

**An Initial Review of Education, Employment and Support
Services for Boston's Struggling Students and
Disconnected Youth**

**A Working Document
Prepared for the
Boston Youth Council**

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Introduction

This report is an initial review of Boston's services for struggling students and out-of-school youth. It is presented not as a final product, but as a way to launch further conversation and investigation. Initial research reveals that Boston has complex array of services supported by different funding and initiatives. This report focuses on education, employment and relevant support services for struggling students and out-of-school youth. Data was gathered through a series of interviews with school staff, service providers and major City, county and state agencies. We are still in the process of identifying more sources and more data. The questions that Youth Council members raise in this discussion will help guide the information sought to complete the picture.

The goals of the strategic assessment conducted by the WIA Youth Council and the Youth Transitions Planning Group are to identify the significant service providers for different youth populations and to assess the level of overall service compared to the level of need. In the process, we hope to build collaboration with those providers among and beyond our network to maximize service and minimize gaps. We also hope to understand where persistent gaps and disparities exist to inform our immediate and long-term action plan on behalf of Boston's youth.

The areas of service considered in this review define the sections of the following report and are as follows, based on either a type of service offered or on the target population:

- Alternative Education
- Youth Struggling with MCAS
- Occupational Skills Training
- Adjudicated Youth
- Boston Housing Authority's Youth
- Young, Single Mothers
- Youth in Foster Care

Each section describes:

- The estimated number of youth eligible for or needing the specific service
- The best estimates for the capacity of identified organizations and agencies
- Current initiatives to improve or increase service
- Challenges highlighted by service providers interviewed
- Questions remaining

There were some themes that were consistent across population and service. One theme was the need for more services. This included the need for outreach services. Youth workers interviewed pointed out that identifying and connecting alienated youth to programs involves considerable outreach and support.

Another theme is that of perceived mismatch between youth in need and program service or eligibility requirements. Providers who refer youth to educational programs wanted access to alternative education programs with more sophisticated special needs services. Some felt their youth's low academic levels kept them out of education and training programs, which often set grade level proficiency requirements. Others felt that the eligibility documentation required by state and federal funders was a barrier for youth.

A third theme was that of service overlap. Youth served by one agency are often served by another. For example, a Boston Housing Authority youth may be in Department of Youth Services custody. This raises the question of how well the agencies are able to track the overlap and to collaborate in service plans.

Alternative Education

Based on Census 2000, there were almost 7,000 young adults, aged 20-24 who did not have a high school credential in Boston. We have identified 17 community-based alternative education sites that provide education services for 750 youth, about 450 of whom are drop-outs. These programs include general GED and diploma programs, as well as specialized programs for specific groups, such as court-involved youth, homeless and runaway youth, pregnant or parenting young women and low-income youth. Most programs serve students of high school age (14-21), though two served middle-schoolers and a few serve youth through age 24. Most providers reported a waiting list and a sense that demand exceeds the funded seats. Given more funding, some would be in a position to expand, while others are limited by space.

WIA funding supports 134 seats in 6 sites and YO funding supports 92 seats in 6 sites.

Additionally, there are about 1,000 seats in 8 Boston Public Schools (BPS) alternative schools that are designed for students at risk of dropping out. Most serve high school-age youth (through age 21), though one serves middle-schoolers. About 300 of these seats were added this year in response to demand.

Boston Public Schools' Adult Education program provides diploma and ESOL programming to adults in the community. Though a limited data system makes disaggregation difficult, it is estimated that about 100 of the 400 diploma program participants are aged 18-24. The program director noted that increasing numbers of youth aged 18-24 are making use of the evening diploma program than in years past. As young adults' educational needs are different than those of adults, this creates some programming challenges.

This initial review suggests that Boston's alternative education programs serve more struggling students than out-of-school youth. We are seeking additional data from public colleges and adult education programs to find out if a significant number of young adults are being served through them.

Current Initiatives

There are several initiatives aimed at improving the ability of alternative schools and programs to serve youth that are struggling to stay in school.

1. Alternative Education. For the past year, BPS and community based providers have been discussing how to better connect the alternative education networks. The goal is to reclaim more dropouts and ultimately to refer struggling students to alternative settings—either within BPS or in the community—before they become dropouts. The challenges here are:

- how to systematically identify BPS students at-risk to drop out in a way that makes it possible to refer them to support programs and alternative education options;
- how to share student information across systems, with issues of confidentiality and disparate data collection processes being the barriers;
- how to create a dialogue when different funding streams create different languages and different networks;
- how to consider expanding services when the end of YO federal funding threatens to remove 92 seats (serving 120-130 youth).

