

**Creating New Pathways to Postsecondary:  
Evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's  
Postsecondary Success (PSS) Initiative**

**Center for Youth and Communities**



**Brandeis University**  
**Heller School for Social Policy  
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**Final Report**

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and  
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## Chapter One INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*Now high school [graduation] is not enough... We have set an ambitious goal for ourselves and the nation: double the number of young people who earn a postsecondary degree or certificate with value in the marketplace by the time they reach age 26. (Gates Foundation 2008)*

*This evaluation ... is an opportunity to learn about the effectiveness of the local partnership model in improving postsecondary education access and success for low income youth, and to place that knowledge in the hands of a major foundation and a group of intermediaries with the capacity to translate the knowledge into both policy and improved practice. (Brandeis University proposal to the Gates Foundation 2009)*

### Introduction

In 2008, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in partnership with the Nellie Mae Foundation, funded the **Postsecondary Success Initiative (PSS)**, an ambitious multi-site effort to develop new pathways to and through postsecondary education for what have come to be known as “Opportunity Youth” – low-income youth who had dropped out of the traditional education process without a high school diploma or who faced significant barriers to further education and success in the labor market.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, an estimated 6.7 million youth aged 16-24 are in this group. Of those, it is estimated that 1% will have completed a postsecondary degree by age 28.<sup>2</sup>

The PSS initiative provided grants to 15 local community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop partnerships with area community colleges that would enable formerly disconnected youth to acquire a high school diploma or GED or needed academic skills, make the transition into postsecondary education or training, and persist through to graduation. The grants to local programs were made through two national program partners -- YouthBuild USA and the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) -- who served as vital program intermediaries, selecting sites, providing training and technical assistance for the local programs, and monitoring the progress of the effort as a whole. A third partner, Jobs for the Future (JFF), in turn supported the national partners and sites through research on promising practices, the development of service-delivery models, support for the design of cross-site training, and management of a leadership group that coordinated the overall initiative and served as advocates for the broad program approach. Brandeis University’s Center for Youth and Communities served as the Initiative’s evaluation partner.

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<sup>1</sup> Several other funders, notably the Open Society Foundations and New Profit, Inc. (though its Social Innovation Fund/Pathways Initiative), later provided further support to expand the PSS initiative to additional sites.

<sup>2</sup> Belfield, C.R, Levin, H.M., & Rosen, R. (2012 January). Economic Value of Opportunity Youth. [www.civicenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.civicenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf)

### **The Back on Track Model**

At the heart of the PSS initiative was a three-part “Back on Track” model. Initially developed by Jobs for the Future with contributions from YouthBuild USA and NYEC, it was based on the experience of similar initiatives and the emerging literature on college access and completion and then refined in collaboration with the PSS partners and sites. Under the model, PSS sites were encouraged to develop strategies that emphasized three major elements:

- **Enriched Academic Preparation:** high quality instruction, academic and social support aimed at preparing students for successful entry into and progress through college. Enriched preparation includes creation of a college-going culture with the expectation that all students will go on to some form of postsecondary education; college and career ready curriculum and instruction (including pre-college math, research papers, homework); substantial reading and writing across the curriculum; and use of time in a way that maximizes instruction and accelerates learning. The goal: a set of skills that enable students to enter postsecondary education or training with minimal or no developmental coursework.
- **Bridge Programming:** postsecondary transition support designed to enhance college-ready skills and provide transition counseling. Bridge programming includes college/career planning; “college knowledge” (e.g. orientation to college campuses and how they work, financial aid planning and assistance, college survival and success skills); and supported dual enrollment. Bridge activities also include individual counseling and information so students can make informed choices on the most appropriate programs of study. The goal: the skills and information necessary to make a smooth transition to postsecondary, the ability to make informed choices about their program of study, and the knowledge and skills needed to overcome obstacles and persist in education or training.
- **Postsecondary Support:** support for at least the first year of postsecondary education (and in some cases through completion) to promote postsecondary persistence and completion. Postsecondary support includes frequent check-ins; academic supports; use of incentives to support key goals; just in time supports (e.g., emergency funds, transportation or child care) to quickly address barriers; and efforts to build attachment to postsecondary education (access to college resources and development of ‘cohort’ or posse-like groups). The goal: supporting the often fragile attachment that first-time students have to the educational process and fostering persistence and success.

All three elements of the Back on Track model also emphasize ongoing individual guidance and support, an element that was also at the heart of most of the community-based programs involved in PSS. While not sufficient by itself to successfully move young people to and through college, the strong supportive relationships provided between program staff and students were seen as a necessary element in any program design.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See the JFF “Back on Track” website for more information: <http://backontrackdesigns.org>.

In short, the idea behind the PSS initiative was to meld the strong youth, workforce development and education programs already in place at the local YouthBuild and NYEC sites with a new (and in some cases expanded) emphasis on postsecondary education as a goal, and to establish new programs and services to support preparation and transition to postsecondary, developed in collaboration with community college partners. In practice, the PSS sites implemented this model in a variety of settings and through a variety of approaches, integrating the PSS principles into enriched GED programs, charter and alternative schools, and stand-alone bridge-to-college programs, in each case in partnership with one or more community college partners. The result was an array of successful program models and college partnerships.

Finally, for the Gates Foundation, the goal was not only to demonstrate that new pathways through college could be created by expanding the capacity of local community-based organizations, but that the partnerships between CBOs and community colleges could also help colleges rethink the supports that they provide to students who faced significant barriers to postsecondary success. The extent to which colleges responded to that challenge is an important aspect of the initiative.

### **The PSS Evaluation**

In 2009, the Gates Foundation contracted with Brandeis University's Center for Youth and Communities to serve as the evaluation partner for the PSS initiative. The initial evaluation design focused on assessing the implementation of the initiative and beginning to identify "what works" (the "how and why" questions) at both the initiative and local program level. Three main questions guided the implementation evaluation:

- 1. At the local partnership level, to what extent are community-based youth development organizations and community colleges able to establish strong, working partnerships that provide effective pipelines into postsecondary education for low income youth and the supports needed for a substantial percentage of those youth to attain a credential?*
- 2. Where effective partnerships are established, what programmatic strategies and institutional arrangements are effective in preparing young adults for and supporting them in postsecondary education?*
- 3. What role can and do the intermediaries in the initiative – JFF, NYEC, and YouthBuild – play in promoting and supporting the development of effective local partnerships?*

Once work on the evaluation began, the need for an additional emphasis on assessing the outcomes of the initiative became evident. While PSS was conceived as a largely exploratory pilot effort, all of the partners recognized that without systematic data on participants and key outcomes, it would be difficult to document the effectiveness of the approach or build support for its expansion. As a result, the evaluation team and the partners added a fourth guiding question for the evaluation:

4. *To what extent are the local partnerships successful in meeting the initiative goals of doubling the proportion of disadvantaged youth who enter and complete postsecondary education and/or attain a credential that has value in the labor market? Are there differences in the rates of success depending on the population served and/or the mix of services provided?*

#### *Evaluation Methods*

To address these questions, Brandeis conducted site visits and/or in-person and telephone interviews with leaders and staff at participating community-based organizations and college partners; attended cross-site meetings and training sessions within the YouthBuild and NYEC networks; participated in leadership team meetings and conducted interviews with the Initiative partners; and reviewed program reports, proposals and other site-related materials on a regular basis.

During the period covered by the evaluation (December 2009 through April 2012), Brandeis carried out one or more visits to fourteen of the sixteen local programs (six of the seven YouthBuild and seven of the eight NYEC sites). In many cases, these were formal site visits in which Brandeis staff spent one or two days at the CBO and its college partner(s), following a formal field visit protocol. In other instances, the site visits took place as part of a larger group visit during each network's cross-site meetings and, as such, offered much less opportunity for independent research activities. To supplement the site visits, in each year of the study Brandeis completed extended telephone interviews with representatives of the participating CBOs and community college partners, focusing on sites that had not been visited during the year.

In order to gather more systematic data on participant characteristics, services received, and participant outcomes, Brandeis also worked with the initiative partners and local sites to design and implement a participant data reporting system. The reporting system was designed to provide participant-level data from all of the sites on key participant characteristics (such as age, gender, initial academic attainment, etc.), participation in services identified as part of the "Back on Track" model (i.e., enriched academic preparation, transition support, etc.) and on a variety of progress indicators and outcomes including attainment of a high school credential, entry into postsecondary education or training, completion or testing out of developmental education, credit accumulation and postsecondary degree or certificate completion. Sites began reporting data in June 2011. This report includes data covering the period from January 2011 through December 2012.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See "Postsecondary Success Initiative Fact Sheet: Supporting Low-Income Youth to and through Postsecondary Education, Careers, and Community Leadership," (September 2012) for an initial summary of the data reported through December 2011. The YouthBuild and NYEC sites have continued to report data through December 2012. An updated summary of that data is included in this report.

## **Key Findings**

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from the implementation evaluation and the initiative reporting system. The implementation aspects of the report cover the approximately two and a half year period from December 2009 through April 2012, when the final round of site visits and telephone interviews were completed. Where later information was available, it was incorporated into the report. The participant outcomes data covers the period through December 2012.

The following is a summary of key findings, which will be discussed in more detail in the body of the report.

**The primary finding is that the PSS initiative was successful in promoting the establishment of new working partnerships between community colleges and local community-based organizations that provided new pathways into and through, higher education.** While it was too early at the time of this report to have substantial data on college persistence and completion, it is clear that the community-based organizations in the initiative were successful in integrating elements of the Back on Track model into their programs and in creating a college-going culture. While making fewer structural changes than the participating CBOs, the community college partners built new and often rich relationships with their CBO partners and incorporated new practices that ranged from improved access to college admissions and advising staff to development of new college transition programs, collaborative case management efforts, and establishment of college courses within the CBO setting. These new partnerships, in turn, provided new pathways for students: by December 2012, well over half of the PSE program participants had entered college and postsecondary training and the data suggest that a substantial majority of those entering college had persisted through beyond their first semester at school.

**A second key finding is that the new partnerships provide substantial benefits to both sets of organizations: the community colleges and the local youth-serving CBOs. As such, these types of partnerships should be supported and encouraged.** For the CBOs, the partnerships provide a route to better outcomes for their participants as postsecondary education and training become critical to longer-term labor market success. As CBO staff came to understand the colleges' requirements and expectations, they were also better able to prepare their young people for success in that environment. For the community colleges, the PSS partnerships helped the colleges to expand their outreach efforts and strengthen the system of supports available to their students (by leveraging the CBO-provided supports) at a time when the colleges' own resources were increasingly constrained. Through the partnerships, CBOs became a "new front door" to college for previously under-represented students. As the colleges increased their understanding of the CBO approach, they also looked at new ways of adjusting their offerings to increase the likelihood of student success. In short, by opening the pathway between local youth-serving organizations and community colleges, both types of institutions were able to improve and expand the services provided to their students.

Some of the specific findings in the report include the following:

- The PSS initiative has resulted in the development of new, working partnerships between CBOs and community colleges aimed at creating new pathways into and through higher education and at significant changes in the ways in which both organizations address the needs of disconnected youth. Among the CBOs, the changes are striking. Working within the “Back on Track” model, NYEC and YouthBuild sites have revamped their educational programs, developed transitional supports, and organized postsecondary follow-up systems for program participants. Across virtually all of the sites, what had been an *ad hoc* connection to postsecondary education and training has become a core program goal, and programs that were previously focused on GED/High School attainment and entry into employment have developed an active postsecondary education culture.
- At the college level, changes have been more varied, ranging from an accommodation of the CBO program (providing space, phones, access to students and faculty) to an active engaged partnership working jointly on curriculum, transition services, and counseling. In many cases, the colleges saw the partnerships as bringing needed resources and access to student supports that could not be offered by the college alone. In addition, the colleges also have seen the partnership as providing an opportunity to rethink their practices. Taken together, the partnerships are seen as a way of improving and expanding services in an environment of limited resources and, as such, all of the college partners see value in the model and expect to sustain the relationship.
- Within the framework of the Back on Track model, CBOs and their college partners have varied widely in their specific approach and organization of services. The CBOs integrated the Back on Track model into three different types of youth and education programs: enriched GED programs, charter and alternative school programs, and stand-alone bridge programs that focused on the short-term transition to postsecondary education. Reflecting these differences, the local PSS efforts differed in the educational starting points of those with whom they worked, with the standalone bridge programs focused on youth who already had acquired a GED or diploma and the GED and charter/alternative school programs focused on students needing to acquire a high school credential before moving to postsecondary. However, in all three types of programs, the CBOs offered a comprehensive mix of PSS services, including individual supports (case management, advising, mentoring, tutoring); enriched academics; transition services; postsecondary supports; and workplace skills and personal/social/ leadership development. The service mix reflects the degree of ‘wraparound’ supports that most programs found necessary to bring students successfully to and through college and stand as guidelines for both CBOs and colleges interested in serving disadvantaged youth.
- The college partners also varied widely in their collaborations with the participating CBOs. At the most basic level, colleges and CBOs worked to create daily working relationships that would ease the way for PSS students entering postsecondary – identifying key contact points in admissions, financial aid, academic advising, and the



registrar's office, for example. Colleges and CBOs also arranged space on campus for the CBO's transition counselor to meet with students and negotiated access to student records (often through signed student releases). In a number of sites, the partnerships went well beyond basic accommodation, with colleges and CBOs creating or refining jointly-funded summer bridge programs for PSS participants; to develop "college success" classes for new students; and to bring college and CBO faculty together to review and revise secondary-level curriculum to better prepare students for entry-level college courses. In a number of sites, colleges and CBOs developed dual-enrollment arrangements, including several where college faculty came to the CBO to teach, and where CBO staff members were certified as college-level instructors.

- While the CBO-College partnerships have resulted in a variety of new working partnerships and pathways for PSS students, the development of those partnerships did include a number of challenges. First, as is almost always the case in partnership efforts, the new relationships took considerable time and persistence to develop. In most instances, CBOs in the initiative struggled to find appropriate entry points into the community colleges; to identify and gain the attention of potential champions in the college structure; and to find effective strategies for providing postsecondary supports. Finding the right connections, building trust, and developing new strategies took several years and in most cases, the relationships are continuing to evolve.<sup>5</sup>

Second, while PSS has resulted in new programs and services among the college partners, the impact of PSS at the college level has generally been more limited than among the smaller, more flexible community-based organizations. One of the original goals for the PSS initiative was that exposure to the types of supports and strategies used successfully in youth development programs would lead to new instructional and support strategies at the colleges. While the community colleges in PSS have become active working partners with their community-based partners, PSS has not generally led to significant, systemic changes in college practice in areas like developmental education or advising as they had within the CBOs. Individual college faculty and administrators involved in PSS do report gaining a better understanding of the needs of their students and potential strategies for addressing them through the initiative, but more substantial structural changes have taken place slowly. Where PSS community colleges are revising their core education and student support programs, it is more often as a result of other state or national initiatives aimed at community college reform than a direct result of PSS.

- While data on longer-term outcomes such as college completion are not yet available, early results from the reporting system suggest that PSS has made a difference, increasing the numbers of disconnected youth who make it into and

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<sup>5</sup> YouthBuild USA organized some of its lessons on building postsecondary partnerships into a guide on *Creating Postsecondary Partnerships that Work*, available at: <https://youthbuild.org/knowledge-bank/creating-postsecondary-partnerships-work-guide-youthbuild-usa>.

persist into the first year of postsecondary education and training. Nearly three-quarters of the youth who entered programs without a GED or high school diploma gained one through the program, and half of all those who entered PSS programs went on to enter college or postsecondary training. Of those who went to college, 70% enrolled for two semesters or more.

