some programs have used non-DOL funding to create what they call "Pre- YouthBuild" for students reading between second and sixth grade level. In Pre-YouthBuild, the program focus is on academic remediation full time until the student reaches sixth or seventh grade level and advances into the full YouthBuild program that includes hands-on construction training. This technique allows the program to enroll young people whenever they apply and then move them into the full YouthBuild when the next cohort begins.

Standardized tests give a general indication of the reading and math levels of incoming students, but they do not reveal specific areas of strengths and weaknesses that students possess. To gain a more thorough sense of a student's strengths and limitations, consider including time in an orientation schedule that would be dedicated for education staff to meet with individual students. At this time, staff should conduct a thorough assessment of students' learning styles, education history, high school background, experience with special education or advanced classes, work history, and interests. In fact, staff can use much of the information gathered during the initial assessment to develop the individual plan with students.

The program should consider adopting a holistic initial assessment. At the beginning phase of the program, students are engaged in other assessments, such as career interest inventories. Education staff can use results from these activities to inform their holistic assessment of student abilities and interests. Some early interest and assessment activities that can be scheduled during Mental Toughness include:

- **The Myers Briggs Type Indicator.** To administer and interpret the Myers Briggs test, someone on the staff must become certified, or the program has to connect with someone who is certified and who can work with the program on administering and interpreting students' tests.
- **Learning Style Inventory.** This is a short survey that can help educators understand the learning style of students.

Education staff also identify specific academic and work-related skills to cultivate over the course of the program and use the information to tailor lessons to individual students. For example, the GED instructor can assign developmental reading materials to beginning readers and supplement with small group practice. By getting to know students' interests and goals, education staff can also tailor classroom materials to reflect students' interests.

Initial Assessments in the Classroom

An initial assessment can and should take place in the classroom as well. Instructors should assess student skills prior to the start of a lesson or unit. They can use the results to guide instruction in the classroom and the work site. Regularly assessing and utilizing these tools in the classroom and worksite will help establish a strong data-informed culture in the program. It will also help students understand that assessments can help them learn and grow. Staff may also utilize technology in creative ways to ensure that students are being assessed only on knowledge. Because initial assessments are designed to be non-threatening, by conducting ongoing evaluations in the context of the caring and supportive environment of the YouthBuild program, students will become familiar with tests, and this kind of evaluation will help break their negative experiences with assessments.

When developing initial classroom assessments, be sure they correspond directly to the skills that instructors will teach. It is also important to design an assessment that measures only knowledge and skills. Therefore, the assessment should be at a reading level that is accessible to all students. Instructors can ensure this by utilizing various strategies such as manual demonstrations, verbal descriptions, and problem-solving simulations. Prior to delivering a classroom assessment, students must understand that it will not be used to pass or fail them or judge their knowledge, but instead that instructors will use the results to inform teaching strategies.

As with all other assessments, instructors need to be open and honest. Thus, they should share the results of the assessment with students by praising existing knowledge, assuring students that they will learn material they have not yet mastered, and praising their effort.

Ongoing Assessment

Ongoing and informal assessment (also referred to as formative assessment) of students is an important evaluation tool in the classroom. Through ongoing assessments, education staff can foster student understanding and significantly contribute to the process of learning. Further, informal assessments can more appropriately capture students' critical thinking, problem solving, and soft skills development than traditional standardized assessments. Teachers should use ongoing assessments to gauge student understanding, which can help them guide subsequent teaching strategies. When education staff are aware of students' skills, knowledge, and feelings, they are better able to target their teaching strategies to the precise needs of each student.

Utilize a range of approaches to gauge student progress, including:

- **Self-evaluation**. Students may be involved in evaluating their own performance on a regular basis, discussing and writing about it. Self-evaluation teaches students to be self-reflective, which will help them initiate change and appreciate their improvements. It can also improve a young person's confidence as a student and boost his or her self-esteem. All staff can use the same evaluation forms, which gives them the opportunity to compare notes with students and other staff.

- **Observation.** Teacher observation can be one of the most informative methods of assessing students, revealing how they learn and think, and how they interact with the learning material and their peers. Observations will reveal not only the mastery of skills, but also the attainment of soft skills. For example, instructors on the construction site can observe how well students make estimations and use tools. They can also gauge how well students work in groups, deal with frustrations, solve problems, follow directions, ask questions, and listen to others. Teachers should keep informal records of observations, taking brief and informal notes during class and adding interpretations and comments later.
- **Classroom Dialogue.** Education staff can use this informal assessment strategy to gauge student understanding. For example, a GED instructor might initiate a discussion with students after reading a chapter of the text, or a construction manager might engage students in a conversation about what students learned and the types of tools they used to accomplish tasks. This type of assessment can be spontaneous or planned into a lesson.
- **Journals.** This form of assessment can be utilized in the classroom and on the worksite on a daily basis. Instructors should consider building into their lesson plans time for journal writing. Education and construction staff can encourage students to summarize what they learned, ask questions, and reflect on their learning. If this is used skillfully, students can demonstrate skills they acquired, share areas of weaknesses, as well as their feelings about the material and understanding of the learning process. Staff may also use journals to interact with students and as a tool to foster communication between peers.
- **Exit Slips.** Asking students to submit short statements after each class, either summarizing the day's lesson or asking questions about specific concepts discussed during class, is a great way to informally assess students' understanding and to plan for the next class.