2. The Success Initiative. DYS, BPS, YO, CommCorp and PIC have been working together to improve the transition of youth from DYS detention back into the Boston Public high schools and community-based alternative programs. There are currently about 230 DYS-committed youth assigned to BPS. This initiative is in its first year of full staffing and includes:

- case-management of 60 students through the transition;
- expansion of the seat capacity and quality of the Community Transition School from 25 to 60;
- policy work to develop a school assignment process for re-entering youth that is student-centered and provides support to school staff in the receiving school.

Challenges include:

- Seats available in schools do not always match students' needs; the small alternative schools often provide the right environment but cannot accommodate special needs students;
- Current policy allows the kind of information sharing needed for transition across systems only for DYS-committed and not DYS-detained youth (of whom there are 800 in Boston).

3. High School Renewal. Boston Public Schools has been funded through the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Gates Foundations to restructure its high schools into autonomous small schools and small learning communities. Last year, South Boston Educational Complex and Dorchester Educational complex have opened 3 small schools each. In September 2005, West Roxbury High School and Hyde Park High School will open 4 and 2 autonomous small schools, respectively. A new small school dedicated to supporting struggling students is the Boston International School, which focuses on newcomers and students with low literacy levels.

One BPS administrator noted the importance of the dialogue between BPS and the community-based alternative schools because it highlighted two important features necessary for success in educating urban youth:

- high levels of social-emotional support
- high expectations for academic achievement

Questions remaining:

1. How many young drop-outs are there? The 2000 Census data was inconclusive for numbers of 16-19 year olds, and there are also some that are younger than this.
2. How many students are at risk to drop out? How do we identify them in time for intervention or referral to settings that fit them better? How do we intervene?
3. How do we balance the preventive measures discussed here with efforts to provide programming for the large number of older youth who have already disengaged from school?
4. Are there significant alternative education programs not captured in this narrative?

Youth Struggling with MCAS

Since its implementation, the MCAS has provided a means to identify struggling students. Among the class of 2003, over 2,000 students or 60% failed the MCAS in the tenth grade. After subsequent retests, many more passed. However in June 2003, there were still over 700 members of this class who had yet to pass the MCAS (Boston Public Schools, Class of 2003 Work Group). For the class of 2004, the Massachusetts Department of Education (DoE) estimates that just under 600 seniors left high school without passing the MCAS, a slight improvement, but still showing a significant number struggling. Though at least half of these exiting seniors had other academic barriers, such as poor attendance and course failures, the implementation of MCAS as a graduation requirement has created a demand for specific services to support youth who are struggling MCAS.

Current Initiatives

Recently developed MCAS support programs include academic remediation and tutoring efforts as well as services that combine career and academic development, for both in-school students and youth who have left the schools without a diploma.

Struggling Students

- 1. Boston Public Schools (BPS).** BPS offers remediation classes as part of the regular class schedule for most students who have yet to pass MCAS or are identified as being at risk to fail. Additionally, the high schools have 600 seats in after-school tutoring for juniors and seniors needing MCAS remediation. 300 students participated last year. The high schools offer summer school remediation for students in grades 9-12 with a total of 800 seats. 400 students participated last year.
- 2. Classroom at the Workplace.** The Boston Private Industry Council offers a Classroom at the Workplace program in partnership with BPS and Boston businesses. This program offers a paid summer job with ninety minutes, five days a week of MCAS remediation with a BPS teacher as part of the work day. Last year, the program had 300 positions. Just over 200 participated.

The challenges for both the school-based and work-based remediation programs are:

- motivating students to take advantage of the additional help, with schools enrolling about half the number targeted and Classroom at the Workplace enrolling two-thirds the number targeted;
- developing the right curriculum for groups of students in which individuals have different areas of academic weakness.