- Finally, it is important to recognize that the local PSS work was greatly enhanced by the intermediary structure that framed the initiative and provided key supports for the sites. JFF, which served as the initiative's 'managing partner' and knowledge development arm, played a critical role in developing and refining the 'Back on Track' model, as well as working with NYEC and YouthBuild USA to integrate that model into training for the sites and developing tools (such as the Counseling to Careers program) that helped sites implement specific elements of the model. YouthBuild USA and NYEC provided direct assistance and support to the sites, through a variety of individual coaching strategies as well as through regular cross-site meetings, which were aimed at building networks and sharing best practices. The local sites particularly emphasized the value of the cross-site meetings in helping them to build their knowledge base and identify 'best practices' that they could adopt from other sites. The intermediaries also worked together through a leadership team structure to coordinate public awareness and advocacy efforts, to reach out to new funders, to bring new organizations into the partnership, and to promote the PSS model among their broader program networks.

The balance of this report provides more detail on these findings. Chapter 2 introduces the PSS sites and program participants. Chapter 3 details the implementation of the PSS programs at the CBOs and the college partners. Chapter 4 examines the partnership building process and impacts at the community colleges. Chapter 5 discusses the intermediary role and Chapter 6 reports on the reporting system data. Chapter 7 provides a conclusion and a discussion of the lessons learned from the initiative.

## Chapter Two

### THE PSS PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPANTS

*While most young adults understand the value of education in the abstract, too often real-life pressures get in the way and prevent them from completing a degree. This is especially true for low-income young people who may have financial constraints, jobs, and family obligations that compete for their time and attention. By offering support, reducing the barriers that prevent them from learning, and reinforcing their motivation to learn and succeed, we expect more young people to be able to focus on completing a degree. (Gates Foundation 2008)*

The starting point for the Postsecondary Success Initiative was the development of strong working partnerships between youth-serving community-based organizations and community college partners. The goal of the partnerships was to create new pathways into postsecondary education for low-income youth and to develop the preparation, transition and support programs the youth needed to attain a postsecondary credential.

To accomplish this, the Gates Foundation made grants to YouthBuild USA and the National Youth Employment Coalition who, in turn, selected and funded a total of 15 local affiliate programs to serve as the pilot sites for the initiative.<sup>6</sup>

YouthBuild USA is a national nonprofit organization that organizes and supports YouthBuild programs across the United States. In YouthBuild, low-income young people ages 16 to 24 work full-time for 6 to 24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills through hands-on work in construction, health care, and other fields in their community. The program emphasizes leadership development, community service, and the creation of a positive community of adults and youth committed to each other's success. There are currently over 270 YouthBuild programs in the United States engaging over 10,000 young people per year.

The National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) is a national membership network of youth-serving organizations working in the fields of youth development, workforce development, and education. As a national coalition, NYEC sets and promotes quality standards; tracks, crafts and influences policy; provides and supports professional development; and builds the capacity of organizations and programs. NYEC has approximately 250 member organizations ranging from individual, local community-based organizations to national program networks and policy organizations. The selection of YouthBuild USA and NYEC as PSS intermediaries reflected the Gates Foundation's goal of leveraging the pilot site efforts to a broader network of programs in the field and, at the same time, to work with organizations that brought a focus on public policy and the capacity to advocate for policy support for similar efforts. While the

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<sup>6</sup> The grant to the Youth Development Institute (YDI) in New York funded two CBOs who worked together with YDI and their college partners.

organizations differed in their structures and missions, but provided links to a broad network of local providers and a strong national policy focus.<sup>7</sup>

### **Site Selection**

In August, 2008, YouthBuild USA began the site selection process by issuing an RFP, open to all YouthBuild affiliate programs, that offered grants of up to \$200,000 per year for three years to programs selected to serve as one of the seven YouthBuild PSS pilot sites. The RFP emphasized that YouthBuild was looking for experienced sites that already had solid education programs in place and were ready “to move to this next frontier of programming.” The RFP also noted that:

*The goal of this initiative is not to do marginal tweaking at the edges but to create a dynamic, creative, innovative, cutting edge program that can serve as a national model for this work. Programs that already have some level of sophistication in their graduate success programming in building bridges to and through postsecondary and/or other credentials, and have shown the ability to follow-up and stay in touch with graduates, or programs that have already shown success in supporting graduates through to post-secondary credentials, should apply to this initiative – this is not the right opportunity for those programs that want to begin doing this work at this time.*

Finally, the RFP noted that this initiative would require the involvement of the local affiliate’s leadership and a commitment to rethinking programs and services at a fundamental level: “Participating programs will need to be ready to examine their program design, infrastructure, allocation of resources, and vision in order to build and modify towards high graduate success outcomes.”

NYEC began its process roughly a year after YouthBuild USA (the NYEC grant from the Gates Foundation began at a later date), issuing an RFP to its membership in August 2009. The RFP was open to member organizations that were direct service providers serving youth aged 16-26 or intermediary organizations partnering with direct service providers. Like the YouthBuild USA RFP, it offered grants of up to \$200,000 per year for a three-year pilot with a goal of funding eight sites. Working with a diverse network of local programs, the NYEC RFP emphasized that local partnerships would need to develop their own models to provide the services needed to create an effective pathway to and through college:

*Support for this population may require a range of supports including but not limited to: academic remediation/acceleration, tutoring, counseling, housing, child care, work study, internships and financial aid – and, require coordination among multiple levels of youth service and postsecondary systems. As different systems may have different resources available to address the needs of youth in these areas, a successful partnership will require understanding of what these*

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<sup>7</sup> A major part of the role of Jobs for the Future, the third major PSS partner, was to codify the lessons of the initiative and work with YouthBuild USA and NYEC to disseminate those lessons to the youth-serving field.

*systems can uniquely provide and complement to support youth through to completion.*

“Most of all,” the RFP noted, “a successful partnership will come from a commitment to a cooperative learning process and development of programs in collaboration.”

The NYEC RFP also emphasized the importance of sites collecting data and documenting the need for postsecondary education and support, with the goal of developing a body of information that could be used to inform national policy.

### **The Postsecondary Success Initiative Sites**

The sites ultimately selected for the initiative represented a diverse group of community-based organizations and college partners. As discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, they fell into three broad types of program settings in terms of their work with the PSS model: enhanced GED programs, which integrated PSS into an existing GED program; alternative and charter schools, which incorporated PSS into a diploma-granting school setting; and standalone bridge programs, which provided shorter-term support for youth who already had a high school credential.

Among the seven YouthBuild sites were programs offering the classic YouthBuild mix of GED preparation and construction training as well as sites that had expanded their educational offerings through an earlier YouthBuild initiative (the National Schools Initiative) to become diploma-granting alternative and charter school programs. The YouthBuild sites ranged widely in size, from the Brockton YouthBuild program which served approximately 30 participants per cycle, to the Philadelphia YouthBuild Charter School, which served over 200 students annually (see Tables 2-1 and 2-2 for summary information on the sites).

The NYEC sites were equally diverse, representing a mix of youth serving agencies that provided education, employment, housing and social services through a variety of service delivery models. One site (The College Initiative) focused its services on ex-offenders and court-involved youth; a second (Larkin Street Youth Services) had a long history serving homeless, runaway, and foster care youth. Others (ISUS, Open Meadow and the LA Conservation Corps) ran alternative or charter school programs with a focus on employability. X-Cel focused on GED preparation and adult literacy, and MY TURN provided education and employability development for out of school youth. In New York City, the Youth Development Institute, a youth-focused policy and program nonprofit, teamed up with two large social service agencies (Good Shepherd Services and Cypress Hills Development Corporation) to create a program in which both agencies were partnered with a branch of the City University of New York.

**Table 2-1: PSS Initiative Sites**

Location	CBO Partner	Primary College Partner
<b>YouthBuild Sites</b>		
Atlanta, GA	Metro Atlanta YouthBuild	Atlanta Metropolitan College
Brockton, MA	YouthBuild Brockton	Massasoit Community College
Columbus, OH	YouthBuild Columbus	Columbus State Community College
Bloomington-Normal, IL	YouthBuild McLean County	Heartland Community College
Madison, WI	Operation Fresh Start	Madison Area Technical College
Philadelphia, PA	YouthBuild Philadelphia	Community College of Philadelphia
Portland, OR	Portland YouthBuilders	Portland Community College
<b>NYEC Sites</b>		
Boston, MA	X-Cel	Bunker Hill Community College
Brockton, MA	MY TURN	Massasoit Community College
Dayton, OH	ISUS (Improved Solutions for Urban Systems)	Sinclair Community College
Los Angeles, CA	LA Conservation Corps	LA Trade Technical College
New York, NY	The College Initiative	CUNY/COPE Program
New York, NY	Youth Development Institute (YDI) - Good Shepherd Services - Cypress Hills Development Corporation	New York City College of Technology/CUNY
Portland, OR	Open Meadow	Portland Community College
San Francisco, CA	Larkin Street Youth Services	City College of San Francisco

While there was substantial diversity within and across the YouthBuild and NYEC networks, there were several fundamental differences between the two groups of sites and their approach to PSS:

- One of the defining characteristics of the YouthBuild approach to PSS was that the YouthBuild sites agreed to include *all* of their entering participants in PSS. As a result, college entry and completion became a focus for each YouthBuild program as a whole and not just for a subset of their participants. Among the NYEC sites, some sites included all of their participants in PSS, but most -- particularly those organizations that provided an array of social services programs under one organizational umbrella -- initially targeted a subset or cohort of the young people they served for inclusion in PSS.

**Table 2-2: Program Overview**

PROGRAM NAME	PSS Program Type	Total # Participants Served Annually	Total # Participants Served in PSE	GED or Diploma at Required at Entry to PSS	GED Offered through PSS	HS Diploma Offered through PSS
<b>YouthBuild Sites</b>						
Metro Atlanta YouthBuild	Enhanced GED	NA	33	No		
YB Brockton	Enhanced GED	60	60	No	Yes	No
YB Columbus	Alt/Charter School	172	172	No	No	Yes
YB McLean County	Alt/Charter School	250	150	No	Yes	Yes
Operation Fresh Start	Enhanced GED	120	80	No	Yes	Yes
YB Philadelphia	Alt/Charter School	480	288	No	No	Yes
Portland YouthBuilders	Alt/Charter School	140	140	No	Yes	Yes
<b>NYEC Sites</b>						
X-Cel	Standalone Bridge	300	45	Yes	Yes	No
MY TURN	Enhanced GED	800	20	No	Yes	Yes
ISUS	Alt/Charter School	200	50	No	No	Yes
LA Conservation Corps (LACC)	Alt/Charter School	500	53	Yes	No	No
College Initiative	Standalone Bridge	706	85	Yes	No	No
Good Shepherd Services	Standalone Bridge	20000	15	No	No	No
Cypress Hills	Standalone Bridge	8000	50	Yes	No	No
Open Meadow	Alt/Charter School	700	15	Yes	No	No
Larkin Street Youth Services	Standalone Bridge	NA	51	Yes	No	No

*Note: Based on data from online program descriptions and participant reporting by PSS sites through December 2012. Data may not reflect all of the services provided by programs through the PSS initiative or changes in program activities during or since the initiative.*

- The second major distinction is that virtually all of the YouthBuild PSS participants entered the program without a GED or high school diploma (most YouthBuild participants nationally are school dropouts without a high school credential), whereas a number of the NYEC sites targeted their efforts on youth who had acquired a GED or diploma before entry into PSS. In those cases (as discussed further below), the focus was on helping students prepare for and transition into college, but with a high school credential as the starting point.<sup>8</sup> Both groups of programs served young people facing imposing barriers to further education, but the differences are important to note and they are reflected in the different expectations within the programs and in the different program designs.

The PSS college partners also differed across the initiative, ranging widely in size and their initial connections to the local CBOs. Some of the college partners were relatively small institutions, such as Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, with an enrollment of under 1,000 students and a mission of serving low income and vulnerable youth and Atlanta Metropolitan College with a relatively modest enrollment of under 3,000 students. Most, however, were larger public institutions with enrollments ranging from 5,600 to over 34,000.

The initial relationships among the colleges and CBOs also varied widely. Both YouthBuild and NYEC sites were required to document an existing relationship with the college partner as part of the PSS application process. But in practice, those relationships ranged from a well-established partnership to a general willingness to join in a proposal without much prior interaction. The ISUS program, for example, had a well-established working relationship with the outreach division at Sinclair Community College. The leadership in that unit knew the ISUS director and had worked with program staff. At the other end of the continuum, as one example, McLean County YouthBuild was just beginning to connect with Heartland Community College staff, having had a relationship with another area college prior to that.

As is discussed later, large community colleges like City College of San Francisco (34,000 students), Columbus State Community College (31,000 students), or Community College of Philadelphia (19,750 students) were often challenging to partner with until proper access points could be identified.

### **PSS Participant Characteristics**

The PSS participants were a diverse group of young people facing significant barriers to access and success in higher education. As Table 2-3 shows (based on reporting system data on participants who entered the programs prior to December 2011), participants

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<sup>8</sup> In many cases, the NYEC PSS participants received their high school credential from another program at the PSS site. For example, students in the X-Cel program were officially enrolled in PSS after receiving their GED, but many had acquired that GED through X-Cel. On the one hand, this meant that most sites were serving youth in the PSS initiative who were similar to those in the agency's broader mix of programs. On the other hand, several agencies were more selective in who entered the PSS program, focusing on those most interested in college as their next step.



were generally older youth, with an average age of just under 19 years old. The majority were from racial or ethnic minorities: 62% were African-American; 15% were Hispanic, and 22% were White. The programs included both men and women (57% male, 43% female). Though there is substantial missing data, the available data also shows that substantial proportions of participants were parents, had experience with homelessness, and/or had been court-involved.<sup>9</sup>

The data also show that most students entered PSS with significant educational challenges. The large majority of participants (79%) entered PSS without a high school diploma or GED; among this group, more than half (54%) tested at reading levels below 8<sup>th</sup> grade at program entry, and more than 70% tested below the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in math. Again, there is substantial missing data, but available information indicates that most participants were first generation college goers. Among those entering college (the point at which some programs recorded college background), nearly 60% were reported as first generation college-goers. Given the amount of missing information, the actual percentage is likely to be higher.<sup>10</sup>

There are some important differences between the YouthBuild and NYEC participants, though both groups focused on youth with significant barriers to educational attainment. The most significant difference, as noted earlier, was that almost all YouthBuild participants entered the program without a high school credential, while the majority of NYEC participants had either a diploma (54%) or GED (22%). Of those entering without a diploma, NYEC participants tended to score somewhat higher on entry reading and math assessments (for example, 48% of NYEC participants in that group scored at 8<sup>th</sup> grade or above on the math assessments, compared to 27% of the YouthBuild participants). However, both groups had similar proportions of first generation college-goers, both served participants who were over-aged for their level of attainment at school and who were predominantly African-American and Hispanic, and both included substantial proportions of youth facing other barriers to education (homelessness, court-involved, parenting, etc.). While the differences among populations are important to take into account in assessing key college-going and persistence outcomes, it is also clear that all PSS sites were serving a population of young people in need of new pathways to and through postsecondary education.

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the missing data is the result of the addition of the reporting system to the initiative after many PSS sites had begun operations. Consequently, data on a number of characteristics for early PSS participants was not collected when they entered their programs.

<sup>10</sup> When the cases with missing data are excluded from the calculations, the percentage of first generation college-goers among PSS college entrants rises to 83%.