Be sure to cultivate a culture of ongoing assessment that informs instruction rather than grades students. Utilize ongoing formal assessments to gauge student skills but be sure to give students adequate notice and time for review, and assess only skills that have been taught. Ongoing assessments can also be traditional, such as quizzes; instructors should use a range of assessments including demonstration (for construction) and written assessments. Students and instructors should utilize formative assessments to inform and guide instruction. Educators can use them to guide planning; students can use them to identify areas that need further practice. Program leadership should make this the culture of the program by modeling this practice with their instructors.

Cumulative Assessment

The Department of Labor mandates that at least 50 percent of students achieve literacy and numeracy gains of one or more educational functioning levels. DOL also encourages programs to hold regular standardized academic testing every three months at a minimum, starting from student orientation or Mental Toughness.

GED Test

Attainment of a degree or certificate is one of the DOL outcomes the program must meet. Therefore, it is not surprising that the GED will be a prominent focus for students at the program. The GED test assesses knowledge of and a set of skills in various concepts in specific subject areas. The skills tested include:

- **Comprehension Skills.** All the questions on the GED require a basic level of comprehension, including the ability to restate information, summarize ideas, and identify implications.

- **Application Skills.** The GED requires students to use given or remembered ideas in a context different from the one provided.
- **Analysis Skills.** Students will need to distinguish facts from hypothesis and opinions, recognize unstated assumptions, distinguish conclusion from supporting statements, and identify cause and effect relationships.
- **Synthesis Skills.** Students will demonstrate their mastery of this skill in the writing section, which involves forming theories, hypotheses, stories, or compositions.
- **Evaluation skills.** When expressing this skill, students assess the appropriateness of data to substantiate hypotheses, conclusions, or generalizations. They must also demonstrate the ability to recognize the role values play in beliefs and decision making, assess accuracy of facts as determined by proof and documentation, and identify logical fallacies in arguments.

Students must demonstrate these skills in various subject areas of the GED test, which include:

- **Language Arts – Reading.** This section contains multiple choice questions and measures literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, application, and analysis. Students have 65 minutes to answer 40 questions.
- **Social Studies.** These multiple choice questions measure integrated concepts and social studies principles rather than focus on isolated facts. They draw on conceptual themes that run through all the social studies disciplines. The section contains 50 questions and lasts 70 minutes.
- **Science.** This section contains questions related to biology, earth sciences, physics, and chemistry. Similar to the social studies test, the science section also measures integrated concepts and science principles rather than isolated facts. There are 50 questions to be answered in 80 minutes.
- **Language Arts – Writing.** This section occurs in two parts. The first part contains multiple choice questions. The focus is on the ability to edit sentences and use proof-reading skills. It measures the student's knowledge of sentence structure, word usage, and mechanics. The time allotted for this part is 75 minutes for 50 questions. In the second part, students must write a 200-word essay in 45 minutes, responding to an opinion question. This section measures the ability to express an opinion in writing.
- **Math.** This is also divided into two parts. In the first part, students may use a calculator to answer 25 questions in 45 minutes. The second part also contains 25 questions to be answered in 45 minutes. However, they are not allowed to use a calculator in this section.

Teaching to Skills and Authentic Learning, Not to the Test

It is important that all staff and program leadership focus on fostering a learning environment of building student skills and knowledge rather than teaching to the test. In such an environment, students are likely to be more engaged in their learning and more successful, including on the GED test.

Depending on how students performed on the initial assessment, the program will place them in a GED or pre-GED class. Regardless of the level, GED instruction should be part of a broader instructional curriculum that takes into account individual learning needs, exposes students to the conceptual groundwork of the disciplines, and helps them develop a range of critical thinking skills. Regardless of whether or not students are ready for a GED level class, they can benefit

from the concepts taught in a GED class. Instructors can tailor the material for specific skill levels and make a connection between the materials used and GED skills. It is important for instructors to emphasize that the GED measures thinking skills as well as reading comprehension.

While teaching skills is more important, staff should also prepare students to take a high-stakes test such as the GED. Often students maintain negative associations with tests from their previous educational backgrounds, which can impact their performance regardless of their preparation. Explicitly teaching test-taking strategies can help students remain calm and demonstrate their preparation on the GED test. Below is a sample list of test-taking skills that can be taught:

- **Budgeting time efficiently.** Before they begin each section, students should learn to scan the test. They should identify easy questions, questions that will yield the most points, and the harder questions. Instructors can help students develop a strategy to budget their time, so they use the allotted time efficiently to complete the test.
- **Pacing.** Because of nerves or lack of time, students may rush through questions and not pay attention to details. Help students learn to pace themselves – this can include strategies such as reading the entire question before answering, reviewing all answer choices carefully, tackling easy questions first, and saving questions that students have trouble with until the end.
- **Keeping a positive attitude.** Maintaining a positive attitude and staying calm and relaxed is an important aspect of test taking. Students can get easily discouraged if the questions are hard or they get nervous. As a result, they can lose focus, which can impact their performance. Addressing these issues prior to the test and teaching students strategies for staying calm and positive (e.g. breathing techniques) can help them on test day.
- **Reviewing answer choices.** If students have time, teachers should encourage them to review the questions and answer choices. Help them develop a strategy for reviewing questions. For example, students might want to review questions that they had difficulty with initially.
- **Tackling multiple-choice questions.** Teach students to read the question and formulate an answer before looking at the answer choices. Once they review all answer choices and eliminate the wrong choices, and if there are no penalties for guessing, students should complete each question with an educated guess. Be sure also to review strategies for tackling specific questions, such as those that have “none of the above” or “all of the above” options. For example, if there are at least two statements that are true, and there is an “all of the above” option, that is likely the right answer.
- **Practicing a strategy for the essay question.** Teach students to budget their time for writing the essay, including the time to develop a short outline. This will help them stay organized and write fluid essays. Emphasize the importance of developing ideas. Have them practice developing paragraphs with one main idea and supporting arguments. Similarly, teach students to minimize the time they spend on developing introductions and conclusions.
- **Tackling math questions.** Ask students to memorize important formulas. On the day of the test, ask them to write the formulas on a sheet of paper as they begin the test or the section. This way, if they forget a formula during the test, they can refer to the list they created. Teach them to solve problems first and then review the answer choices. Work with students to help them estimate answers; this way they’ll know an accurate range for the right answer.