Out-of-School Youth

- 1. Community College Programs.** Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) and Roxbury Community College (RCC) each offer evening MCAS preparation programs for post-seniors who have left the schools without passing MCAS. These programs include classroom instruction and assistance with college and career planning. Together, BHCC and RCC had 120 seats available last year and 60 students actually attended.
- 2. One-Stop Career Center Services.** Boston's three one-stop career centers each have staff who specialize in outreach and service to youth leaving school without passing the MCAS. The employment counselors reach out to these students, starting at the BPS high schools during senior year, and continuing to do phone, mail and community outreach for post-seniors. These employment counselors

provide assistance with job search skills, employability skills, employment referrals, training and education referrals and career planning. Since the beginning of the program 2 years ago, the Career Centers have enrolled 400 of the targeted youth from the classes of 2003 and 2004. There is no set capacity for the program, but Career Center staff express that they could serve more if more youth sought services.

Challenges for these two programs, who work in partnership with each other, are:

- Contacting youth after they have left the high schools: once youth leave the schools, the trail of contact information that remains is tenuous;
- motivating eligible youth to use the services. Career center staff, community-based organizations and PIC staff conducted extensive outreach efforts to reach the youth that did participate.

Questions Remaining

The common theme among programs for both in-school and out-of-school youth is that they are under-enrolled, despite the large numbers who have yet to pass the MCAS. Educators and career-service providers attribute this under-usage to a number of factors. One factor is the seeming low motivation or discouragement affecting many of the youth. Another is the difficulty in contacting students once they have stopped attending school. Some students are unclear about their MCAS status; others have personal or family situations that prevent them from attending a structured program. A final barrier is that many of them have low skill levels and may not pass the MCAS. Service providers are unsure of next steps for these young people, other than an entry-level job.

The questions to address are:

1. How can the schools and programs better identify and contact youth eligible for education and employment programs?
2. How can counselors and educators convince youth that it is worth the extra effort to persist with the MCAS, education and career planning?
3. What are viable education and career options for youth who cannot pass the MCAS, due to either language barriers or learning disabilities?

Occupational Training

Based on Census 2000, there were 7,827 16-24 year olds who were neither in school nor working, an at-risk population. About half were drop-outs. The other half had a secondary credential but was neither working nor enrolled in continuing education or training. Latino males and females and African American males were most likely to be in this group.

An initial review suggests that beyond tuition-based programs, there are few advanced occupational skills training options accessible to youth in Boston. Youth without a credential struggle to join the labor market, particularly at a time when jobs are scarce.

Recently, JCS analyzed usage of WIA Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), the vouchers used to pay for individual low-income adults to attend skills training programs. Though anyone at least 18 years of age is technically eligible for ITAs, only 14% of 320 or about 45 were granted to 18-25 year olds.

Investigation into local training providers revealed pockets of programming aimed at young people and some adult providers with a commitment to serving youth. These programs together serve about 500 youth.

Youth Training Programs

JobCorps serves about 330 Boston low-income youth a year, primarily at its North Grafton and Devens sites. JobCorps receives applications from 150 youth that are not accepted into the program. JobCorps, a residential program that requires commitment and willingness to live on campus, provides education (GED and diploma) and skills training in fields such as auto repair, technology, the building trades and culinary arts.

YearUp provides IT and Web-Design training, integrated with college-preparation and intensive case-management for about 50 youth annually (10 WIA-funded), and requires a high school credential for admission.

YouthBuild trains 90 youth annually in construction or computer refurbishing (8 are WIA-funded). Bridge Over Troubled Waters provides computer training for 20 youth annually. JFY Networks trains about 50 unemployed, underemployed or non-college bound youth in Environmental Technology.

Adult Training Programs

In 2001, Mayor Menino implemented the City's Neighborhood Jobs Trust, a linkage-funded training initiative, which was meant to increase training options available to help Boston residents reduce the skill gap that prevented many from attaining well-paying jobs. As in the case with other adult programs, adults over 25 were most likely to take advantage of the opportunity but between 2001 and 2004, 179 of a total of 781 were between the ages of 18 and 25.

Additionally, Morgan Memorial/Goodwill Industries provides transitional employment with some training components to about 350 low-income youth per year. Occupations include logistics, retail and administration.

Current Initiatives

1. Young Adult Training. JCS and PIC have worked together to use short-term funds to pilot programming designed specifically for young adults. The BEST Older Youth initiative last year and the upcoming WIA Young Adult program are examples that featured small group training models that serve 25-50 young adults in a year, with an emphasis on young men. An important goal of these programs is to establish best practices for this age group. Adult skills training providers indicated that the learning styles of young adults differ from older adults, so attempts to include them in adult skills training programs without appropriate support or program design can cause disruptions.