**Table 2-3: PSS Participant Characteristics**

Characteristic	NYEC Sites		YouthBuild Sites		All PSS	
	N=537	%	N=1392	%	N=1929	%
<b>Average Age at Entry</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>19.04</b>	<b>1392</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>18.8</b>
<b>Education at Entry</b>						
High School Diploma	292	54.4%	11	0.8%	<b>303</b>	15.7%
GED	117	21.8%	7	0.5%	<b>124</b>	6.4%
Diploma or GED	394	73.4%	18	1.3%	412	21.4%
No Diploma/GED	143	26.6%	1374	98.7%	<b>1517</b>	78.6%
<b>Race</b>						
Native American	9	1.7%	11	0.9%	20	1.1%
Asian	17	3.2%	19	1.5%	36	2.0%
African-American	245	45.7%	881	69.0%	1126	61.9%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	0.6%	3	0.2%	6	0.3%
White	130	24.3%	264	20.7%	394	21.7%
Other	131	24.5%	35	2.7%	166	9.1%
Race Unknown	6	1.1%	64	5.0%	70	3.9%
Missing	0		5		5	
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
Hispanic	168	31.4%	110	7.9%	278	14.5%
Non-Hispanic	348	65.0%	1277	92.1%	1625	84.5%
Unknown	19	3.6%	0	0.0%	19	1.0%
Missing	2		5		7	
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	282	52.6%	809	58.1%	1091	56.6%
Female	252	47.0%	583	41.9%	835	43.3%
Transgender	2	0.4%	0	0.0%	2	0.1%
Missing	1		0	0.0%	1	
<b>Parent or Primary Caregiver at Entry</b>						
Yes	70	13.1%	65	26.5%	135	17.3%
No	465	86.9%	180	73.5%	645	82.7%
Missing	2		1147		1149	
<b>Homeless (Current or in past year)</b>						
Yes	24	4.8%	34	14.2%	58	7.8%
No	477	95.2%	206	85.8%	683	92.2%
Missing/Not Collected	36		1152		1188	
<b>Court-Involved</b>						
Yes	113	25.9%	22	16.9%	135	23.9%
No	323	74.1%	108	83.1%	431	76.1%
Missing/Not Collected	101		1262		1363	

Characteristic	NYEC Sites		YouthBuild Sites		All PSS	
	N=537	%	N=1392	%	N=1929	%
<b><i>Reading Level at Entry (among those entering without a Diploma or GED)</i></b>						
5th Grade and below	43	23.6%	387	27.8%	430	27.3%
6th-7th Grade	37	20.3%	381	27.4%	418	26.6%
8th Grade or Above	102	56.0%	624	44.8%	726	46.1%
Missing	355		0		355	
<b><i>Math Level at Entry (among those entering without a Diploma or GED)</i></b>						
5th Grade and below	49	27.2%	642	46.1%	691	44.0%
6th-7th Grade	44	24.4%	375	26.9%	419	26.7%
8th Grade or Above	87	48.3%	375	26.9%	462	29.4%
Missing	357		0		357	
<b><i>First Generation in College (among those entering postsecondary)</i></b>						
Yes	261	59.0%	222	58.7%	483	58.9%
No or Missing	181	41.0%	156	41.3%	337	41.1%

### Chapter Three IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PSS MODEL

*The comprehensive set of interventions required will include both organizational partnerships and student level programming—academic skills strengthening, financial supports and incentives, leadership development opportunities, mentoring, exposure to post-secondary environments and needed skills, helping students build their expectations and future focus, building strong articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions that take into account employer needs, student interests and aspirations, and community resources. (YouthBuild USA proposal to Gates Foundation 2008)*

As discussed earlier, the PSS sites were expected to build a comprehensive sequence and system of supports that would help move students to and through postsecondary education. The three-part “Back on Track” (BOT) model provided the framework for that system, emphasizing enriched academic preparation, bridging services to ease the transition to postsecondary, and support through at least the first year of postsecondary education and training. YouthBuild USA, NYEC and Jobs for the Future worked together to build a common understanding of BOT and its practical application (in classrooms, counseling strategies, postsecondary agreements, etc.) through training at the cross-site meetings, working groups, and site-by-site assistance.

Across the board, the PSS sites responded by modifying their programs to make college-going and postsecondary education core elements of their program strategies and to incorporate elements of the BOT model. Virtually every site made changes in education curricula and/or instruction; established college awareness and college planning programs; developed the role of the college transition coordinator as student counselor, academic advisor, and link to postsecondary support; and developed working relationships with key staff and services at their postsecondary partner institution. **Perhaps the most significant finding from the initiative is that the Postsecondary Success Initiative was successful in shifting the focus at participating CBOs toward postsecondary education and in enabling them to develop the services and partnerships needed to make postsecondary education and training a central goal for their programs and participants.**

While all 15 sites worked within the Back on Track framework, local program designs and specific program strategies varied substantially, reflecting both the nature of each organization’s existing programs and the opportunities and resources available through their college partnerships. Put simply, while there is a basic PSS framework, there is no single PSS “model.” What we found was the application of a core set of principles and program elements in a variety of settings, all guided by the common goal of increasing postsecondary access and completion.

### **Overview: Three Strategies/Approaches**

As noted in the previous chapter, the PSS programs were based in a number of different organizational settings which set the context for the ways in which the Back on Track model was implemented at the sites. At the broadest level, the PSS sites can be grouped into three basic settings, reflecting the diversity of organizations across the initiative. We characterize these as:

1. ***Enhanced GED programs***
2. ***Charter and alternative school models***
3. ***Stand-alone bridge programs.***

All three incorporated the major elements of the Back on Track model (enriched academics, bridge programming, and postsecondary supports), though often in different ways, and all three types of programs worked closely with their college partners. Table 3-1 lists the PSS sites by model/approach.

In the ***Enhanced GED programs*** sites, the PSS effort added a postsecondary focus to an existing GED program, generally through additional academic material (research papers, homework, advanced math), college planning and college transition activities, and postsecondary supports, often in a separate, supplemental set of classes. YouthBuild Brockton, for example, added a college preparation class, which included academic preparation and college planning, to supplement the core GED curriculum. YouthBuild Brockton and MY TURN (also located in Brockton, MA) also both worked with Massasoit Community College to develop summer and fall bridge programs that provided additional college orientation and academic support.

The ***Charter Schools and Alternative Schools*** added a postsecondary focus to the more comprehensive, diploma-granting educational programs at organizations that included either charter schools or alternative schools in their operations. In most cases, the charter/alternative school programs provided a broader and more diverse educational curriculum than the GED programs and students tended to spend more time in the program (1-2 years vs. 6-9 months for the GED programs). The charter/alternative school sites also tended to be larger and, because they often had access to local education funding, had more capacity to integrate college-related activities into their staffing and curriculum.

In both the charter/alternative school and the enhanced GED sites in the initiative, the education programs were generally part of a broader youth development model that linked education with career preparation, and youth development.<sup>11</sup> As such they tended to offer a more comprehensive program experience than the standalone bridge programs (below).

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<sup>11</sup> This is true both for the YouthBuild sites, where the basic program model integrated education, workforce preparation, leadership and youth development, and the NYEC charter/alternative school sites, which also generally combined education and workforce and youth development. Two NYEC sites (LACC and ISUS) also incorporated YouthBuild programs into their operations.

The ***Standalone Bridge*** programs focused on providing a shorter-term transition into postsecondary education or training for students who had already acquired a high school credential (GED or diploma). In some cases, the “bridge” programs focused primarily on college planning, counseling, and postsecondary support with access to tutoring for additional academic support. Others provided a more substantial dose of academic support and remediation in addition to college preparation and postsecondary support. The X-Cel program in Boston, for example, developed a 14 week transition program that included intensive math and English remediation services, plus assistance with financial aid and transition to their postsecondary partner, Bunker Hill Community College. The College Initiative (TCI), which focused its services on youth offenders, also provided short-term, intensive academic remediation through a sequence of evening classes aimed at preparing students for the placement exams at the City University of New York (CUNY).<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that this grouping is not exact, as some sites incorporate multiple strategies that blur the distinctions and others incorporated new services over the course of the Initiative. As one example, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) officially framed its PSS program as separate from its alternative school program and as requiring a GED or diploma at entry. However, the program is closely integrated into LACC’s alternative school and the boundaries between school preparation and PSS activities are hard to discern in practice. As a result, we have included LACC in the alternative school group. Similarly, some alternative school programs that offered both a GED and a diploma option (YouthBuild McLean County, for example) were generally classified under the charter/alternative school category. On the other hand, several PSS organizations (for example, Larkin Street, X-Cel, Good Shepherd, etc.) operate GED and other education programs and often recruit PSS participants from among graduates of those programs, but their postsecondary efforts are not closely integrated with their educational programs and are most accurately described as standalone bridge efforts.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Tables 3-2, 3-3, and 3-4 at the end of the section for an overview of the key services provided by the PSS organizations, organized by program type. The tables are based on data compiled from the program reports completed by sites and participant reporting data and may not reflect all of the services provided by sites through the initiative. It is worth noting that while most of the standalone bridge programs offered tutoring support, the percentage of students who were reported as participating ranged from zero to 70%.

<sup>13</sup> The X-Cel and Good Shepherd programs, for example, recruit and accept students from outside their own programs into the PSS initiative. Larkin Street draws on students from a number of its different educational programs within the organization based on student interest in postsecondary education, rather than building PSS services directly into those programs themselves.

**Table 3-1: PSS Program Approaches**

Strategy	NYEC Sites	YouthBuild Sites
Enhanced GED Programs	MY TURN (Brockton, MA)	Brockton YouthBuild Metro Atlanta YouthBuild Operation Fresh Start (Madison, WI) <sup>14</sup>
Alternative/Charter School Programs	ISUS (Dayton) LA Conservation Corps (LA) Open Meadow (Portland, OR)	Columbus (OH) YouthBuild McLean County YouthBuild (Bloomington-Normal, IL) Philadelphia YouthBuild Portland YouthBuild (OR)
Stand-Alone Bridge Programs	The College Initiative (NYC) Larkin Street (San Francisco) X-Cel (Boston) YDI/Good Shepherd/Cypress Hills (NYC)	

**Services and Strategies**

Tables 3-2 through 3-4 at the end of this section provide a more detailed look at the mix of services that were provided as part of the PSS Initiative and at some of the similarities and differences across the different types of programs.

In terms of commonalities, all of the PSS sites provided some mix of case management and academic advising to program participants across all stages of the program: preparation, transition, and entry into postsecondary. These individualized support services provided the ‘glue’ that helped connect young people into the program and kept them moving forward when there were barriers. Many of the programs also facilitated additional connections between participants and caring adults through a mentoring relationship, either through program staff, peer mentors, or links to outside adults (Table 3-2).

Virtually all of the PSS sites also provided a variety of college transition supports, reflecting the emphasis on building college knowledge and readiness in the Back on Track model. These activities included college awareness classes, financial aid planning and FAFSA preparation, campus orientation programs, and college tours (Table 3-3). This is one of the areas in which college staff and faculty were often active partners: in designing curriculum, arranging tours, and teaching courses. Most PSS programs also provided core career and youth development services, including career counseling, leadership, job readiness and training, and life skills programs, and financial literacy (Table 3-4), all aimed at building students’ capacity to operate independently over the longer term. As discussed in the section on postsecondary supports, most developed some type of postsecondary support system, either through the CBO staff (usually the transition coordinator), college staff, or a combination of both.

<sup>14</sup> At the time of the study, Operation Fresh Start was also beginning to offer a high school diploma.

The biggest difference among programs was in the nature and degree of enriched academic preparation that was provided as part of the PSS programming (Table 2). Among the **standalone bridge programs**, the most common form of academic support took the form of tutoring rather than more formal, organized forms of instruction. Only one of the standalone bridge programs – the X-Cel program in Boston – reported working with students through workshops or formal classes on such college-level tasks as research papers, substantial reading and writing, and an introduction to college-ready math, though as noted earlier, The College Initiative also provided a structured academic remediation program in preparation for college entry tests. In contrast, the **enhanced GED** and **charter/alternative school** programs tended to provide a more comprehensive academic mix, including research papers, college ready math, an emphasis on reading and writing across the curriculum, and opportunities for dual enrollment in college-level classes. As noted earlier, most of the more comprehensive GED and Alternative/Charter School programs also provided access to vocational education or training; most also integrated some form of service and service-learning into their curriculum.

Each approach has strengths and challenges. The more comprehensive enhanced GED and alternative/charter school programs, because they had students in their programs for longer periods and were able to begin the college discussion earlier in the education process, generally provided a greater opportunity for academic skills development and creation of a “college-going culture.” Staff at those programs could begin talking with students about postsecondary education as a goal at intake into the program and integrate college-related topics into all of their classes and activities. The YouthBuild programs and the NYEC sites that combined education with occupational training or work experience had additional opportunities to integrate postsecondary education goals into worksite learning as well.<sup>15</sup>

The standalone bridge programs provide transition assistance and supports for students with a GED or diploma who needed extra preparation and support, and who could particularly benefit from counseling and academic support after entering postsecondary education. While they had less of an opportunity to build academic skills and college-going culture in a relatively short-term program, the standalone bridge programs can help address near-term academic needs and provide critical assistance on financial aid, supported access to the community college or postsecondary training, and ongoing counseling and support once in college.

### **Creative Solutions to Challenging Problems**

While there were clear differences among PSS programs, what stood out across the initiative was the development of new and creative strategies for moving participants along the pathway to postsecondary education. This section highlights some of those

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<sup>15</sup> At the ISUS program, for example, the construction and health care courses were taught by instructors who were certified as instructors at Sinclair Community College, so that students were able to earn community college credits through their class and see their training as a step towards additional postsecondary training offered at the college. At Operation Fresh Start, education staff worked with the crew leaders at project worksites to integrate, academic learning into the construction training and work experience.



approaches: strengthening academics, integrating work and learning, building a college culture and college skills, postsecondary supports, and relationships and individualized supports.

### ***Strengthening Academics***

The PSS programs incorporated a wide variety of academic enrichment strategies.

All of the charter/alternative school programs used the initiative as an opportunity to review and strengthen their academic curriculum. Some examples:

- The ***Philadelphia YouthBuild Charter School*** increased the emphasis on reading and writing across all of its academic courses. They also integrated research papers and projects into the curriculum, often focused on topics with a real-world connection for students. In-class learning was supplemented through the school's learning lab and tutoring before and after-school by AmeriCorps volunteers.
- ***McLean County YouthBuild*** developed a project-based approach as part of its charter school curriculum and then worked with Heartland Community College faculty to better align the high school curriculum with the academic skills needed for college. As a result, every student participates in multiple class projects designed to address specific skills and standards. The school also increased its emphasis on literacy, adopting a balanced literacy approach for its curriculum and incorporating literacy circles into the academic program.
- ***Operation Fresh Start*** in Madison, WI, built their education program around work-based learning. Program participants work on construction crews that include both a construction supervisor and a teacher who serve as counselors, educators and case managers. Classroom instruction takes place in the context of the construction training with a hands-on, contextual emphasis.
- ***YouthBuild Columbus Community School*** worked with its partner, Columbus State Community College (CSCC), to review and revise its curriculum to better prepare students for entry into the college. The school also adopted a "Drop everything and read" program to promote literacy and provides tutoring on site to supplement regular classes. CSCC faculty also teach developmental education classes at the YouthBuild campus to ease the college transition for students.
- ***Portland YouthBuilders*** revised its curriculum to move away from drill and practice to more college-ready instruction emphasizing critical thinking and higher order skills. Working with Portland Community College faculty, the program identified the 'hard' and 'soft' skills that students needed for college and looked at how to build research papers, student projects, vocabulary, and homework into the curriculum – all with a focus on community issues of interest to students.

Among the enhanced GED programs, much of the academic enrichment took place through the creation of new, college-oriented courses to supplement the existing GED program.