Fostering Respect

Because students' abilities might be at different levels, it is important that staff foster a culture of respect and support in the classroom. Instructors should be open and upfront, acknowledging the fact that each student may be at a different level, and that students can learn from one another. While instructors should provide regular opportunities to practice taking the GED, it is important to embed GED skills into a larger curriculum. In so doing, instructors can reduce student frustration and discouragement, particularly for those students who need to make large strides. It will also reduce the false impression of "superiority." Furthermore, instructors can demonstrate that there are other valid measures of skills, including displaying sample student work, celebrating the completion of a set number of books read, completing projects, and maintaining a portfolio.

Adult students often fear making mistakes in front of their peers. Acknowledging these fears, fostering a culture of respect, and allowing students to demonstrate their strengths to their peers, can help students get over the fear of learning and feel successful. In the course of daily classroom activities, staff should also teach leadership skills, encouraging students from varying skill levels to work together to practice skills. Because the GED requires mastery of a range of competencies such as listening and note taking, students will have the opportunity to show mastery of different skills, highlight their strengths, and support one another. Students with more advanced skills can also function as tutors in the classroom. Giving students responsibility recognizes their achievement and assigns them the responsibility of helping their peers. As a result, the program can develop leadership skills while building a safe and supportive program culture.

Since the GED requires students to write an opinion-based essay in the writing section, staff can integrate community service and skill development in the context of GED preparation. In addition to allowing students to practice their writing skills, it can be another opportunity to infuse leadership development. Students can keep journals about their experience, which instructors can supplement with guiding questions for reflection. The program could also offer a community service or civic engagement class. Students can tackle real problems while also working on developing important leadership skills.

Assessing Student Readiness

DOL recommends YouthBuild programs assess its students, at a minimum, every three months. Whether the program follows the DOL guidelines or institutes more frequent assessments, be sure to develop an assessment timeline and share it with students and instructors. Regular assessment of students' skills will allow instructors to determine whether they have attained the skills necessary to take the GED practice test, which is similar to the actual test. It contains the five sections of the GED and takes a total of four to five hours. The practice test can be an accurate predictor of actual test scores if it is treated seriously. The testing environment should be replicated as closely as possible, including offering the test without any interruptions. This will help students take the test seriously, and it will prepare them for the actual test.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on developing a testing timeline, see Chapter 1 of this manual.

Before students take the practice test, carefully examine the test with them. Young people come into the classroom with fears, misconceptions, ideas, and false expectations about the GED. Therefore, it is important that instructors should communicate openly and honestly about the expectations for the practice and actual GED tests.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a list of sample questions that your program can use to discuss the GED test, please see the Community of Practice.

Each student's readiness to take the practice test and the GED exam should be determined on an individual basis. A combination of individual assessment and standardized testing can help instructors determine each student's readiness. Be sure to make this judgment from test scores and observations. For example, use grade equivalency improvement along with an individual student's ability to handle difficult reading material, to think critically, to concentrate for long periods of time, and to show competency in subject matters. The following guidelines can help staff determine the readiness of students:

- **Beginner.** Students at this level possess an equivalent reading score up to a 4 on a standardized reading test. They will have difficulty with basic reading, writing and math skills. Because these students need substantial practice with reading and writing, working from a GED practice test will be too difficult and could be frustrating. Teachers can help such students develop skills that are tested on the GED by using appropriate reading materials.
- **Advanced beginner.** At this level, students typically score between a 4 and 6 on standardized tests. They display some difficulty with reading comprehension, writing and math skills. Students at this level need to build skills, particularly thinking skills. The GED practice test can frustrate students at this level, so pre-GED work might be most appropriate, allowing the student to achieve some success without too much frustration.
- **Intermediate.** Students scoring between an eight or above on a standardized test possess intermediate reading comprehension, math and writing abilities. They also have a reasonable level of self-discipline and ability to concentrate. While these students have greater mastery of skills tested on the GED, they need more practice. Your instructors should work with the GED practice test carefully. While a high score on the test can motivate these students, a low score can be discouraging and may hinder students from persisting.
- **Ready for the GED.** If students score an eight or above on a standardized test, they should be able to demonstrate mastery in all areas of the GED. A high score can be a motivation for students at this level. Your instructors can use GED study materials along with other high-interest and comprehension-building materials to improve specific areas.

While some students will enter the program ready to take the GED and others will be lacking basic skills, staff might consider waiting a period after the initial assessment to test any students. A pause on the testing schedule in the beginning will help students have an educational experience that is different from their previous educational experience. Some young people may be able to master the GED test, but they might still not possess job or post-secondary readiness skills. Therefore, waiting to test young people, regardless of skill level, will give the program an opportunity to set the context that YouthBuild is more than a GED attaining program and truly engage students in the learning process and develop a love for learning.