2. Career Explorations. JCS has worked with the Youth Council to use WIA youth funding to support Career Explorations. Career Explorations programs are specialized group programs designed to introduce low-income youth 16-21 years old to a variety of careers within specific industries. These programs serve 128 young people annually and include hands-on skills training, exposure to different occupations within an industry, and integrated academics. Through these programs, youth have explored the fields of construction, health careers, appliance repair, computer technology and facilities maintenance.

Challenges to programs attempting to engage youth and young adults in career exploratory and skills training program are:

- Creating the right balance between activities that promote interest and those that provide rigorous instruction in the skills needed in the specific industry;
- Finding incentives to retain young adults in programs when many are pulled by immediate needs to earn money.

Questions Remaining

1. Is occupational skills training a useful intervention for older youth who either lack skills, credentials or a significant work history?
2. Is it best to train youth alongside those of a broad age-group, or in programs targeted for young adults?
3. If training is a viable activity for young adults, how can this activity be funded in Boston?

Adjudicated Youth

In 2003, the Suffolk County Juvenile Court system handled 2,275 juvenile cases, 75% of whom were males. The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) has about 700 juvenile offenders committed to its custody annually. Another 800 are detained by DHS, but not committed. Youth in this status are eligible for fewer services than DHS-committed youth due to their legal custody status. In the adult corrections system, about 525 or 31% of 1,700 annually detained in Suffolk County House of Correction (HOC) are under 25 years of age.

Current Initiatives

Education and workforce status are addressed in several initiatives during the process of re-entry from custody to the community.

1. Boston Reentry Program. On the adult side, the Boston Police Department (BPD) and HOC have piloted the Boston Reentry Program, which is a grant-funded pilot initiative. Each year, this program targets 150 of the most serious and violent offenders who are projected to have a high impact on the community upon release. Most of these are under 25. These offenders receive counseling, education and pre-employment services for several months prior to release and case-management, employment, education or training services for a year after release. This program is unable to expand due to funding and the need for a small case-load with this population, but the program manager interviewed expressed that this approach would benefit a broad range of offenders.

Challenges for this initiative are:

- Keeping participants in communication and keeping them motivated once they are released;
- Getting younger participants to buy into the goals of the program, as they have not spent as much time living with the consequences of breaking the law.

2. DHS Reentry Initiative. On the youth side, the DHS Reentry Initiative targets 45 DHS-committed youth of the same profile as the adult program, also a grant-funded pilot initiative. The targeted youth receive counseling, needs assessments and assistance identifying a post-release education and support program. Youth are supported through the transition for a year after release. Youth Opportunity (YO) partners with this program to provide the appropriate employment services and transitional educational referrals and support for these youth. This program has expanded its capacity from 45 to 60 this year to better meet demand.

Challenges for this initiative include:

- Finding appropriate schools or alternative programs for reentering youth;
- Finding housing for youth who have to leave public housing due to arrest record;
- Lack of transitional independent living programs for DHS and Department of Social Service (DSS) youth.

3. Success Initiative. A parallel initiative, the Success Initiative, builds on DHS' 5-year effort to improve its in-house education program and the law enforcement collaboration in Boston. This initiative, a joint effort of DHS, Boston Public Schools (BPS), YO, the Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp) and the PIC, is focused on improving the transition from custody into the public schools. There are currently 230 DHS-committed youth assigned to Boston public high schools. In this new initiative, YO will case manage 60 youth to assist them with the transition, working with DHS and BPS

staff to determine the most appropriate school setting. Some will be assigned to Boston Public Schools and some to alternative education programs.

As part of this initiative, the Community Transition School is being redesigned to improve quality and to expand capacity from 25 to 60 seats. Two policy specialists have been hired by BPS to develop better school assignment and support services for reentering youth, as well as for BPS staff who work with them.

Challenges for this initiative include:

- Finding a way to address DYS-detained youth in BPS in this initiative;
- Identifying more alternative placements that can provide a small, therapeutic environment and can also accommodate special needs students above 0.3 diagnosis (on a 4-point scale).