- **YouthBuild Brockton**, for example, added a college preparation class for students who completed (or were near to completing) their GED. The course introduced more advanced math and English, research papers, homework and study skills and operated in a style similar to regular college classes. YouthBuild students then received additional academic support through a summer bridge and a college transition program operated by their postsecondary partner, Massasoit Community College.
- Students at **MY TURN**, also located in Brockton, received additional academic preparation through an Accuplacer preparation program after they completed their GED and through a tutoring program staffed by the program's education specialist and volunteers from an area college.

As noted earlier, two of the standalone bridge programs created structured academic enrichment courses as part of their program models.

- **X-Cel** created a college preparation class for its participants, all of whom had a GED or diploma at entry, as the central element in its PSS program. Designed to reflect a 14-week college semester and provide a college-level experience, the class stresses math and reading preparation for the Accuplacer exam. Students are required to write several types of papers (conceptual, argumentative, narrative), read college texts, and practice note-taking on readings and class presentations. Math remediation starts with basic math for those that need it and provides algebra instruction for more advanced students. The 14 week program also focuses on life and personal skills and connections with X-Cel graduates who serve as mentors.
- **The College Initiative (TCI)** created a structured series of courses aimed at helping its participants, all of whom begin with a GED or a high school diploma, to better prepare for entry into the CUNY college system. Developed in partnership with CUNY faculty, the TCI courses are a series of six-week modules with several tiers (for example, Math 1, Math 2, etc.) that students can enter and complete as needed. Each class takes place two evenings per week so that students can take them while working. TCI also created an intensive 10 week summer version of the course that includes math and English plus 30 hours of non-academic workshops on career and life skills.

Common to all of these efforts was an emphasis on small classes and individualized attention. Sites also worked to maintain a connection to real-world and community issues in projects, using readings, research paper topics, and classroom projects that related to the world students lived in. Along with changes in the content of the curriculum, academic programs also increased their emphasis on practical academics skills – study skills, note-taking, etc.

### ***Integrating Work and Learning***

Academic education at the GED and alternative/charter school programs was closely connected with occupational training. This grounded the academic education in a real-world context -- vital in demonstrating relevance to the students and sustaining their motivation. It also helped broaden the goal of postsecondary education to include the acquisition of occupational credentials as well as a college degree. All of the YouthBuild sites included some form of construction training as part of the program experience (work on construction projects in the community has always been a central feature of the YouthBuild program model). A number of YouthBuild programs have also begun to add training in other occupational areas, most commonly health care. Most of the NYEC charter/alternative school and enhanced GED programs also incorporated some form of career or occupational training. MY TURN, as one example, combined its GED program with training in three career tracks: healthcare, retail-customer service, and human services. In each area, the training incorporated curriculum from a national certification body so that students would receive an industry-recognized certificate when they completed the program.

For a number of programs, occupational training provided an important avenue of collaboration with the community college partners and the basis for dual enrollment agreements that allowed participants to accumulate college credits while working toward their GED or high school diploma.

- In Dayton, OH, **ISUS** worked with Sinclair Community College to develop a dual enrollment model for its construction technology program. After initial efforts (sending ISUS students to Sinclair for the training and, in a second effort hiring Sinclair faculty to teach at ISUS), ISUS established an agreement in which Sinclair accepted the nationally certified construction curriculum used at ISUS and granted adjunct faculty status to the ISUS instructors (who were certified to teach the curriculum). As a result, students who gained certifications through the ISUS construction classes could accumulate over 40 credits towards a Sinclair degree.<sup>16</sup> ISUS similarly worked with health care providers and the college to create “stackable” credentials in the health care field (for example, Certified Nursing Assistant, phlebotomist, etc.).
- **The YouthBuild Columbus Community School** worked with Columbus State Community College to create dual enrollment opportunities with its training programs. YouthBuild students can earn college credits in the construction and nursing assistant programs through courses that are taught at the Charter School by CSCC instructors.
- In addition to the training students receive on the construction crews, **Operation Fresh Start** also created a program that introduces students to careers in five

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<sup>16</sup> The ISUS construction program used National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) curriculum and assessments, as did a number of other PSS sites. The NCCER curriculum is widely recognized in the construction field, and students can to earn industry-recognized certificates in areas such as carpentry and construction technology through their classes and on-site training.

major career clusters that are aligned with the career clusters at their partner college, Madison Area Technical College (MATC). Through the cluster program, students learn about career areas, hear speakers, participate in job shadowing, and complete short-term certificate programs through the college. Operation Fresh Start crew supervisors are credentialed as MATC instructors, so students can also gain college credits in construction and remodeling before completing the program.

When most of these programs were first developed, the occupational training components were a central part of the strategy of helping young people complete their high school degree or GED and move directly into the workplace. As the focus of the programs has shifted to preparation for postsecondary education and training, occupational training has remained a critical element. On the one hand, it provides the hands-on learning and practical skills that many young people need in order to stay engaged in the educational process. At the same time, the training now also offers opportunities to reinforce the academic education at many of the programs and provides an additional route toward postsecondary education and the accumulation of college credits. While the focus of much of the work at the PSS sites has been on enhancing the academic program, it is important to recognize that the occupation experience is a major part of what makes these community-based education programs attractive for young people and represents an integral part of the program design.

### ***Building A College Culture and College Skills***

A central challenge for many PSS sites was to build more consistent and comprehensive supports for college-going and to develop a “college culture” as a core value of the programs. At many programs, college-going had always been an option, but one that had not been built systematically into the program. As a program staff person commented: “Before the Gates grant, college-going had really only been an occasional focus. It is more consistent now. [The PSS grant] gave us the opportunity to follow students past our program, to take a more planful approach to tracking them and following up.” A program director commented: “Before, we were making them apply, but we hadn’t followed up with anything. We found out that college is more complicated than we thought.” A third noted that before the grant, “college was kind of an ad hoc part of our program.” She added, “I’ve been kicking myself that we didn’t do this sooner.”

For some programs, the transition to a postsecondary focus was not easy. Staff sometimes had to be convinced that participants could handle higher expectations and that the programs could provide necessary supports. Staff with different knowledge and skills (including college advising experience) had to be brought in, and new relationships had to be built with staff and faculty at the community colleges. As one CBO representative noted, culture change is hard work and takes time:

*Cultural change is important. It is hard to change how you have done the work in the past. It is therefore important to clarify the vision of new approaches and then focus on what needs to change if the culture is to be changed.*

*We have been working to change how our program looks at college attendance as opposed to our traditional focus on employment. We are still in the process of the shift. It takes time.*

But culture change was at the heart of the PSS effort, and it was evident within most of the PSS community-based organizations. As one CBO director put it: “We are now presenting ourselves as a college-readiness program. We used to describe ourselves as a GED program, but now it is college readiness. This has changed our culture.”

### **Key Strategies for Building College Culture and Skills**

The strategies used by programs to integrate postsecondary into their programs included changes in the program orientation process, new courses and activities, and the development of special college bridge programs. The result at almost every site was that college became part of the conversation from day one and the goal of postsecondary education was reinforced on a regular basis.

**Orientation.** Most of the PSS sites began by adding discussions about postsecondary education into their intake and orientation process, often in partnership with staff from their college partner. At **YouthBuild Brockton**, as one example, a representative from Massasoit Community College participated in the orientation process, leading a session on college opportunities. **YouthBuild McLean County**, as at other YouthBuild sites, added discussions of college and careers to the “Mental Toughness Orientation” that begins every YouthBuild program.

**College Transitions Courses and Workshops.** Almost every program created a college transition course or workshop to provide a structured college transition curriculum. As noted earlier, **YouthBuild Brockton** created a college prep class that students took after they completed their GED and which provided a mix of college-prep academic work and college advising. Students from both Brockton YouthBuild and **MY TURN** who went on to college then participated in a summer bridge program and a fall college success course at Massasoit Community College. At **Open Meadow**, students took a college prep class in their senior year or in the summer following graduation. At **YouthBuild McLean County**, the curriculum included a college readiness class, college tours, opportunities to audit college classes during the year, a summer ‘bootcamp’ program, and a college transitions class once they entered Heartland Community College. **YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School** students participated in a weekly transition services class that focused on practical skills for college – note taking, time management, and communications. Students also had a weekly “Postsecondary Lab” where they could explore career and education options using online resources, work with teachers to set career and education goals, build resumes and develop interview skills, and work on financial planning. Students also had the opportunity to participate in summer bridge programs offered by two of Philadelphia’s college partners. The **LA Conservation Corps** also had a College and Careers class for seniors, plus a college orientation class at LA Trade Tech.

While each class was unique, most included college and career planning, financial aid planning and assistance with FAFSA forms, and work on practical academic skills (note-taking, time management, communications skills, navigating the college environment, etc.). At some sites, financial aid assistance and college tours were part of the transition

class; in other sites they took place separately. Some were taught primarily by CBO staff; others were taught by counselors or faculty from the college partners (which often had similar classes for regular, non-PSS students) or took place on the college campus during the first semester of postsecondary.

**Summer Bridge Programs.** A number of sites also created more intensive summer bridge programs, usually in collaboration with their college partners. **Operation Fresh Start** developed a week-long “Learning to Learn Camp” with Madison Area Technical College, its college partner, which provided an intensive on-campus program focused on college success strategies (note-taking, time management, reading strategies, etc.), writing, and college and career planning. **YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School** developed summer bridge programs with two of its college partners. The program developed with the Community College of Philadelphia provides four-weeks of college transition activities built around the College’s “Advanced College Experience” Course. Like the Operation Fresh Start program (on which it was based), the Philadelphia program focuses on college success strategies and first year college planning. The charter school also worked with Thaddeus Stevens College to create a month-long residential college bridge program. YouthBuild students live on campus for the month and take college exploration classes (vocational exploration, college success, etc.) with other Thaddeus Stevens students. **YouthBuild McLean County** developed an intensive summer “boot camp” course, “Skills for the Future,” with its partner, Heartland Community College. The class focused on college behaviors and communications skills, reading and writing skills, and preparation for college placement tests.

**Postsecondary Transition Courses.** At many of the programs, college transition activities at the CBO led into or were supplemented by college success courses that were often a regular feature of the transition programs at the community college partners, though a number of colleges set up special classes for the PSS participants. As noted earlier, students from **YouthBuild Brockton** and **MY TURN** followed their summer bridge program by taking the “College Experience” course in their first semester at Massasoit Community College. That course, required of all students taking more than one developmental education course, aims at helping first-semester students build their knowledge of college resources and the practical skills to help them make the transition to college. **YouthBuild Columbus Community School** students took the “College Success Skills” and “Positive Impact” classes taught by Columbus State Community College staff. While the class is offered to all students at the college, Columbus State faculty brought the class to the community school as part of their partnership. **Metro Atlanta YouthBuild** worked with its college partner, Atlanta Metropolitan College, to provide a combination of customized “Pathways to College Success” seminars and access to the college’s COMPASS test preparation classes. **Portland YouthBuilders** and Portland Community College developed customized “College Success and Survival” courses, along with basic reading and writing classes focused on YouthBuild students. In many cases, the college transition courses on campus, and those provided by college staff through the YouthBuild programs, provided college credits for students who completed them.

### ***Postsecondary Supports***

In addition to enriched academic preparation and college transition support, the “Back on Track” model also calls for at least one year of postsecondary support to help students make the often confusing and difficult transition into the college environment. While the transition programs outlined above are intended to help prepare students for the transition into college and postsecondary training, first-generation college students and those coming from disadvantaged educational backgrounds often face complex challenges once they enter college or training. Those challenges range from the need for additional academic preparation, to lack of knowledge of college rules and procedures, to the need to balance coursework with family and job demands. As staff across the PSS programs readily testify, students struggle with daily questions and decisions that can send them off track without easy access to support.

The PSS partnerships use a variety of strategies to provide such support. **The central strategy for most sites was the continued involvement of CBO staff – counselors, transition coordinators, and others – with students as they graduate from their initial program and enter postsecondary.** At most sites, CBO staff arranged to be at the community college campus at least one or two days a week to meet with students, help students make connections with college resources, and provide counseling and support. In some cases, the colleges provided space and access to a computer and telephone as part of the partnership; in others CBO staff met with students in the library, cafeteria, or wherever they could find a quiet yet accessible place for conversation. It is clear from students, CBO staff, and college partners that this regular face-to-face connection needs to be a key part of the postsecondary support strategy.

CBOs and their college partners built on these basic approaches in a number of ways. At several sites, the site coordinators not only met students at the counseling office, but also tracked them down at their classes to make sure that they saw them regularly. Other sites offered incentives for students to stay in touch and to help them address financial needs. One site provided a gift card each time a student showed up for a counseling appointment; other sites provided transit passes, scholarship money for books, and stipends to help students meet emergency needs. Several sites, including ***Open Meadow, Cypress Hills Development Corporation, and Good Shepherd Services*** set up regular cohort-building activities with their students after they entered postsecondary. Cypress Hills students met on a monthly basis for a mix of workshops and more casual activities; Good Shepherd students met twice each semester for workshops on life skills, career panels, and other education-related topics. Open Meadow students began the year with a retreat and then continued to meet regularly through the year.

Most sites also found ways for CBO staff to access PSS students’ college records, though that often took some time (access to student records provided CBO staff with the capacity to directly assess student progress). At the ***LA Conservation Corps***, for example, program staff members were certified as adjunct faculty, providing them with access to student records. In Boston, ***X-Cel*** and Bunker Hill Community College crafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that provided the program’s staff with access to student records and the ability to talk about students with college faculty. At other sites,

PSS students were asked to sign a waiver giving the college permission to share information with CBO staff. At several of the partnerships, college leadership wrote/emailed faculty and staff to make them aware of the partnership and to ask their cooperation with CBO counselors whose students were in their classes.

CBO and college staff also worked together to introduce students to key contacts in the student services offices on campus (admissions, academic advising, financial aid, etc.) and at the student support centers (tutoring, math or writing support centers, etc.). Often these introductions took place as part of the college transition or bridge programs, with college staff making presentations and students touring the campus to find the different office locations. In some cases, PSS students were linked to specific programs at the colleges that were designed to provide additional student supports. In San Francisco, students from the **Larkin Street Youth Services** PSS program were integrated into activities run by the Guardian Program at San Francisco City College, which provided supportive services for former foster care youth transitioning into postsecondary. **The College Initiative** in New York partnered with City University of NY (CUNY) through the CUNY COPE program (College Opportunity to Prepare for Employment) which provides a variety of counseling and support services for students on the CUNY campuses. All of the New York City PSS programs also worked with the CUNY Start program, which provides academic supports for students across the CUNY campuses.

One of the more sophisticated counseling and support strategies was developed through the partnership between **Youth Development Institute** (YDI), its two PSS partner programs (**Good Shepherd Services** and **Cypress Hills Development Corporation**) and their college partner, New York City College of Technology. The partner organizations established an on-campus case management process in which representatives from all of the organizations met monthly to review PSS student progress, identify issues or concerns, and troubleshoot problems faced by PSS students. The case management group included counseling and advising staff from each organization, but also senior staff from the agencies and the college. According to the participants, the cross-institution conversations made it possible for partners to provide different perspectives on students' progress and have multiple options for addressing issues that arose. Strikingly, the case management group included the Provost of the college, who had been involved in establishing the original partnership with YDI, and the Dean of Student Services. The presence of high-ranking officials meant that the group could look at the issues that arose in terms of their implications for the way the college systems worked for students. According to the Provost, the monthly meetings served as a "learning lab" for her, helping her to understand the needs of students at her institution.

