

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:

- [Bureau of Labor Statistics K-12](#) 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.

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 \(Overcoming Obstacles\)](#). This curriculum contains information on assessing talents and interests; colleges, universities, and technical schools; and help with securing financial aid.



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.