Two months after the program cycle begins is an ideal time to start the testing cycle. For example, if the program begins in August, then testing should ideally begin in November. This allows staff to establish systems in the program, and such a timeline allows students to participate in the classroom throughout the program cycle, be engaged in lessons, and develop test-taking skills. Building a testing timeline into the larger curriculum keeps testing grounded within the program's education philosophy. It also gives the young people an important context for testing and helps them understand the need for it, the knowledge that is measured, and the connection to outcomes for themselves and the program. Understanding the testing process will help students strive harder to meet their educational goals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, see the sample testing timeline in the Community of Practice.

Regularly assessing student readiness can help your students practice for the test, develop a plan for taking the test, and avoid a frustrating test experience. The GED test is long and requires patience, which alone can impact student performance. In order for the staff to be confident in a student's ability to pass the test, the student's scores on the practice test need to be well above the required passing score on the GED test. Be sure to establish standards of readiness (minimum averages) and communicate them with students openly and regularly. Consider instituting a system that sets goals for each student to meet at the end of the quarter or program cycle.

One of the challenges that staff might face is that students may not take the test seriously. Being upfront with students about their learning, demonstrating that small steps leading to final success, and showing the connection between earning their high school credential and a future focus will help students buy in to the seriousness of testing. It is also helpful to connect their success with the ability of the program to continue operating and the impact on students who will come after them. Discussing these issues in the context of the care and support of the YouthBuild program, particularly before and after they understand that the program is different from the traditional education setting, will help get buy-in from students.

Often, students' prior experience with tests can hinder their performance and progress. After each practice test, consider discussing the test-taking process, including students' feelings, fears and expectations. One strategy for implementing this is for instructors to review the test with each student individually. This can give your students and instructors the opportunity to tackle individual challenges, such as specific types of questions, concepts, or skills. Instructors may also develop a specific plan for identifying areas of strengths and addressing challenges.

Educational Support after the Program Cycle

Regardless of their skill or performance, all young people will invest hard work and time to pass the GED, and staff should continue to support young people until they succeed. If students failed to earn their GED during the program cycle, consider dedicating staff time to support these students in the summer months. Perhaps an educator could schedule specific times for tutoring or holding small classes as part of his or her summer planning process. Ideally, this should be an instructor the students are already familiar with, so they feel comfortable attending these sessions. Consider allowing students to attend class full time on an unpaid basis. The program may also refer young people to other GED preparation programs. When making this recommendation, be sure to research the program and ensure that it is an outstanding one that will support the student's growth.

Grades/Portfolios/Presentations

For a variety of reasons including meeting DOL guidelines, programs have to assess young people through numbers and scores. While the YouthBuild program should discuss the importance of standardized tests to measure student progress and program outcomes, the program should also measure student achievement in multiple ways.

Grades and Learning Records

If the program assigns grades, keep in mind that letter and number grades have many limitations. They usually don't explain a reason for a particular grade or score. Sometimes students will perceive grades as arbitrary or as recreating the educational experiences that failed them in the past. When providing letter or number grades for work completed in the classroom or work site, instructors should accompany them with a narrative explanation and, whenever possible, provide scoring rubrics as well. Narrative explanations and rubrics can help guide students toward improvement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information on rubrics can be found on page 129.

A holistic alternative to assigning grades is the learning record. It is an opportunity for students and instructors to pull together the range of assessment materials into a readable and meaningful form. Learning records often include:

- competency checklists (inventories of performance objectives that students aim to achieve during the program cycle)
- written summaries of each student's work and evidence of learning
- student reflections of their growth and learning and the quality of their work
- narrative evaluations from teachers on the skills mastered and the progress made

Portfolios

As much as possible, make cumulative assessments holistic and allow students to demonstrate the progress they made throughout the program cycle. Many programs successfully use portfolios as a form of cumulative assessment. A portfolio is a record of a student's learning and an end product that a student can develop over the course of the year. It includes sample work and student reflections of their work. Because students have to be actively involved in creating their portfolios by selecting their best work and presenting it in a way that demonstrates their accomplishment, a portfolio is an engaging way to involve and assess students. It is also a graphic way for students to evaluate their own progress because it helps them identify skills they acquired through the different components of the program (leadership development, community service and volunteer work, and education). It can also be a tool for program integration, since students will develop portfolios in other components, particularly the career readiness classes. Portfolios have value beyond the program cycle, since it allows students to organize their accomplishments and to communicate these skills to potential employers. There are several types of portfolios, including:

- **Writing Portfolios.** These portfolios assess a student's evolution as a writer. Writing portfolios should contain brainstorms, outlines, rough drafts, revisions, and final drafts as well as a range of writing samples (e.g. fictional pieces, letters, narrative essays, etc.). An important component of such a writing portfolio is a written piece that contains the student's reflection on his or her growth.

- **Readiness Portfolios.** Students should develop this portfolio in conjunction with their career-readiness classes. It can demonstrate one element of a student's career readiness and contain concrete documents to be used in job and post-secondary education placements. It should contain application materials such as a resume, sample cover letter, financial aid and college applications, and other tangible career-readiness documents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on items to include in the career readiness portfolio, see Section III of the Pathway to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

- **Vocational Portfolios.** Students can demonstrate their knowledge of vocational skills through this portfolio. It may contain instructions for tasks related to a specific trade, photographs of the student performing the task, and a list of tools and descriptions of their use. Worksite instructors should also include written evaluations of the student's ability to perform tasks. It can also be a mechanism for educational integration, since students can practice their writing by mapping their future career goals in the field through interviews with trades people and by researching apprenticeship pathways that students need to follow to become professionals in the field.