Finally, a number of the PSS sites established mentoring programs to supplement the academic support services provided by community colleges to the general student population. At **The College Initiative**, PSS students were matched with College Initiative alumni mentors who were attending the same CUNY school as the PSS participants and who had completed at least two semesters of college with a 3.0 average or better. They initially met participants at the College Initiative courses and then met regularly over the year to help the new students with the college transition. **X-Cel** established a similar model, pairing X-Cel alumni with current students during the 14 week college transition



program; the pairs then met regularly through the year. Other programs took a more traditional approach to mentoring. At **YouthBuild McLean County**, for example, students were linked with outside mentors through the program's association with groups such as 100 Black Men, Young Business Professionals, or the Women's network at State Farm Insurance (headquartered nearby). The **LA Conservation Corps** combined its tutoring and mentoring functions: students were assigned tutors before the start of college classes and continued to work with them into and through community college so that tutors became both tutor and mentor.

### ***Relationships and Individualized Support***

At the heart of the Back on Track model at all sites were the individual relationships and support provided through the case management, counseling, and other staff at the CBOs. In one way or another, in every program, a staff person, counselor, or "transition coordinator" was responsible for providing counseling and academic support during the program's pre-college stage and usually continued working with and tracking students once they were in postsecondary. In most cases, the transition coordinators/counselors/case managers met with students regularly (sometimes daily or weekly). They worked with students to develop education and career plans; tracked student progress through the education program; helped students with financial aid planning and completion of FAFSA forms; and made connections to resources at the postsecondary institution, including introducing students to college-based advisors, financial aid and admissions staff, tutors, and other resources. They also served as cheerleaders, problem-solvers, disciplinarians, and even (as one put it) "nagging parents" in the ongoing effort to help students stay on track. In all of the programs, all program staff were expected to build individual relationships with their students. The transition coordinator generally served as the point person for that "it takes a village" effort.

The transition coordinator role was, for many programs, where the rubber met the road for the PSS effort. It was often the transition counselor who carried the primary load in convincing students that college was possible, who walked students through the college planning and application process, who served as troubleshooter when problems at school or college arose, and who tracked students down for a conversation when a teacher let them know that a student had missed class or failed to turn in a paper. It was also generally the transition coordinator who built the day-to-day relationships with key college staff and faculty and maintained the program's presence on the college campus. In that regard, the transition coordinator served as the accountability point between CBO and college, working to ensure that the postsecondary institutions were providing students with needed services. While the college partnerships generally depended on relationships at several levels, the transition coordinator was the face of the PSS program on campus and was seen as the point of contact by the college partners.

### **Common Themes**

Within the context of the “Back on Track” model, two common themes were evident across all of the PSS programs:

***First, each program site emphasized the creation of a “college-going culture.”*** Across the board, PSS led to a fundamental shift in philosophy, orientation, and practice at the community-based organizations to college as a goal, with college or postsecondary training introduced at program entry and reinforced throughout. As a reflection of that, all of the sites integrated college planning and transition activities into their programs, including a mix of college counseling, financial aid planning and FAFSA preparation, college orientation activities, and college tours. They also built conversations about college into personal and career counseling, academic courses, and on-the-job work experience.

***The second common theme was the central role of the individual counseling and support functions played by the college transition coordinator,*** or by a combination of counselors, advisors and other staff, in each site. Whatever the program structure, the importance of creating those one-to-one relationships, as well as other peer and participant-staff relationships, was seen as a critical feature of the PSS experience in every site. In interviews with staff and program participants, the idea that “someone cared about me” (participants) or “they need to know that someone cares” (staff) came up almost every time. While the PSS initiative added new, postsecondary-related functions to the role of counselor or case manager at most programs, that core counseling function, and the importance of building relationships between staff and participants, was a central element of the programs before PSS began and continued to be a central theme as the focus shifted to postsecondary.

**Table 3-2: Individual Support Services and Academic Enrichment**

PROGRAM NAME	Individual Support Services			Enriched Academic Support							
	Case Management	Academic Advising	Mentoring*	Tutoring	GED Prep Offered	Credit bearing classes for H.S. Diploma?	H.S./State Test Preparation	Research Papers and Projects	Substantial and increasingly challenging reading and writing	Emphasis on core math skills/ offers college ready math?	Dual Enrollment
<b>Bridge Only</b>											
College Initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	
Larkin Street Youth Services	✓	✓	✓	✓							
X-Cel	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Cypress Hills	✓	✓									
Good Shepherd Services	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	
<b>Enhanced GED</b>											
MY TURN	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Atlanta	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	
YB Brockton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
<b>Alternative/Charter School</b>											
ISUS	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LA Conservation Corps (LACC)	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Open Meadow Alt. School	✓	✓									
YB Columbus	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portland YouthBuilders	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
YB McLean County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Operation Fresh Start	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
YB Philadelphia	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Table 3-3: College Awareness/Preparation**

PROGRAM NAME	College Awareness Classes	Financial Aid Planning	FAFSA Assistance	College/ Campus Orientation Program	College Tours
<b>Bridge Only</b>					
College Initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Larkin Street Youth Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
X-Cel	✓	✓	✓		✓
Cypress Hills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Good Shepherd Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Enhanced GED</b>					
MY TURN	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Atlanta	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Brockton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Alternative/Charter School</b>					
ISUS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LA Conservation Corps (LACC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open Meadow Alt. School	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Columbus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portland YouthBuilders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB McLean County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Operation Fresh Start	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Philadelphia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Table 3-4: Career Preparation and Youth Development Activities**

<b>PROGRAM NAME</b>	<b>Career Counseling/ Awareness</b>	<b>Vocational/ Technical Ed Classes</b>	<b>Internship/ Work Experience/ Apprentice<sup>17</sup></b>	<b>Leadership/ Life Skills Devel.</b>	<b>Financial Literacy</b>	<b>Service- Learning</b>
<b>Bridge Only</b>						
College Initiative	✓			✓		
Larkin Street Youth Services				✓	✓	
X-Cel	✓		✓	✓		
Cypress Hills	✓			✓	✓	
Good Shepherd Services	✓			✓	✓	
<b>GED</b>						
My TURN	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Atlanta	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Brockton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Alternative/Charter Schools</b>						
ISUS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LA Conservation Corps (LACC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open Meadow Alt. School	✓			✓	✓	✓
YB Columbus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portland YouthBuilders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB McLean County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Operation Fresh Start	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
YB Philadelphia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>17</sup> For YouthBuild programs the item relates to work experience/apprenticeship outside YouthBuild. Most YouthBuild programs incorporate work experience into their core program.

## Chapter Four

### BUILDING THE POSTSECONDARY PARTNERSHIPS

*This initiative supports the formal partnership between youth service providers and postsecondary institutions to provide a holistic set of supports that result in postsecondary success. ... Most of all, a successful partnership will come from a commitment to a cooperative learning process and development of programs in collaboration (NYEC RFP).*

One of the key goals for the PSS initiative was the expansion of partnerships between CBOs and community colleges aimed at strengthening the pathways into and through postsecondary education. As the previous section makes clear, the PSS CBOs and community colleges worked together to enhance programs and services, develop new student opportunities and supports, and build working relationships that promised to extend beyond the end of the PSS grants. The nature and structure of the relationships varied widely, ranging from an accommodation of the CBO program (providing space, phones, access to students and faculty) to an active engaged partnership with staff and leaders working jointly on curriculum, transition services, counseling and other supports aimed at improving participant outcomes. In most cases, developing the partnerships took time, with CBOs often struggling to find an appropriate entry point to the college, with staff at both institutions learning about the priorities and requirements of the other, and with all of the partners working to balance high hopes and ambitions with limited resources. Ultimately, both sets of partner institutions (colleges and CBOs) came to see the other as an important resource and that the types of collaborations developed through PSS ultimately allowed both institutions to serve their students more effectively.

#### **Building the PSS Partnerships**

The PSS CBO-college partnerships took shape in a variety of ways, ranging from bottom up “infiltration” of the college (as one person put it) by CBO staff to more top-down partnerships that were promoted and pursued by leadership at the college and CBO. While the partnerships all shared a common goal – to strengthen the transition into and through postsecondary – there was no single approach. As one CBO director put it: “There is no one size fits all. This took a lot of trying and negotiating. It’s a mindset: whatever it takes.”

For many PSS partnerships, the process was one of relatively slow exploration and negotiation following the agreement to submit the PSS grant proposal. **McLean County YouthBuild**, for example, initially targeted a local junior college as a partner, but shifted focus to **Heartland Community College** because it was closer and more affordable. The program struggled to gain administrators’ attention and finally began to gain traction working through the college’s workforce development program. YouthBuild ultimately hired a college faculty member (who had taught YouthBuild students) as a consultant to help review and revise the YouthBuild curriculum and develop a summer transition program. Through that faculty member, the program made connections with other faculty and administrators, which led to a broader partnership.

Other partnerships began with an initial contact and then expanded to more formal relationships. The partnership between **YouthBuild Brockton** and **Massasoit Community College** began, in part, with an existing set of informal relationships between staff at the two institutions (YB staff had worked at the college previously). Through the efforts of the Massasoit staff, they gained the involvement and support of more senior college officials and support for a more formal relationship. As one YouthBuild staffer described it: “We started from the ground and infiltrated.” **Portland YouthBuilders**, which worked with one of the **Portland Community College** campuses, also had worked with college staff previously. As a result of PSS, they began working directly with the Deans of Instruction and Student Development, building relationships at multiple levels. **X-Cel** had worked with admissions and counseling staff at **Bunker Hill Community College** under a previous grant. As a result of the PSS initiative, they made a new connection with the Interim Dean of Student Support and College Pathways who expanded the counseling relationship, provided space for X-Cel on campus, and helped negotiate an MOU that provided access to student records.

Other partnerships benefited from early leadership from senior college officials. The partnership between **Open Meadow** and **Portland Community College’s Cascade Campus** took off with the involvement of the campus President. In that instance, the Executive Director at Open Meadow approached the campus President about developing a partnership. By all reports, the President saw the partnership as an opportunity to expand campus-community connections and quickly signed on, providing campus space for the Open Meadow counselor, arranging access to records, and making college resources (testing center, etc.) readily available to Open Meadow students. As one Open Meadow representative commented, “The support from the President has been critical. He attended one of the cross-site meetings, learned about what other sites were doing, came back and said, ‘Why can’t we do that?’”

At **Columbus YouthBuild**, the former **Columbus State Community College** Provost, who had come out of retirement to serve as the Dean of Community Education and Workforce Development, proved to be the key contact. A YouthBuild supporter who was also on the board of Columbus State Community College arranged a meeting with the Dean and YouthBuild leadership. The Dean became interested enough to visit the YouthBuild program, and grew to be a strong and active supporter. Once he became involved, the partnership broadened, resulting in faculty exchanges and the teaching of courses on the YB site.

The partnership in New York City between **Good Shepherd Services**, **Cypress Hills Development Corporation**, the **Youth Development Institute** (YDI) and **New York City Technical College** (City Tech) grew out of an earlier initiative organized by YDI, a youth-focused policy and program nonprofit. Under the earlier program, YDI brought together a group of college and community-organization representatives to explore ways of strengthening the pathway from community to college in New York City. They continued that effort after the end of the initial grant when YDI received the grant to participate in the PSS initiative, focusing on the partnership between Good Shepherd, Cypress Hills, and City Tech. One of the key steps in building the partnership, YDI representatives suggest, was the creation of a *Partnership Benefits Agreement* rather than a traditional

MOU. Using a process where each partner was required to outline both their roles and what they saw as the benefits of partnership resulted in a conversation and shared understanding, rather than a bare legal document (“It forced partners to date each other for a while.”). One of the major outcomes was the establishment of a formal, collaborative case management process (described previously) involving the college, the CBO partners, and YDI to keep track of the progress of PSS students as they worked their way through City Tech.

While most PSS partnerships have solidified and grown, it is important to recognize that all faced some degree of challenge in the making. Both YouthBuild Columbus and Columbus State Community College recognized the good fortune that led to their partnership. The retired Provost, the initial entry point into the college, noted that he was only able to respond because his part-time, interim status gave him time to take interest in a relatively small scale initiative: “If I was a full-time Provost, they would be a speck on my screen.” At the same time, the YouthBuild Columbus director noted that it took an introduction from a Columbus State trustee to get him in the door. Then, even with an experienced, senior official on board, the partners had to address myriad logistical and administrative challenges – differences in the academic calendars and registration dates, curriculum alignment, gaining approval for college staff to teach on-site at YouthBuild, etc. As one college representative noted, “YouthBuild got us to do things that none of us ever thought we’d be able to do. Everyone is winning, but it takes time.”

Other CBOs reported challenges in finding an appropriate entry point at the college. One CBO leader noted that they had originally approached the college’s TRIO office, thinking they would be an obvious partner, but later discovered that other college offices were more interested in working with them. Another commented that, based on their experience:

*It takes time for the leadership of CBOs to learn about the different pieces within the community colleges and who is most worth investing in to develop partnerships. It took us a while to realize that some parts of colleges don’t even talk regularly with one another... We learned that the college office we originally partnered with was not the right fit, and the partnership had to be re-constituted with another office within the college whose staff were more aligned with the PSS vision.*

The partnerships also had to deal with legal and logistical issues as they tried to connect two different types of institutions. At one site, the college’s rules and regulations made it almost impossible for the CBO to pass grant funds through to the college to pay for added counselors and services: “Giving money to the community colleges has been the hardest part of the grant thus far.” At another, the college representative commented, “We’ve had to make adjustments – for example, in the ways that students enroll, helping staff recognize the value of outreach, finding ways to provide access to student records.” He added, “We are showing our staff how you work with CBOs in a true partnership; how to compromise.” One college partner, who had strongly supported the PSS partnership, noted that as much as the college sees value in the partnership, they might have trouble



expanding it: “Space is an issue, for example. If it’s one program it is workable; if it’s multiple programs, things like space and safety (having people on site who are not employees of the college) can be an issue.” In each instance, it took time, patience, and the “right” people to reach a solution.

Some partnerships got off on the wrong foot due to differences in understanding and expectations. At one site, the CBO partners were frustrated that the college did not readily offer access to space and services and felt that the college had been unresponsive. From the college perspective, the CBO was asking for concessions it did not understand. The college representative said, “I don’t think they understood the college very well at first. For a school this large, their program was small stuff.” The college, he noted, saw itself as a regional institution and was interested in programs that would bring scale and resources – 1000 students rather than 15 or 20. In that context, the PSS initiative was seen as contributing little to the college’s strategic goals while asking for what was perceived as privileged access to college services. In the end, the CBO and college were able to negotiate workable solutions, but it took time and resulted in a more limited partnership than in some other locations.

#### ***Partnership Lessons: A Sense of Shared Benefits and Persistence***

Relationships and partnerships have grown most easily where the community colleges see the partnership with CBOs as furthering a shared mission. The Dean of College Transition services at one of the PSS community colleges made the point simply: “What is in it for the college? We want students to succeed. We have 12,600 students, open enrollment. We want to find way to support as many students as possible – it is part of the college’s philosophy.” The Vice President of Student Development at another college made a similar point: “We are an access institution – we are accustomed to this population.” Noting that his college subscribes to the motto, “Believe, Begin, Become,” he added, “We are not doing anything revolutionary here. We accept these students and can’t push them to the side. We have to deal with every student and problem-solve.” The Vice President of Student Development at a third college made a similar point: “We wanted to address the needs of disconnected youth. [YouthBuild] is the premier program for disconnected youth.” Another college administrator explained his school’s involvement: “We live and die by our mission, and YouthBuild students fit our mission.” The message that distinguished these partnerships was that both the colleges and community-based partners saw PSS participants as “our” students, not “your” students, and both felt accountable for helping them move successfully through postsecondary.