4. Youth Opportunity (YO). YO provides both specialized services for re-entering DYS-committed youth and services for court-involved youth of varying custody status. YO serves 1,200 annually, 600 of whom are court-involved, 300 of whom are DYS-committed and 100 of whom are HOC-committed. For services provided, 800 receive case-management and referrals; 300 participate in the YO's Transitional Employment Services (TES), 200 receive specialized educational support (tutoring, advocacy, case management). As mentioned above in the Alternative Education section, YO supports 92 seats in community-based alternative education programs for participants. The points at which YO staff feel that demand most exceeds its capacity is in TES, where, given resources, it could add 100 jobs per year, and alternative education, which always has a waiting list of 10-15.

YO seeks to sustain a more focused set of services after its federal funding ends in July 2005. YO is focusing its services on the most serious and violent offenders. Its combination of community connections, education, employment and support services add a unique value for these young people. At the same time, YO has been applying for grants that serve slightly different populations, such as 14-16 year-olds struggling with substance abuse. In this context, challenges for YO include:

- Finding major funding sources to sustain services for youth as its federal grant funding ends;
- Planning for the YO facility to handle the age-range and need profiles of participants served through different grant-funded programs.

Questions remaining

1. Are there other major providers or initiatives supporting adjudicated youth to complete their education and transition to the workforce?
2. How do we sustain the grant-funded youth and adult reentry initiatives?
3. How do we balance the need to target young men with emerging needs of young women detained by DYS and HOC?

Youth Living in Boston Housing Authority (BHA) Programs

As of September 2004, there were 3,145 youth and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 living in BHA programs, which is about 3% of the Boston population in this age group. BHA residents, who are all low-income, comprise higher proportions of Latinos and African Americans than Boston residents, as indicated below.

BHA Residents--all ages (BHA 2004 records)	Boston Residents--all ages (BRA Analysis of Census 2000)
41.6% Latino	14.4% Latino
31.7% African American	23.8% African American
16.9% White	49.5% White
8.9% Asian	7.5% Asian

Though data on high school graduation rates, drop-out rates, youth employment and court-involvement is not currently available for BHA youth, BHA workers interviewed indicated that BHA youth are a population that is more likely to be disconnected from education and the workforce. Additionally, the concentration of many of these youth in housing developments creates a unique, almost geographically defined disconnection from the mainstream.

The problem of this disconnection has been compounded in recent years by federal funding cuts supporting BHA youth programming. Between 1991 and 2002, BHA received about \$3 million annually from the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Drug Elimination Program. This public safety initiative supported, among other things, 30 youth workers to run youth programs in 20 housing developments. Program offerings included GED preparation, ESL instruction, tutoring, work-readiness, sports and recreation. These youth workers also built networks to connect BHA youth to other programs throughout the city.

This funding has been cut, leaving four staff to provide services for the whole BHA population. In this context, the challenges in serving BHA youth are considerable.

- BHA is no longer able to offer its own youth programming
- It is difficult for the reduced BHA staff to refer youth to programs run by other organizations, as reduced staff means reduced capacity to:
 - adequately advertise youth programs to its residents;
 - assist youth in following through on the process of applying for programs and documenting their eligibility;
 - support youth to attend regularly and complete the programs;
 - maintain working contacts with existing youth programs.

BHA staff want BHA youth to access education and employment programs throughout the city. Due to decreased staff capacity, BHA workers are less able to maintain the level of contact with youth service programs that they formerly had. As a way to give its youth access in this context, BHA asks alternative education and training programs to consider BHA youth as a priority population when they recruit for programs.

Questions Remaining

1. What are high school graduation, drop-out, college attendance and employment rates for BHA youth and young adults?
2. Are a significant number of BHA youth involved with other government agencies, such as DSS, DYS, HOC and DTA?
3. What is the means to identify service levels for BHA youth among existing education and employment programs?
4. How can we strengthen the connection between service providers and BHA residents?

Young, Single Mothers

According to Census 2000 data, there were a total of 3,167 single mothers between the ages of 16-24. 781 were 16-19 year olds and 2,386 were 20-24 year olds. For pregnant and parenting teens under 18 years old, state and City efforts focus on supporting them to stay in school. Those attending Boston Public Schools (BPS) have access to support to stay in school through referrals to either Crittenton Hastings House or St. Mary's Women and Children's Center. Each year, these programs provide academic support to keep up with the BPS curriculum for 120 young women in late pregnancy.