Many programs provide a time near the end of the program cycle for young people to present their portfolios to YouthBuild staff, peers, and sometimes members of the community or volunteers (for readiness portfolios). If the program includes this component, young people should be made aware of this from the outset. Programs can utilize portfolio presentations as one aspect of the cumulative assessment for each student.

Presentations

Presentations are an opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning by simultaneously using a variety of skills. When a student presents, instructors have the opportunity to gauge not only the student's mastery of the content but also his or her ability to communicate. Presentations help students develop soft skills that are important for job and post-secondary readiness. Through presentations, young people learn to communicate effectively and clearly, speak confidently, and organize ideas. This can be a cumulative assessment as well as an opportunity to celebrate student work with peers and staff.

Rubrics[12]

Based on previous educational experiences, students might believe grading is arbitrary. Rubrics are an important tool in teaching young people that instructors evaluate their performance fairly and against set standards. It can also help staff implement a data-informed culture and ensure that students and teachers buy in to it.

A rubric is an assessment tool that lists the criteria instructors will use to evaluate student work. It usually contains a description of characteristics that make up each level of quality (e.g. excellent, good, fair, and poor). For example, if a GED instructor created a rubric for an essay, it would contain a description of standards that would make the essay excellent, good, fair or poor. A rubric also specifies the aspects of an evaluation. For example, a construction manager could design a rubric that contains elements of evaluation such as safety principles, proper

[12] This section is adapted from "Teaching with Rubrics: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" written by Heidi Goodrich Andrade. You can retrieve the complete resource at www.csuchico.edu/vpaa/assessment/documents/AndradeTeachingWithRubrics.pdf.

usage of tools, and effective practices for a specific task. Rubrics can either take into account the overall quality of work, focus on the details, or both. Instructors will find both methods useful. In either case, they should communicate the standards to students in advance.

There are two kinds of rubrics that instructors can use in the classroom or the worksite.

1. **Scoring rubric.** Instructors develop the tool to communicate evaluation standards with students and to assign grades for a particular task.
2. **Instructional rubric.** Students and teachers work together to create the rubric. It has a wide range of uses, including a measure for self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and instructor feedback.

The following resources will help instructors to learn more about rubrics and create their own:

- **RubiStar** allows teachers to select pre-determined criteria, complete rubrics, or create their own assessment criteria. It is an excellent resource for developing rubrics for Project-Based Learning.
- **iRubric** assists instructors in building flexible rubrics. It also allows teachers to create and manage collaborative learning environments, e-portfolios, personal and group websites, and academic communities.
- **Teacher Planet** provides ready-to-use rubrics. While teachers cannot change rubrics, the examples are of high quality. This resource would be particularly helpful to teachers who are not familiar with developing rubrics.
- **Buck Institute Project-Based Learning rubric** cannot be altered but are high-quality rubrics that teachers can use to evaluate project-based learning. Instructors may also use these rubrics outside the project-based learning context to evaluate group work and oral and visual presentations.

The use of rubrics helps students think, learn and produce high quality work because it provides a description of both the desirable characteristics and the pitfalls to avoid. It also helps them understand the goals and focus of each assignment. Instructors should consider developing rubrics with their students. If students can brainstorm the criteria for strong and weak examples with their instructors, they are more likely to be engaged and understand the expectations. Whether instructors create rubrics with students or develop them on their own, students will need help in understanding them. Instructors should explain the rubric and practice with students by conducting mock critiques.

Rubrics are also an effective tool for self- and peer-assessments. As with other aspects of the education components, students will need to practice assessing themselves and their peers using a rubric. Even with the guidelines for evaluation, students can struggle with providing honest, accurate, and effective feedback to their peers and in assessing themselves. Despite these challenges, students can learn to use rubrics to provide feedback and instructors should practice using them with students on a regular basis. Once students become familiar with rubrics, they will utilize them and value the feedback they receive.

Similarly, rubrics can help instructors as well. Education staff will find rubrics help them to clarify learning goals, to design instruction, communicate goals and give feedback to students, and to evaluate final products. When planning with a rubric, teachers often work backwards. First, they list goals for students and identify a project that will help them demonstrate their learning. Next, they design daily lessons and select materials that will help students master specific concepts or skills. Rubrics also help instructors provide informative feedback, which can be a time-consuming task; through rubrics, they can provide individualized feedback that delineates strengths and weaknesses in a timely manner. While rubrics play an important part in supporting instruction, they cannot and should not replace good instruction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on how rubrics can inform classroom instruction see Chapter 6 of this manual.

If instructors utilize rubrics, particularly instructional rubrics, they are also more likely to assign more challenging assignments. Because instructors can communicate goals and criteria for evaluation at the beginning of an assignment, students are more likely to understand the evaluation process and rise to the challenge. Most importantly, rubrics help create an equal grading system. Since YouthBuild is a program that is built on love, caring and support, over the course of the program cycle, students and teachers will naturally develop strong bonds, which could easily influence students' grades. Rubrics help instructors maintain a fair and unbiased grading system.

Rubrics are a valuable instructional and assessment tool. However, instructors need to ensure they are fair, valid and reliable. Rubrics that meet these three criteria guarantee evaluations are accurate and consistent. Instructors can make sure rubrics are valid by aligning them to published standards and staff may also involve colleagues and students to create rubrics and help evaluate their fairness, validity and reliability.