As the partnerships grew, colleges were increasingly likely to recognize and acknowledge the benefits to their institutions. More than one college partner noted that the PSS partnership served as a “laboratory” for their schools, helping them learn about how to better support their students. One senior college official noted: “Disconnected students represent a lot of the students at [our college]. This is an opportunity to see what we can learn that we can implement more broadly, and what are the benefits of connecting to CBOs.” Another college partner observed: “If we don’t change from the practices of the 60’s, we will have trouble educating the coming generations.” As a result of the PSS initiative, he continued, “we are learning about working with at-risk youth more intentionally. We are also beginning to build a broader agenda in [our community] on

what to do to address disconnected youth community-wide. That is one effort that is the result of this initiative.” Another noted, “[Our college] gets a lot of non-college ready students. More work with [our CBO partner] means students who are more college ready. So it’s a real strategic partnership.”

It is important to note that the CBOs’ ability to pay for some college services through their Gates Foundation grants did make a difference, though generally not a pivotal difference. As both college and CBO representatives noted, funding helped to open doors at the college and gain the attention of administrators. It also allowed colleges to expand their services to PSS participants or experiment with new programs (for example, summer bridge programs) without having to make the case inside the college for additional funding. As one CBO director stated: “Being able to pay the college for its services places the community-based organization in a strategic position. The CBO program gets noticed and prioritized. It sets the program apart from those other nonprofit organizations who are just asking for money.”

In the end, those involved in partnership-building emphasized that the keys were to establish strong relationships and to remain persistent in building them. As one program director commented, “It’s about getting the right person engaged. Think about who that should be and be persistent. Keep looking for the person who buys into the mission – not the right title, but a champion.” Another noted that while formal agreements or MOUs were valuable, they had to be more than just a paper document: “Before PSS we had an MOU, but it did not mean much. You need more than an MOU, you need a relationship. An MOU will never be sufficient without a solid relationship.”

### **Impacts on Postsecondary Policies and Practices**

One of the goals of the PSS initiative was to influence the ways in which community colleges provided services – encouraging them to learn from their community-based youth development partners. While the CBOs and community colleges have built solid working relationships in most PSS sites and have developed a variety of collaborative programs and services, the PSS partnerships generally have not led to significant structural changes in college policy and practice in areas like developmental education or student counseling and advising. Where colleges have been engaged in major reforms – for example, rethinking their developmental education or academic advising programs – it is more often as a result of other state or national initiatives targeting community colleges than their partnership with the CBOs.

That is not to say that the PSS initiative has not had an impact on the college partners. As suggested by the comments from college officials in the previous section, the work with community-based organizations has helped community colleges gain a better understanding of their students’ needs and the kinds of supports that would benefit them. A number of community colleges also have begun expanding or replicating some of the programs established through the PSS partnerships -- for example, setting up pathway/college transition classes and summer bridge programs for other organizations and groups of students. The major constraint, as a number of colleges noted, is money. As one official noted, “We at community colleges don’t have the capacity to provide

services for everyone that could benefit.” Another commented that “CBOs can offer services that we can’t – we are not a social services institution.”

As a result, one of the more common impacts from PSS has been the college partners’ expansion of their involvement with other organizations in their communities – to replicate the PSS partnership as a way of expanding the supports they offer students. **Bunker Hill Community College**, for example, has entered into a second PSS partnership with another CBO – a local YouthBuild program that is participating in YouthBuild’s PSS expansion. **Massasoit Community College** has similarly been working to identify other CBOs to incorporate into its bridge programs. The Cascade Campus at **Portland Community College** has begun a partnership with a neighboring high school modeled in part on their experience working with Open Meadow. In Madison, Operation Fresh Start and **Madison Area Technical College** co-sponsored a conference to bring together organizations to explore new ways of collaborating to support community youth.

As one college official explained:

*The PSS experience helped us to see that community-based organizations could do things for our students that we could not.... We can only afford a few counselors for all of our students, and CBOs sometimes have a range of resources that can engage to help out.*

Another commented:

*The biggest thing for our college right now is to identify and work with other CBOs that can provide support services, since our budget to do this is rapidly being cut back. Our campus is now looking to other CBOs to see if they could provide similar services as [our PSS partner].*

A third noted:

*We need more CBOs to pool our resources with. There are many CBOs in this area with similar missions and visions [to our PSS partner]. Foundations should promote groups of CBOs to work together with each other and colleges to become more cost-effective in supporting our students.*

In retrospect, the goal of transforming community colleges through their partnerships with community-based organizations was overly optimistic. As one of the college partners noted, the small numbers of PSS students represented “a drop in the bucket” for colleges serving thousands of students, and the funds available through the PSS grants, though helpful, were similarly not enough to prompt the colleges to engage in more systemic change.

At the same time, the PSS partnerships have helped raise the colleges’ awareness of their students’ needs and, equally important, of the value of partnering with community-based organizations as a viable strategy for helping more of their students succeed. In doing so, the PSS initiative has helped to raise awareness of the contributions CBOs can make in preparing and supporting students through postsecondary, which in turn creates opportunities for and openness to new partnerships in the future.

## Chapter Five THE PSS INTERMEDIARY ROLE

*To what extent, and in what ways, have the intermediaries supported these partnerships? What is the unique value-add of their role in promoting partnerships? (Gates Foundation Evaluation RFP 2009)*

The work at the local level in the PSS initiative was greatly enhanced by the intermediary structure that framed the initiative and provided key supports for the sites – in fact, it can be argued that the PSS initiative as a whole would not have achieved its level of success without the key roles played by the partner organizations. Between them, the intermediary partners – JFF, NYEC and YouthBuild USA – provided valuable information, resources and supports for the local programs and partnerships, giving them direction, access to ideas and strategies, and building a sense of shared vision and commonality of purpose. At the most fundamental level, the intermediaries helped to ensure that their sites would not each have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ as they build their local partnerships. But equally important, through the cross-site meetings and through outreach and communications efforts, the intermediaries began to build a community of practice and a sense of mission that served as a critical source of support as they moved their organizations in new directions. Each of the intermediaries has, in turn, incorporated the goals of postsecondary access and completion into their own missions and programs and is likely to continue to work in the field for the longer term.

The Leadership Team structure that brought the intermediary partners together on a regular basis, along with the evaluation partner (Brandeis University), funding partners (Gates Foundation, Nellie Mae, Open Society Foundations and later New Profit, Inc.) and additional program intermediaries (the Corps Network) also brought added value to the initiative. While the intermediaries could have done much of their work without that central collaborative body, the Leadership Team provided an opportunity to develop a common vision, create shared tools, and coordinate public awareness and advocacy efforts in ways that ultimately benefited the initiative as a whole and extended its impact.

The intermediaries’ contributions fall into three broad categories: creating the model, building capacity, and spreading the word about the initiative.

### **Creating the Model**

One of the core challenges in developing the PSS initiative was to create a common model or approach to guide the sites and define a core set of ‘best practices.’ As part of its role as the PSS ‘managing partner’ and knowledge development arm, Jobs for the Future played a lead role in developing and refining the Back on Track model used throughout the initiative, as well as working with NYEC and YouthBuild USA to integrate that model into their work with the PSS sites. As JFF staff outlined in an interview, most of the existing college transition models focused on school-based settings. Thus there was a need to synthesize the lessons from those models, translate them for a new context, and develop a coherent model and language that was applicable to the new CBO/College partnerships. As part of their initial year of work on the initiative, JFF staff

visited programs around the country (including programs that were participating in the initiative), reviewed the existing literature on college access and completion, and outlined the basic elements of the three-part Back on Track model that guided much of the initiative. JFF, NYEC and YouthBuild USA then worked together to refine the model and integrate it into the ongoing capacity-building work with the sites. Over the course of the initiative, JFF continued to build resources around the model as part of their effort to create products that would help a broader audience adopt the approach. These included publications and online tools and resources aimed at helping programs assess their own postsecondary efforts and estimate the costs of building a “Back on Track” approach into their own program.<sup>18</sup>

### **Building Capacity**

While JFF’s initial design work established the framework for much of the initiative, that design work was brought to the sites through the partners’ capacity-building efforts, which included both cross-site meetings and one-to-one support from intermediary staff. Both NYEC and YouthBuild USA, with assistance from JFF, conducted twice-a-year meetings that brought sites together to attend workshops and share ideas and resources. Usually, the meetings took place at a PSS site and included site visits and staff presentations from the local partnership. Those meetings were then supplement by NYEC and YouthBuild USA staff working with their sites through regular site visits, telephone call, conference calls and webinars. The goal across the organizations was, in the words of one partner, “to provide convening with a purpose, to educate, to build capacity, through a collaborative process with the sites.”

Both college and CBO leaders pointed to the cross-site meetings as one of the most valuable components of the PSS initiative. For many of them, the meetings provided an opportunity to gain added insight into the three-part Back on Track model, to share strategies, successes, and challenges from other sites, and to build a community of practice with others attempting to implement the same model.

For the CBOs, the cross-site meetings were prime opportunities to learn, gather new ideas, and see their work in context. As one director said, “We tried to take as many people as possible to the convenings. These gatherings are where we’ve pushed things forward in the initiative.” Others noted that the meetings “created an environment for peer learning.” “It was reassuring,” one CBO director observed, “to know that other CBOs across the country were having similar experiences.” The meetings “helped us to remember that we are not alone,” and “helped confirm we are on the right track.” As one regular attendee observed, “I came back from the convenings so inspired!”

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<sup>18</sup> The Back on Track resources from JFF are available through the Back on Track website: <http://www.backontrackdesigns.org>. Two of the major tools developed through the initiative are a “Back on Track Self-Assessment Survey” that helps local programs assess their existing efforts and links them to resources for strengthening each phase of the model; and a Back on Track Calculator that helps programs estimate the costs of implementing the Back on Track model at their sites.

From early on, the PSS organizations encouraged the sites to include their college partners in the teams attending the cross-site meetings, a strategy that proved to be very effective as a way of engaging the colleges and moving their partnerships forward. For the community college partners, the cross-site meetings were a chance to learn more about the initiative and their partner organizations and to hear about strategies being developed in other communities. As a college administrator working with one of the YouthBuild sites noted, “the conferences gave me a broader understanding and appreciation for YouthBuild and the PSE initiative. It also helped me realize that we were not the only ones facing this issue.”

Many who attended the cross-site meetings were able to point to specific approaches or strategies that they had learned about and acted on through the meetings or through periodic conference calls. One CBO director recalled learning about the summer bridge program run by one of the partnerships: “I hadn’t thought about a bridge program until we visited [this college]. A light bulb went off in my head.” Others mentioned learning about mentoring program strategies, strategies for engaging college faculty, online learning tools, and strategies for promoting a “college culture” among their youth.

Sites also pointed to the one-on-one support and regular conference calls with the intermediaries as another valuable source of assistance and support. For the NYEC sites, NYEC staff conducted regular site visits and organized monthly conference calls and webinars highlighting one or another of the programs or common issues. The calls were seen as another opportunity for shared learning and networking. The site visits and one-to-one calls with NYEC were also seen as valuable opportunities for reflection and advice, with CBO staff noting that the NYEC program staff were “good at asking critical questions” and sharing resources through the calls. As the data from the reporting system became available, NYEC also conducted data consultations with many of the sites to review program specific data, discuss potential uses of the data (program improvement, communications, sustainability), and look at ways in which the sites could increase their use of data over the long-term. Finally, NYEC also created a weekly email newsletter for the PSS sites that highlighted information and resources related to postsecondary education.

YouthBuild USA also conducted regular conference calls and visits with their sites and provided sites with “coaches” who worked with sites one-on-one on program design and curriculum. The support from individual YouthBuild staff was seen as particularly helpful. Virtually all of the YouthBuild sites considered the role played by the YouthBuild PSS initiative director as invaluable. As one director noted, he “was the best coach we have ever had because he **listens**, asks great questions, pushes us!” Because of its established training capacity, YouthBuild USA was also able to leverage its PSS-specific training by bringing PSS site representatives to its leadership meetings and bringing representatives of PSS and other-related YouthBuild initiatives together for joint conferences and workshops. In that regard, YouthBuild USA provides a strong example of how an intermediary’s broader organizational capacity can enhance the intermediary role, and the intermediary role can impact the broader organization.

YouthBuild and NYEC also both established youth-led advisory groups for the initiative with the goal of providing a vehicle for youth voice in the Initiative. YouthBuild's VOICES (Views On Improving Credential & Education Success) student advisory council was created in 2008, and over the course of the initiative VOICES members met for monthly conference calls, served as an advisory group for YouthBuild USA and the PSS sites, made regular presentations and participated in workshops at cross-site meetings, and took part in presentations to outside groups about the PSS experience. According to YouthBuild staff the VOICES members added a critical perspective to the Initiative that informed and influenced policy and program design. NYEC, in turn established their Student Leaders Group (SLG) in early 2012, building in part on the YouthBuild experience. While the initial focus of the NYEC student group was to prepare a student-led workshop for the July 2012 convening for NYEC PSS sites, as with YouthBuild's VOICES, the broad goal was to provide students with leadership and civic engagement opportunities as part of the PSS process.

Jobs for the Future worked directly with the PSS sites less frequently than NYEC and YouthBuild USA, working instead with NYEC and YouthBuild USA on the convenings and other capacity-building efforts. However, JFF did provide direct assistance to sites through workshops at the cross-site meetings, coordination of three virtual working groups (on data, curriculum and instruction, and transition counseling) and also through the *Counseling to Careers* (CTC) program, one of the major products JFF developed under the PSS initiative. CTC provided training, curriculum, and tools for school, CBO and college counseling staff on the use of labor market data and other information to inform the career and postsecondary counseling process. While aimed at a broad audience, JFF designed CTC in part based on piloting and feedback from PSS sites and trained PSS counselors on the program. Several CBO partners cited Counseling to Careers as one of the types of resources that were uniquely available to them as a result of their PSS involvement.

### **Spreading the Word**

The major focus of the initiative partners' work was on implementing PSS through the local partnerships; however, another goal was to build a broader awareness of the PSS initiative and the value of the PSS approach. Over the course of the initiative, PSS partners worked independently and collaboratively through the Leadership Team structure to expand awareness beyond the PSS grantees to other members of the NYEC and YouthBuild USA networks and to organizations and networks beyond the initiative. The results of those efforts were mixed. While NYEC and YouthBuild have worked to integrate postsecondary access and completion into the work of their respective networks, and JFF has begun working with school districts around the Back on Track model, efforts to promote a broader awareness and support among key constituencies (for example, community college networks) and policy makers have been more limited and less successful. The Leadership Team's external efforts have resulted in the creation of a set of common messages and tools that all have continued to use in promoting the PSS approach to other groups, but it is clear that a continued effort is needed to make the PSS model more visible in the education and policy community.

In terms of dissemination within their respective networks, both YouthBuild USA and NYEC worked, particularly in the later years of the grants, to raise awareness of the PSS model and support its adoption by other network members. YouthBuild USA actively pursued expansion of the PSS model among YouthBuild programs by seeking additional grant funds, and in 2011 expanded its PSS efforts to include twelve new sites, five funded by the Open Society Foundations and seven funded through grants from New Profit, Inc., and the federal Social Innovation Fund grant program. As noted earlier, YouthBuild USA also promoted the link between the PSS program and its other educational initiatives by including PSS sites in its annual instructional leadership training, combining PSS cross-site meetings with the annual meeting of its National Schools Initiative (NSI) programs, and integrating PSS-related workshops into the national YouthBuild Directors meeting and conferences with the Department of Labor. YouthBuild USA also organized a learning community among the nine Department of Labor-funded YouthBuild programs located on community college campuses to share lessons from the initiative.<sup>19</sup> In 2012, YouthBuild USA organized many of the lessons learned from its sites with a set of detailed planning tools in a guide for YouthBuild programs: *Creating Postsecondary Partnerships that Work: A Guide from YouthBuild USA*.<sup>20</sup> As noted in the introduction to the guide, the purpose is “to help YouthBuild programs pursue, develop, and sustain partnerships with postsecondary institutions” with the ultimate goal of helping to prepare more students for postsecondary enrollment and success.