Three high schools partner with the Comprehensive School Age Parenting Program (CSAPP): English High School, West Roxbury High School and Charlestown High School). CSAPP provides school-based support to 123 pregnant and parenting teens (and 43 teens at risk to drop out). Services include counseling and referrals (for tutoring, social services, clinical services, etc) to help these young women stay in school, as well as day care referrals (41). CSAPP staff feel that students in other schools would benefit from their services, as participants retention rate is 90%. The service level is limited by funding, but CSAPP staff hope to expand to another high school next year.

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is a significant provider of support services for pregnant and parenting young women who are single and low-income. DTA services include access to education and vocational training, financial support, food stamps, transportation funds and day care vouchers. Young women under 18 must document attendance in a high school or GED program, in order to receive benefits. Other service providers have found this policy effective in minimizing the dropout rate for this group. Young women over 18 years of age with children over two years olds must participate in education, employment or training in order to receive benefits. DTA funding will support education or training for these women.

DTA, through its Young Parents Program (YPP), supports 110 young women between the ages of 14 and 21 to pursue their GEDs. DTA pays for their seats through contracts with community-based organizations and provides benefits for the young women and their children. Data on young women under 25 accessing education and training is not yet available.

There is some community-based programming to help single young mothers advance in education and careers. St. Mary's Women and Children's Center serves 40 teen mothers aged 13-19 through a teen residential program. This program provides education, case management and health services. As part of its residential services for adult women, St. Mary's served 58 (out of 123) homeless and parenting women who were under 25 years old.

St. Mary's also provides education services to young women as part of its service to adult women. About 20 out of 40 in the Women's Learning Center, an Adult Basic Education and GED program, were age 16-24. St. Mary's Occupational Skills Training provides 15 young women aged 16-24 with training and integrated education services as part of its services targeted for adult low-income mothers.

Challenges for these programs serving young mothers include

- Finding appropriate alternative education settings for young women. One provider noted a specific lack of GED programs in Dorchester since the Dorchester branch of City Roots has closed.
- Funding is a limiting factor; programs such as those run by St. Mary's are all funded by short-term grants.

- Parenting young women entering training/employment programs often have very low skill levels, which makes the employment choices limited even after training.

Questions Remaining

1. Are there other significant providers serving this population?
2. Are there significant numbers of disconnected young mothers who would connect with employment and education if they had access to support services, such as day care, transportation, and housing assistance?

Youth in Foster Care

The information in this section was provided by one source, the Department of Social Services (DSS). As we develop more relationships with providers who work with this population, we hope to gather more data to provide a clearer picture of the services available to Boston's teens in foster care.

There are about 723 Boston youth in foster care. 359 are in foster homes, 278 in residential placements and 86 in other placements. Of these, 300 are teens with independent living goals. Most youth leave DSS custody once they turn 18, though some stay in custody a bit longer if their DSS transitional plan warrants the extra time. Here are some data on residential status, educational and transitional programming:

- 77 are enrolled in Common Works at the Home for Little Wanderers. This program tracks these youth to make sure their educational needs are met, whether in residential or public schools.
- 10 are in group care outside of Common Works.
- 171 are living in various types of foster care.
- 5 are enrolled in the Young Parents Program.
- 9 live in transition to independent living programs.
- Over 20 are in school and mature enough to live on their own and receive their own payments from DSS.

Education: In addition to the supports mentioned above, DSS contracts with Compass to provide educational consulting services. Each area office has a consultant who works with schools to make sure that DSS youth's educational needs are being met. Once they get a secondary credential and are over 18 years of age, transitioning DSS youth are eligible for free tuition to state colleges.

Employment and Training. For the last two years, the Boston Regional Office has allocated funds to employ 50 youth in 2003 and 27 in 2004 in sponsored jobs at community-based organizations. Additionally, DSS refers some youth to training programs such as JobCorps and YouthBuild if this seems appropriate to their goals.

Youth Development. DSS has a curriculum called Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood (PAYA), which it makes available to all the providers with which it contracts. DSS also contracts with various community-based organizations to provide after-school youth development activities for youth.

Challenges to serving DSS youth are:

- Many DSS youth do not fit into a traditional classroom; they need more supports and small settings.
- DSS youth often have behavior problems stemming from abuse and neglect. In schools, these youth often end up as discipline cases.
- Many DSS youth deal with adversity by running away, which disrupts their clinical, educational and developmental plans.