Chapter 8: Education Success After YouthBuild

YouthBuild students are likely to find the transition out of the safety and security of the YouthBuild program challenging. Knowing that young people will find this transition difficult, the Department of Labor requires programs to provide follow-up supports for at least three quarters after students exit the program. The post-program support the program provides should include helping young people to achieve their educational goals.

When structuring follow-up services, be sure to make educational support an integral part. Young people, whether or not they attained their GED while in the program, need your support and guidance to pursue their educational goals beyond the program. This may mean that the YouthBuild program continues to help them gain important post-secondary and career-readiness skills or help them navigate the post-secondary system. Young people are more likely to become life-long students if program staff model the importance of continual learning in the transition services component.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on setting up your post-program placement and retention services, see Section IV of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Post-Program Skills and Support

The transition support program is an extension of the counseling support young people received during the program cycle on topics such as developing soft skills, learning time management, and pursuing further education or certifications. Although these topics were covered while young people were still active in the YouthBuild program cycle, it is helpful to revisit these topics with your alumni since they now have the backdrop of real world experience that could enhance the meaning of the content.

The following are common supports that a transition program may typically offer, which will help young people continue to build skills:

- counseling on specific issues that typically arise for young people in their first year of post-secondary education, for example, how to balance the course workload, how to manage finances and stay on top of financial aid deadlines, how to approach instructors with questions or concerns, and identifying campus support services such as tutoring, counseling, or affinity groups
- opportunities for continued career and post-secondary exploration
- program-sponsored workshops to develop soft skills, for example communication, conflict-resolution, time management
- occasional program-sponsored specialized certification courses for alumni, for example, lead abatement, toxic waste handling, or asbestos removal
- help with education needs such as obtaining the GED or applying to college
- opportunities for continued leadership development, for example, community service, serving as a staff or board member, or representing the program publicly

Career and College Development Options

Career and post-secondary exploration should begin during Mental Toughness and continue in depth throughout the core YouthBuild programming. Ideally, young people will have participated in career classes, researched various career and post-program educational options, and visited local post-secondary institutions while still at YouthBuild. After young people leave the program, staff should continue to encourage students to explore career options and become passionate about their career ambitions, while also helping them gain an understanding of what will be required to realize their dreams. One way to do this is to highlight consistently the post-program success stories of students and alumni.

If students choose to pursue post-secondary education, it requires very concrete actions. Staff can help young people navigate this process by teaching them to obtain information and complete tasks such as:

- identifying application deadlines for a variety of local post-secondary education institutions
- scheduling SAT/ACT and/or COMPASS/AccuPlacer testing dates
- identifying open house dates at a variety of local post-secondary education institutions
- completing financial aid applications and scholarships before critical deadlines
- preparing for and scheduling GED testing dates, if applicable
- meeting with post-secondary academic counselors and registering for classes

Whether or not young people think they want to attend college, it is a good idea to have them complete financial aid applications during the program cycle by critical state and federal deadlines. This is particularly helpful to young people who decide to pursue post-secondary education after exiting the program. They are less likely to be intimidated by the process and will already have a head start (and have submitted their applications).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the post-secondary education plan, see page 54 of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Whether an alumni's first job placement is a short- or long-term match, transition support staff should help students continue to explore career options. In the same way as during the program, staff should encourage young people to participate in activities that relate to their interests and aspirations as well as their current qualifications and capabilities.

While young people will have completed these inventories during the program cycle, encourage them to continue to evaluate their interests and skills. This is particularly important in the transition phase because young people may have a greater understanding about themselves after they have spent some time in the "real world."

The following are a sample of assessment tools and resources for career exploration and self-assessment:

- **What Do You Like? (Bureau of Labor Statistics).** Provides a resource that allows students to explore careers based on broad areas of interest such as math, sports, building and fixing things, social studies, art, etc.

- **O*NET Resource Center—Work Importance Locator (WIL).** This web site is a self-assessment career exploration tool created by the Department of Labor. It allows students to identify characteristics that they would find important in a job. It helps individuals identify potential careers by exploring sectors based on their work values and characteristics of the occupations.
- **Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).** This assessment tool measures strengths, weaknesses, and potential for future success. The ASVAB also provides career information for various occupations and is an indicator for success in future endeavors: college, vocational school, or a military career. Although armed services personnel administer the survey, it is a national survey and is not primarily used by the military. In fact, most participants in the ASVAB program were not interested in joining the military. Unlike the other tools we recommend in this section, the ASVAB requires a lengthy administration process, including working with a specialist to determine the most efficient way to utilize the survey with students. Furthermore, the ASVAB is more than an assessment; it is a program that can be integrated throughout the YouthBuild program.
- **My Next Move.** This site provides occupational profiles including job descriptions, knowledge required to perform duties, skills and abilities needed to succeed, and a range of other information for over 900 careers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a complete list and help with helping students explore career options, see Section II of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Graduates Program Manual.

Early Completers

Sometimes, students might achieve certain program goals ahead of schedule, such as receiving their GED. Also, since the Department of Labor allows programs to accept up to 25 percent of students who, prior to enrolling in YouthBuild, obtained a high school diploma or GED, a program may have entering students who already meet some academic requirements. In either case, it is important to continue to engage these students in the regular program cycle. While these students may have mastered the content on the GED, they still need to develop the range of skills, including career and post-secondary readiness. Planning in advance for this reality will ensure that these students continue to participate in a meaningful way and benefit from the services of the YouthBuild program. It is easier to put alternative plans in place when the need arises if the program plans ahead for these contingencies.