NYEC also began highlighting the postsecondary efforts within its membership network through working groups, conference sessions, and publications. In March 2012, NYEC launched a PSI (Postsecondary Initiative) Working Group at its National Members Forum with the goal of meeting quarterly (in person and by telephone) to share “the learnings from the initiative in an effort to broaden the impact of the PSI across the NYEC member network.” NYEC also began to develop policy briefs and reports linked to the postsecondary initiative effort, with the first major product, *Promoting Postsecondary Success of Court-Involved Youth: Lessons from the NYEC Postsecondary Success Pilot*, released in May 2013.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in 2013, NYEC transitioned its weekly email newsletter on postsecondary issues to a monthly newsletter (*Expanding Education Options*) with a broader distribution to its membership.

There were two major efforts to promote awareness of the PSS initiative and its lessons outside of the partner networks: a series of Washington, DC events in November, 2011 and a press event organized in conjunction with the Los Angeles programs in September 2012. Both were coordinated through the Leadership Team and represented collaborative efforts to create a common message and leverage the influence of the organizations involved in the initiative. The DC event included a briefing aimed at Congressional and federal agency staff at the Capitol Visitors Center followed by a day-

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<sup>19</sup> One notable aspect of YouthBuild’s expansion efforts was its use of a mix of public and private funding to support program innovation.

<sup>20</sup> The guide and tools are available online at: <https://youthbuild.org/knowledge-bank/creating-postsecondary-partnerships-work-guide-youthbuild-usa>.

<sup>21</sup> The report and executive summary are available online at: <http://www.nyec.org/page.cfm?pageID=384>.



long “Learning Exchange” conference that brought together representatives from all of the PSS sites, plus invited representatives from foundations, higher education organizations, and national nonprofit groups, approximately 150 participants in total. The press event the following September (2012) was similarly designed to highlight the PSS programs and partners in the Los Angeles area and included presentations by local program and college representatives, the Gates Foundation, and students from the initiative.

Neither of these events generated the hoped-for level of interest among the press or policy makers. However, both served as valuable organizing points for the PSS partners in developing their messages about the importance of postsecondary access and completion and the Back on Track model. As part of the Washington, DC event, JFF developed a policy paper highlighting Back on Track and the early PSS results, which was distributed at the Washington briefing and Learning Exchange, and also used in subsequent meetings with a number of federal agencies.<sup>22</sup> The Los Angeles press event similarly prompted creation of a two-page “Fact Sheet” providing a brief overview of the initiative and data on student outcomes through 2011, which has also been distributed widely as part of the initiative’s ongoing training and promotion efforts.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Leadership Team Role**

As the foregoing suggested, the Leadership Team structure, which brought the key initiative partners together on a regular basis for joint planning and collaboration, provided an additional dimension to the initiative. The PSS partners were able to develop a much more integrated approach to PSS than would likely have been the case otherwise, with staff from the partners working together on the design of each group’s cross-site meetings, outreach to outside groups and agencies, and the development of public materials. Major products like JFF’s Counseling to Careers program and its online assessment and finance tools were created in cooperation with staff from NYEC and YouthBuild USA and their sites, and YouthBuild USA and NYEC both drew heavily on JFF staff for advice and assistance in developing their training and products. The Leadership Team structure also made possible the development of a common reporting system for the initiative, which was developed by Brandeis through a working group involving all of the partners. The system has provided data on PSS participants, services, and outcomes and is being used to document the initiative’s effectiveness. Without the common reporting system, it is unlikely that the partners would have had the capacity to make any meaningful statements about the results of PSS across all of the sites.

By including both the funding partners and the initiative evaluators alongside the program partners, the Leadership Team structure also brought a variety of perspectives into the regular planning and management discussions that took place over the course of

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<sup>22</sup> Adria Steinberg and Cheryl Almeida. *Pathway to Recovery: Implementing a Back on Track Through College Model*. [Boston]: Jobs for the Future. 2011, revised 2012. Available at: <http://backontrackdesigns.org/sites/default/files/Pathway%20to%20Recovery.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> *Postsecondary Success Initiative Fact Sheet: Supporting Low-Income Youth To and Through Postsecondary Education, Careers, and Community Leadership*. Postsecondary Success Initiative. September 2012. The fact sheet will be updated in September 2013 using data through 2012.

the initiative. The presence of the initiative funders at the Leadership Team meetings meant that their views and priorities were represented in the planning discussions. But it also meant that they developed a more thorough and appreciative understanding of the work being carried out than would have been the case if they were less involved. The involvement of national funders on the Leadership Team also created opportunities to make connections to other groups and initiatives that were operating on related tracks. The presence of the evaluation partners at the table similarly brought an “outside” perspective to the team, and the observations of the evaluators and the data they provided helped to inform the discussions of the initiative’s progress and the efforts to disseminate information about its outcomes.

Finally, the Leadership Team structure provided a context and vehicle for pursuing the expansion of the initiative to other partners. Over the course of the initiative, the Open Society Foundations joined the team as it brought its resources to the initiative, as did New Profit, Inc., a major funder of YouthBuild’s additional PSS sites. The Leadership Team also served as a means of integrating the Corps Network into the PSS initiative when the Network was funded to develop five PSS sites among its members. Through the Leadership Team, Corps Network staff accessed information, received help in developing training and technical assistance to the sites, and became participants in the common outreach and data reporting efforts.

One area in which the Leadership Team could have been more effective was in outreach and awareness-raising to the broader education and policy communities. While there were regular discussions about raising awareness of PSS and its lessons with the community college and college reform networks, the Leadership Team was never able to arrive at a consistent strategy for outreach and public awareness. The reasons for this are not clear: it may be that it was too early in the initiative; that there was not available time and energy given the demands of managing the sites; that the right people were not in the room (the Team was primarily comprised of representatives with program as opposed to communications or outreach expertise); or that the partners had other networking and policy agendas that took priority. Whatever the reason, this is one area in which there was an opportunity to leverage the joint influence and capacity of the partners that did not take place. As such, there is still a need for a collaborative effort among the partners to raise awareness of the PSS effort.

Ultimately, the initiative partners, individually and through the Leadership Team structure, provided much of the glue that held the PSS initiative together, providing an increased opportunity for capacity building, shared learning, and outreach. As several of the partners noted in interviews, “a project like this will not work without an intermediary. You can’t do this one program or one site at a time – there’s no capacity building, no learning community.” That the initiative partners were able to work effectively as intermediaries is one of the major reasons that PSS was able to accomplish as much as it has.

## Chapter Six

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE EARLY PSS INITIATIVE OUTCOMES

While data on longer-term outcomes such as college completion are not yet available, early results suggest that the PSS model has been successful in increasing the numbers of educationally disadvantaged or disconnected youth who make it into and persist through the first year of postsecondary education or training. Nearly three-quarters of the youth who entered programs without a GED or high school diploma gained one through the program, and half of all those who entered PSS programs went on to enter college or postsecondary training. Of those who went to college, 70% were reported as enrolled for two semesters or more. These results compare favorably with data on community college students from a number of national studies. Given that participants in PSS came from particularly challenging personal and educational backgrounds, their degree of success compared to community college students nationally is striking.

#### The PSS Data Reporting System

As part of the PSS Leadership Team's interest in documenting the PSS process and its outcomes, the initiative partners worked with the Brandeis University evaluation team to develop and implement a common reporting system across all of the PSS sites.

Developed through a working group process that included representatives from local sites and the PSS partner organizations, the data system was designed to collect consistent, individual-level data on participant characteristics, program services received, and interim and final outcomes through the use of a common set of data elements and definitions. The system was implemented at the beginning of 2011, with data from the sites collected twice a year (covering the periods from January through June and July through December). All fifteen of the initial PSS sites participated in the data collection process, and as additional sites have joined the initiative, they have begun providing data on their programs as well.<sup>24</sup> While the partners have been responsible for collecting the data from their own sites and have carried out their own analyses, the Brandeis evaluation team has been responsible for combining the data across the initiative as a whole for public reporting purposes. Table 6-1 provides an overview of the elements of the reporting system. The rest of the chapter summarizes findings from the reporting system data (in the areas of high school completion and postsecondary entry and postsecondary success) and compares the reporting system data to national data.

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<sup>24</sup> The system was implemented differently at NYEC and YouthBuild. For YouthBuild sites, the new data elements of the reporting system were added to YouthBuild USA's existing national reporting system, Websta\_Q. PSS sites were asked to complete additional data entry modules as part of their regular, quarterly reporting. NYEC sites provided the data individually through a common spreadsheet template, providing an updated spreadsheet for each report. NYEC added two sites midway through the initiative, both are participating in the data reporting system. The Corps Network also began collecting data in 2012 for its five sites.

**Table 6-1: PSS Data Reporting System Elements**

Participant Characteristics	Services	Outcomes
<p><b>Characteristics at Entry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Demographics</b> (Date of birth, gender, race/ethnicity, primary language, 1<sup>st</sup> generation college, parent status)</li> <li>• <b>Education</b> (Diploma/GED, baseline reading/math level, educational goal)</li> <li>• <b>Employment history</b> (current employment, hours)</li> <li>• <b>Barriers</b> (homeless, disability, criminal record, court-involved, other significant barriers)</li> </ul> <p><b>Updated at major transition points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent status (i.e., became parent during program)</li> <li>• Homeless</li> <li>• Court Involved</li> </ul>	<p><b>Individualized Program Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Case Management</b> (participated, provider, avg. frequency, avg. hours)</li> <li>• <b>Academic Advising</b> (participated, provider, avg. frequency, hours)</li> <li>• <b>Mentoring</b> (participated, avg. hours)</li> <li>• <b>Tutoring</b> (participated, avg. hours)</li> <li>• <b>Financial supports</b> (type received, dollars)</li> <li>• <b>Employment</b> (<i>outside of program</i>) (Employment status, avg. hours)</li> </ul> <p><b>Program Activities/Components</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pre-College Academic Skills Instruction/College-Ready Instruction</b> (GED, high school classes, test prep, research papers/projects, dual enrollment, other academic prep)</li> <li>• <b>Postsecondary Academic Support</b> (Academic support center programs, other academic support)</li> <li>• <b>College Preparation/Transition</b> (College awareness, college tours, financial aid planning, college bridge program, college orientation, exposure to non-college PSE, other college prep)</li> <li>• <b>Career Preparation Activities</b> (Career awareness, vocational/technical classes, internship, other career prep)</li> <li>• <b>Other Academic/Youth Development Services</b> (Leadership/ personal skills development, life skills development, financial literacy, cohort-building program, community service/service-learning, other youth development activities.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Secondary Progress/Skill Gains</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math/Reading Levels</li> <li>• Receipt of GED/HS Diploma</li> </ul> <p><b>Postsecondary Application and Enrollment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of FAFSA</li> <li>• Applications/acceptances,</li> <li>• College Enrollment (college name, type, full/part-time)</li> <li>• Non-college postsecondary (program name, type, duration)</li> </ul> <p><b>College Entry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date entered</li> <li>• Placement test scores (reading, writing, math)</li> <li>• Placed out of developmental courses at entry</li> </ul> <p><b>College Progress</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credits at beginning of semester</li> <li>• Courses taken/completed</li> <li>• Completed developmental education English/math requirements</li> <li>• Total credits earned/required for graduation</li> </ul> <p><b>College Completion/Transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfer or Dropout</li> <li>• Degree received/Field of Study</li> </ul> <p><b>Non-College Postsecondary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training Hours</li> <li>• Certificate Received</li> </ul> <p><b>Education-Related Financial Aid</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial aid received (dollars, type)</li> <li>• Pell grant received</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-College/Training Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entry into Employment</li> <li>• Further Education</li> </ul>

### **High School Completion and Postsecondary Entry**

As Tables 6-2 and 6-3 show, the early reporting system results indicate that the PSS initiative has been successful in moving program participants into and through postsecondary education. While it is too early to see many final outcomes (i.e., degree attainment), ***nearly three-quarters of those who entered PSS programs without a diploma or GED attained a high school credential, and more than half of all of the young people who entered the local PSS programs enrolled in some form of postsecondary education.***

Table 6-2 shows a core set of outcomes related to attainment of a high school diploma or GED and entry into postsecondary education. The tables are based on data for over 1900 participants: 537 young people who entered the NYEC programs prior to January 2011 and 1392 youth who entered the YouthBuild programs prior to June 2011. The data covers participant progress through December 2012.

As noted in Chapter 2 (Table 2-3), almost all YouthBuild participants (99.7%) entered YouthBuild without a high school diploma or GED. Participants in the NYEC programs included those with diploma or GED at entry (73.4%) and those who needed to earn a diploma or GED through the program (26.6%). For PSS as a whole, 78.6% of participants entered without a diploma or GED. Of those entering without a high school credential, most started with significant educational challenges: 53.9% tested below an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level at entry and 70.7% tested below the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in math. Among those who eventually enrolled in college, 59% or more were first generation college-goers.

***High School Completion.*** Among participants who entered without a high school credential, nearly three-quarters (73%) acquired a diploma or GED through the PSS program by the end of 2012. Roughly half of the participants (48%) gained a diploma, and another 26.5% passed their GED. Reflecting the integration of academic and occupational education in most PSS programs, a substantial percentage of participants – just over 60% -- also completed some form of vocational or technical certificate as part of their program. When academic degrees and vocational certificates are combined, over 80% of those who entered the PSS program acquired some form of secondary degree or certificate.<sup>25</sup>

***Entry into Postsecondary.*** The majority of PSS participants went on to enter college and other forms of postsecondary training, results that compare favorably with the national data for college going among similar students. Overall, 50% of the young people who entered PSS programs entered college or other postsecondary education by the end of 2012, the latest point at which data is available. The rate of entry into postsecondary

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<sup>25</sup> As noted in the tables, the data exclude NYEC participants who were reported to still be in academic preparation and YouthBuild participants who were reported as “Active” (i.e., those who had not yet completed their educational programs). The YouthBuild data also excludes students who left the program under the “Other Exit” classification, usually students who left for reasons beyond their control, such as moving out of town with their families. Results do include participants who entered the program but terminated (voluntarily or otherwise) without completing.

education is substantially higher for those who entered the program with a high school credential or who successfully earned one in the program: 55% of those youth had entered college by December 2012 and 61% had entered college or some other form of postsecondary training or education.

As Table 6-2 shows, there were substantial differences in the results for those youth who entered with a high school credential in hand and those who had to earn a credential in their programs. Of those participants who entered PSS programs with a high school credential (that is, those who were largely served through the shorter-term bridge programs), over 96% entered college, and an additional 2.6% entered other types of postsecondary education. The PSS programs were extraordinarily successful in connecting that group of low income, generally first-generation college youth into postsecondary education.<sup>26</sup>

Among those who entered PSS without a high school diploma or GED, the rate of entry into postsecondary education was substantially lower, but still impressive given the educational challenges those young people faced. Just under 40% (37.5%) of those who entered without a high school credential went on to college or postsecondary training by December 2012. Thirty-one percent (31%) of those participants entered college and 12% participated in other postsecondary training (a small percentage of students reported both types of postsecondary education). It is important to note that these figures include those participants who dropped out of their programs without completing their high school degree. Among those who entered without a high school credential and successfully earned a diploma or GED, 40% went on to enter college by the end of 2012 and just under half (48%) went to college or other forms of postsecondary training.

Finally, it is important to note that many of those who completed their initial program but did not go directly on to postsecondary instead entered the labor market. Among YouthBuild participants, for whom detailed post-program placement data is available, the majority of program completers who did not go on to college were placed in jobs. Overall, 82% of the YouthBuild participants who completed the program and earned a diploma or GED went on to postsecondary education or employment.

### **Postsecondary Success**

While it is too soon for definitive data on college persistence and completion, the early results from the reporting system indicate that many PSS participants who enrolled in college are making their way through developmental education, accumulating credits, and persisting beyond their first year of college.