Implementing a holistic education component that focuses beyond the GED can ensure that students who obtain their GED early continue to stay engaged in the academic component. The accomplishments of these students may be rewarded by offering:

- **Transition class.** Students can research post-program educational and career opportunities, sharpen skills, prepare for the SAT, ACT, COMPASS, or AccuPlacer tests, or begin in-depth goal setting.
- **Tutors.** While developing their own leadership skills, students can also assist their peers by serving as GED tutors. Partner with local elementary schools or other programs, so students have the opportunity to serve as tutors to younger children.

- **Dual credit options.** Some YouthBuild programs partner with their local community college to set up a dual credit system in which YouthBuild students can earn college credit for coursework they complete at their YouthBuild program, or they can attend one class at the community college while still in YouthBuild. A number of community colleges grant credit for NCCER construction certifications. For students that complete the GED early, this is an excellent way to keep them engaged in the program and expose them to education opportunities beyond YouthBuild. If a program chooses to pursue this option, it should use existing college partners.
- **Specialized training.** The program may also help students find courses outside YouthBuild that will help them further job-related skills such as computer training, specialized construction skills, or entrepreneurship training.
- **Work experience.** While participating in other core activities such as life skills, job readiness and working on the construction site, students can participate in an internship or job-shadowing experience. Some programs also might enable these students to work longer hours in the construction site and receive a higher pay for their work.
- **Post-secondary exploration with mentors.** Encourage students to explore post-secondary and career opportunities with mentors. For more information, view the E-Learning Module on mentoring.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on setting up job shadows and internships, see page 64 of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Academic Support Beyond the Program Cycle

No single achievement will affect a young person's economic future more than gaining a secondary school credential. Without it, economic sustainability is extremely challenging. Numerous studies demonstrate that the lack of a GED or diploma vastly undercuts a person's ability to succeed in the economy. In fact, among jobs with the most anticipated openings, those that require post-secondary training or an associate degree pay 65 percent more (or nearly $15,000 more annually) than those that require only work experience or on-the-job training. All students must understand the importance of a secondary as well as post-secondary credential and the cornerstone it can be in a sound career-development strategy.

Despite staff and students' best efforts, there may still be some students who do not complete their GED before the end of the program. Staff can provide a variety of ways for these students to gain their GED.

Consider the following options for these students:

- **Regular tutoring sessions.** After program hours, the GED instructor or a transition coordinator with an education background can conduct tutoring sessions to help alumni prepare for the GED. This can be one-on-one tutoring or classes in the evenings or weekends. If possible, provide childcare and transportation to enable young people to attend.
- **Alternative GED programs.** If the program does not have the resources to continue GED education for students who have completed the program, identify other GED programs. Before recommending these programs to students, evaluate their compatibility with the YouthBuild approach; contact the agencies to inform them about YouthBuild and the potential need to refer your graduates to their programs.

- **Re-enrollment options.** If the program can allow students to re-enroll, consider allowing them to take part in the education component without compensation. This might be an option if your program is a charter school that offers students the option to earn credits toward their high school diploma.
- **Post-program connection.** It is very important for many students to receive encouragement and support to persist towards obtaining their GED. As part of the post-program follow-up, stay in contact through phone calls, visits, and support groups.

Part of what makes YouthBuild work is that programs cultivate a community in which all students are striving to improve themselves. When young people leave this community, it is harder for them to sustain their efforts to obtain a GED or high school diploma. If the program offers these young people a way to stay connected to the program, particularly through GED preparation, they are far more likely to persist in obtaining their GED.

Post-Secondary Education Partnerships

The strength of the education and post-program support components of the program are strengthened by meaningful partnerships with post-secondary institutions. Post-secondary technical schools, apprenticeship programs, community colleges, and universities all have one thing in common: they want to recruit students. In their quest to enroll students, they are generally very willing to make presentations and meet with programs that prepare young people for post-secondary education. Prior to forming a partnership with an educational institution, be sure to determine whether it offers certifications or degrees in occupations that are connected to high-growth sectors in the local area. When forming partnerships with post-secondary institutions, ensure the partnership is:

- meaningful, sustainable, formal, and mutually accountable
- reflecting local context, student needs, and existing resources
- strengthened with formal agreements (MOAs, articulation, and data-sharing agreements)
- incorporating a timeline and process to review and recommit to partnership agreements to ensure integrated and effective services

Upon selecting an appropriate post-secondary partner and discussing the ways in which both organizations can work together, the program is strongly encouraged to develop a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the institution. An MOA is a formal written agreement outlining the roles and responsibilities of the YouthBuild program and the post-secondary institution. The capacity of each organization to address the most pressing needs of YouthBuild students within the post-secondary environment and the overall efforts and resources available to support low-income students at the institution will fundamentally shape the development and implementation of each MOA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on selecting and forming partnerships with post-secondary institutions, please see Section I of the Pathways to Long-Term Success for YouthBuild Students Program Manual.

Through post-secondary partnerships, programs can also better support alumni placed in post-secondary institutions. Many schools offer supports that are readily available to the general student population. However, if the YouthBuild program collaborates with the post-secondary institution to offer support services, it is likely that program and college staff will offer supports in a more proactive manner, and the students will have greater access to everything the campus offers.

While the specific structures for delivering student support services vary widely across post-secondary institutions, the following are key student service offices that YouthBuild programs should consider engaging to offer students support and assistance during their post-secondary experience:

- **Student support services**—provide academic tutoring, academic and financial aid counseling, and transfer support. Some programs also provide personal and career counseling, opportunities for students to engage in cultural events, housing assistance for former foster-care youth, and mentoring opportunities.
- **Academic counseling**—provides academic and financial aid counseling, transfer support, and long-term education and career planning.
- **Supplemental instruction and/or academic resource centers**—offer a range of tutoring and academic support services.
- **Developmental education faculty**—provide developmental education instruction that meets the learning styles and needs of YouthBuild students.
- **Career centers**—provide information to help students explore and pursue careers. In addition, they often house expert career advisors who can offer students direct career planning support.

Post-Program Bridge Programs

Typically, YouthBuild students find the transition out of YouthBuild into a career or post-secondary placement difficult. This can be particularly true for students in post-secondary placements, as they need to learn to navigate not only the transition to but also the culture of post-secondary institutions, which can be drastically different from their YouthBuild program. A bridge program offered in partnership with post-secondary partners can help students make a seamless transition.

The first few months of the post-secondary experience often are the most difficult for YouthBuild students. Post-secondary institutions that maintain high rates of student success, particularly with populations similar to YouthBuild, take a multifaceted approach to actively supporting students. They support young people academically, personally, and financially before and during the time they are enrolled in the institution, often offering summer bridge programs. Bridge programs provide students with the tools, skills, and strategies they need to navigate the post-secondary landscape and succeed.

Prior to enrollment in college-level or developmental courses, bridge programs immerse and prepare students for the post-secondary experience. While the content and focus of bridge programs vary, typically they:

- support students' academic development in reading, writing, and math
- help students develop critical college success strategies such as time management, note taking, organization, and navigating the institutions' available support services
- expose students to the postsecondary institution's policies, culture and expectations
- help students develop supportive relationships with post-secondary faculty and staff and other students

Bridge programs ensure that students persist and succeed in their post-secondary educational pursuits. Research suggests that nationally almost 60 percent of students enrolling in community college take at least one developmental class. Furthermore, the more developmental classes students take, the less likely they are to earn a post-secondary degree or credential. While the YouthBuild program will prepare young people to meet the demands of higher education, they may have to enroll in developmental classes as well.

Bridge programs, if coupled with quality academic instruction received throughout students' YouthBuild experience, may offer a solution to this reality. Post-program bridge programs are a promising strategy for increasing the overall time to work with students on academic remediation and acceleration. During the summer months, students can enroll in remedial education in reading, math and writing. If students successfully complete the remedial courses in small classes, they could be ready for college-level courses when they formally enroll at the post-secondary institution. Bridge programs can also help students make the psychological transition, ensuring they receive additional guidance and resources for a range of social and emotional supports, which can facilitate success beyond the classroom. For example, spending time with a cohort of students on the campus can help them strengthen ties to the college, faculty and peers.

Jobs for the Future, in "Designing a Skills for Success Course," outlines several key elements for bridge programs. Consider taking the following actions in establishing a bridge program:

- deliver the program in cohort or learning community format
- offer credit by working with college partners to align the YouthBuild curriculum and certify the program's instructors as adjuncts
- locate the program entirely or partially on a college campus
- include units on financial aid, literacy, career exploration, and study skills (e.g. note taking, test taking, reading strategies, and learning styles)
- build students' non-academic skills (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy, goal setting, time management, ability to identify potential resources and supports)
- provide students with college ID's so they can access college resources and services
- include units on computer, writing, research, and presentation skills
- offer support and case management to help students focus on studies
- provide students with childcare options and transportation to and from the post-secondary campus

The following resources can be helpful as you consider options for a bridge program within YouthBuild:

- **College for Adults.** This site provides suggestions for study skills, recommendations for career and education planning, and helpful hints for a successful post-secondary education transition.
- **Free College Readiness Curriculum (College Spark).** Although developed for high school students, this lesson book contains many useful activities to help students engage in post-secondary and career exploration.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sample bridge program templates and descriptions can be found in the Community of Practice.

Conclusion

YouthBuild students view their program as a family because staff value and respect young people. They also have a positive educational experience because YouthBuild recognizes their strengths and talents, provides opportunities to learn and grow at their own pace, and believes in their ability to succeed academically. As a result, young people feel empowered and transform their lives through educational and vocational success.

The fundamental principles that drive an education component at YouthBuild programs make certain that students succeed. These principles include:

- respecting the intelligence of every student
- building a safe, caring and positive community of peers and adults engaged in one another's success
- providing individualized attention to serve each student
- establishing high expectations for students and teachers
- focusing on a core academic curriculum with additional curriculum relevant to the students' own lives and histories
- creating relevant and tangible service experiences linked to student learning
- involving youth in leadership opportunities
- making resources and opportunities available to students after graduation

The goals and principles of the education component ensure that young people at YouthBuild programs experience education as a social and interactive process. Students have opportunities to interact with the curriculum, relate information to their own experiences, and take part in their own learning. While at YouthBuild, students gain academic skills in an alternative school environment. They also have the opportunity to apply these skills in the job-training and civic engagement component of the program. Construction training allows YouthBuild students to assume an immediately productive role in their community by building affordable housing. Through the leadership development component, they become more civically engaged citizens.

As a result of the YouthBuild experience, which counters the negative experiences and educational failure students had prior to YouthBuild, students attain educational and career success and transform their lives.