**Full and Part-Time Status.** Table 6-3 provides data on key progress measures for those PSS participants who enrolled in college, a total of 811 participants by the end of 2012. Of those, just under 60% began college as full-time students, and at the time of last report, two-thirds (67%) were reported as full-time enrollees.

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<sup>26</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, students who entered PSS with a high school credential in hand also tended to have higher level math and reading skills.

**Developmental Education.** While information on developmental education status is missing for many participants, the available data suggest that substantial proportions of the PSS college enrollees have either tested out of developmental education at college entry or completed the developmental education requirements by the end of 2012.<sup>27</sup> Overall, 41% of the PSS college enrollees tested out of developmental reading or writing at entry into college, though substantially fewer (24%) tested out of developmental math.

Once in college, a growing percentage of PSS students have been able to complete their developmental Math and English requirements. By the end of 2012, 42% of the PSS college students had tested out of or completed developmental math, and more than half (53%) had completed developmental English requirements. For students in their second year of college, the figures were substantially higher: 59% of students with three or more semesters in school had completed their developmental math requirements, and 71% had completed the requirements for English. These are conservative estimates that include students with missing information in the calculations; more complete information might show a higher rate.

**Credit Accumulation.** The data also show that just over half (55%) of the PSS college participants have begun to earn college credits, with the proportion earning credits rising to 73% among those who had been enrolled for at least a year (three semesters or more). While most of those with credits have a relatively small number (between 1 and 12 credits), 22% of those who have been in school at least a year have 25 credits or more. Here, too, the percentages are based on all college enrollees, with those reporting no data on credit accumulation included as a “0” in the calculations. With more complete data it is likely that an even higher percentage of students would report at least some credit accumulation.

**Persistence.** Finally, the early data suggests that PSS students are persisting in college. A large majority of students – roughly 70% -- have enrolled in college for two semesters or more, and nearly half (48.5%) have been enrolled for three semesters or more, suggesting persistence into a second year of college. As discussed below, these figures are comparable to national persistence results for similar groups of students.

### **PSS and the National Data**

Direct comparisons between PSS students and national data on community college are difficult, since few of the national studies break out results in ways that match the characteristics of PSS participants (school history, reading levels, first generation college, etc.). That said, where comparisons can be made, the PSS results appear to compare favorably with the data from a number of national studies. Given that participants in PSS came from particularly challenging personal and educational backgrounds, their degree of success compared to community college students nationally is striking.

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<sup>27</sup> Gathering data on developmental education status and credit attainment was a major challenge for a number of sites. In some cases the problem was one of definitions (colleges differed on how they identified courses and assessed course credits), in others sites simply had difficulty accessing student records on a regular basis.

In comparisons with other GED recipients, PSS students were as, and in some cases more likely to enter college than GED recipients nationally. According to *Crossing the Bridge*, a national study of GED participants by the GED Testing Service, 43% of students who passed the GED nationally, and 47% of those aged 16-24, enrolled in a two- or four-year college. In comparison, 55% of the PSS participants generally and 40% of those who completed their high school diploma or GED in the program enrolled in college (61% entered some form of postsecondary education or training).<sup>28</sup>

PSS participants also appear to compare well to GED students in terms of their in-college experience. PSS students were substantially more likely to enroll as full-time students in their first year of college than GED recipients nationally: 59% for PSS vs. 40% for GED students nationally. PSS students also persisted in college at a slightly higher rate than the GED students in the national study, with 70% of PSS students in college for two semesters or more vs. 67% nationally.

It is more difficult to compare the performance of PSS students with national data in terms of developmental education or credit accumulation. National data for these measures is limited and generally includes all community college students, rather than those entering through alternative pathways. That said, the comparisons are encouraging.

In terms of developmental education, the best national estimates come from studies from the Community College Research Center (CCRC), which estimates that 59% of community college students are referred to developmental education in math and 33% to developmental education in reading at entry into college.<sup>29</sup> The initial PSS data indicates a somewhat higher rate of referral to developmental education, with 24% of PSS students testing out of developmental math (i.e., 76% needing at least some math remediation) and 42% testing out of developmental reading (or, 58% requiring remediation).

CCRC also estimates that 33% of developmental math students complete the developmental math requirements within three years and 46% complete developmental English, leading to an estimate that about 60% of community college students ultimately test out of or complete developmental math and 80% test out of or complete developmental English. Here, the results for PSS students compare favorably. As noted above, among the PSS students enrolled for more than a year, 59% had tested out of or

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<sup>28</sup> Jizhi Zhang et al. 2011. *Crossing the Bridge: GED Credentials and Postsecondary Educational Outcomes, Year Two Report*. [Washington, DC]: GED Testing Service, American Council on Education. It is worth noting that only 30% of the GED passers nationally entered college within a year of passing the GED. It seems likely that a substantially higher percentage of the PSS participants made a more direct transition.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Bailey et al. "Student Progression Through Developmental Sequences in Community Colleges." Community College Research Center, *CCRC Brief*, Number 45. September 2010. The CCRC data is based primarily on data collected from colleges participating in the Achieving the Dream initiative.



completed developmental math and 71% had completed their developmental English requirements, figures close to the CCRC national data. It is important to note that the CCRC report was based on student records covering three years after entry into community college and include all students in the participating schools without breaking out results for those entering with a GED vs. a high school diploma. As more PSS students make their way through school, and as data collection on PSS students improves, those percentages could increase.

There is little readily comparable data on credit accumulation. Data from the Achieving the Dream project (ATD), a group of over 160 community colleges working to improve college completion, shows that 31% of first year students at the ATD schools earned 20 credits or more during their first year of college.<sup>30</sup> Though not directly comparable, the percentages for PSS students are substantially lower, with only 15% of students overall and 22% of students with more than a year of school reporting more than 25 credits. At the same time, the ATD schools have been working for some time to improve college completion rates, and without more data on who the ATD students are and the relative proportion of full and part-time students, it is difficult to make a more direct comparison.

**Overall, the early results from the PSS initiative are encouraging.** The local partnerships have been successful in helping participants gain needed high school credentials, in making the transition into higher education, and in making early progress in their community college careers. While more data is needed, the early results suggest that the programs and partnerships developed through PSS are making a difference for the large majority of their participating youth.

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<sup>30</sup> Achieving the Dream. "Data Notes." Vol. 6, no. 6. November/December 2011. Available at: [http://achievingthedream.org/resources/newsletter/data\\_notes](http://achievingthedream.org/resources/newsletter/data_notes).

**Table 6-2: High School Completion and Entry into Postsecondary**

Outcomes	GED or Diploma at Entry		No GED/ Diploma at Entry		All PSS Participants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>All Participants<sup>1</sup></b>	412	21.4%	1517	78.6%	1929	100.0%
<b>Credential at Entry<sup>2</sup></b>						
Diploma	303	71.0%			303	15.7%
GED	124	29.0%			124	6.4%
No Credential at Entry			1517	100.0%	1517	78.6%
<b>High School/GED Completion</b>						
N of Participants without Credential <sup>3</sup>			1430		1430	
High School Diploma			688	48.1%	688	48.1%
GED			379	26.5%	379	26.5%
<b>Diploma or GED</b>			<b>1044</b>	<b>73.0%</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>73.0%</b>
Vocational/ Technical Certificate			900	62.9%	900	62.9%
<b>Diploma/ GED or Certificate</b>			<b>1193</b>	<b>83.4%</b>	<b>1193</b>	<b>83.4%</b>
No Diploma/GED Completed			237	16.6%	237	16.6%
<b>Entered Postsecondary - All participants<sup>3</sup></b>						
Enrolled in College	377	96.2%	434	30.5%	811	44.6%
Enrolled in Other Postsecondary	10	2.6%	169	11.9%	179	9.9%
Enrolled any Postsecondary	380	96.9%	534	37.5%	914	50.3%
No Postsecondary	12	3.1%	891	62.5%	903	49.7%
Total	392		1425		1817	
<b>Entered Postsecondary - Participants who entered with or acquired GED or Diploma in Program</b>						
Enrolled in College	377	96.2%	413	39.6%	790	55.0%
Enrolled in Other Postsecondary	10	2.6%	145	13.9%	155	10.8%
Enrolled any Postsecondary	380	96.9%	497	47.6%	877	61.1%
No Postsecondary	12	3.1%	547	52.4%	559	38.9%
Total	392		1044		1436	

<sup>1</sup>NYEC Participants includes those who entered by January 2011; YouthBuild participants includes all who entered by June 2011.

<sup>2</sup>Some participants reported both a diploma and GED at entry.

<sup>3</sup>Excludes NYEC participants reported to be still in academic preparation and YouthBuild participants listed as "Active" participants and "Other Exit".

**Table 6-3: Postsecondary Progress**

Outcomes	GED or Diploma at Entry		No GED or Diploma at Entry		All PSS Participants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enrolled in College	377		434		811	
<b>Full or Part Time</b>						
Part-Time at First Report	90	43.3%	119	39.3%	209	40.9%
Full-Time at First Report	118	56.7%	184	60.7%	302	59.1%
Missing	169		131		300	
Part-Time at Last Report	68	32.4%	99	34.0%	167	33.3%
Full-Time at Last Report	142	67.6%	192	66.0%	334	66.7%
Missing/Not Collected	167		143		310	
<b>Tested Out of Developmental Education</b>						
Tested out of DevEd Math at Entry	106	28.1%	25	14.2%	131	23.7%
Tested out of DevEd Reading at Entry	175	46.4%	55	31.1%	230	41.5%
Tested out of DevEd Writing at Entry	163	43.2%	64	36.2%	227	41.0%
Missing/Not Collected	0		257		257	
<b>Completed Developmental Education (All Enrollees)<sup>1</sup></b>						
Completed or Tested out of DevEd Math	178	47.2%	160	36.9%	338	41.7%
Completed or Tested out of DevEd English	247	65.5%	186	42.9%	433	53.4%
<b>Completed Developmental Education (Among those Enrolled for 3 or More Semesters)<sup>1</sup></b>						
Completed or Tested out of DevEd Math	115	55.0%	116	63.0%	231	58.8%
Completed or Tested out of DevEd English	157	75.1%	123	66.8%	280	71.2%
<b>Credit Accumulation<sup>1</sup></b>						
1-12 Credits	101	26.8%	132	30.4%	233	28.7%
13-24 Credits	63	16.7%	39	9.0%	102	12.6%
25-50 Credits	50	13.3%	26	6.0%	76	9.4%
More than 50 Credits	18	4.8%	17	3.9%	35	4.3%
1 or More Credits	232	61.5%	214	49.3%	446	55.0%
None or Missing	145	38.8%	220	50.7%	365	45.0%

Outcomes	GED or Diploma at Entry		No GED or Diploma at Entry		All PSS Participants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Credit Accumulation (Among those Enrolled for 3 or More Semesters)<sup>1</sup></b>						
1-12 Credits	57	27.3%	64	34.8%	121	30.8%
13-24 Credits	49	23.4%	28	15.2%	77	19.6%
25-50 Credits	38	18.2%	24	13.0%	62	15.8%
More than 50 Credits	13	6.2%	15	8.2%	28	7.1%
1 or More Credits	<b>157</b>	<b>75.1%</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>71.2%</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>73.3%</b>
None or Missing	<b>52</b>	<b>24.9%</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>26.7%</b>
<b>Persistence in College<sup>1</sup></b>						
In college one semester only	100	26.5%	141	32.5%	241	29.7%
In colleges two semesters	68	18.0%	109	25.1%	177	21.8%
Enrolled in three semesters	151	40.1%	83	19.1%	234	28.9%
Enrolled in four semesters or More	58	15.4%	101	23.3%	159	19.6%

<sup>1</sup>Based on all college enrollees as denominator.

## Chapter Seven CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

In 2008, the Postsecondary Success Initiative began as an ambitious effort to develop new pathways to and through postsecondary education for what have come to be known as “opportunity youth” – low-income youth who had dropped out of the traditional education process without a high school diploma or who faced significant barriers to further education and success in the labor market. At the heart of the initiative were grants to 15 local community-based organizations to develop partnerships with area community colleges that would enable formerly disconnected youth to acquire a high school diploma or GED or needed academic skills, make the transition into postsecondary education or training, and persist through to graduation. The ultimate goal of the initiative was to demonstrate the effectiveness of these local partnerships and to help both CBOs and community colleges better understand the services that young people facing significant educational barriers need if they are to succeed in postsecondary education.

**As documented throughout this report, the PSS initiative has largely succeeded in meeting its goals.** In each of the 15 PSS communities in the initiative, CBOs and their college partners have created strong working partnerships aimed at helping students coming from limited educational backgrounds prepare for, enter into, and persist in college or other types of postsecondary education and training.

- Building on the “Back on Track” framework developed as part of the initiative, the PSS community-based organizations have redesigned their educational programs, developed “bridge” programs to strengthen the transition into college, and developed systems for providing postsecondary follow-up and support for their students. For most, the initiative led to a shift in focus from high school completion and entry into employment to the creation of a college-going culture where entry into postsecondary is a core program goal.
- Among the college partners, PSS created an opportunity to learn more about the needs of incoming students; expand outreach efforts and create new pathways into their institutions; and to work with community partners to increase opportunities for student success by aligning curriculum, strengthening transition services, and experimenting with new approaches to counseling and student supports. While the colleges varied widely in the degree to which they initially welcomed and engaged with their community-based partners, in most sites the partnerships have grown over time with both partners coming to increasingly appreciate the benefits of working together.

**Perhaps the key finding for the initiative is that the new partnerships provided substantial benefits to both the community-based organizations and their college partners. As such, the PSS partnerships can serve as models for similar arrangements in other communities.** For the local CBOs, the partnerships provide a route to better outcomes for their participants as postsecondary education and training become critical to longer-term labor market success. As CBO staff came to understand the colleges' requirements and expectations, they were better able to prepare their young people for success in that environment. For the community colleges, the PSS partnerships helped the colleges to expand their outreach efforts and to strengthen the system of supports available to their students (by leveraging the CBO-provided supports) at a time when the colleges' own resources were increasingly constrained. Through the partnerships, CBOs became a 'new front door' to college for previously under-represented students. As the colleges increased their understanding of the CBO approach, they also looked at new ways of adjusting their offerings to increase the likelihood of student success. In short, by opening the pathway between local youth-serving organizations and community colleges, both types of institutions were able to improve the services provided to their students.

**The early data from the initiative's reporting system indicates that these efforts have made a difference for the students themselves:** the partnerships are succeeding in moving a significant percentage of their students into and through postsecondary education and training. Nearly three-quarters of the youth who entered PSS programs without a high school credential (more than half of whom entered with math and reading levels below 8<sup>th</sup> grade), gained a diploma or GED through the program, laying the foundation for postsecondary education. Of those who entered PSS with a high school degree or acquired one through the program, 55% enrolled in college and 61% entered college or another form of postsecondary training. Of those who entered college, 70% have stayed in college for two semesters or more. Overall, the college entry and persistence results for PSS match up well with results for community college students nationally, despite the fact that PSS participants as a group were less likely to come to college through traditional educational pathways.

### **Lessons**

What lessons can we learn from these efforts? Several stand out:

**First, the benefits of bringing community-based organizations and colleges together are clear and significant.** One of the original hopes for the initiative was to change the ways in which community colleges supported their students by exposing them to the youth development strategies used by their community-based partners. This has happened to some degree, but the fact that the PSS programs were so small compared to overall community college enrollments limited the extent to which they were able to leverage large-scale structural change. Where PSS colleges were undertaking major reforms in their developmental education or advising programs, it was more often through larger national efforts targeting community colleges than through the influence of PSS.

However, almost all of the college partners in PSS did realize significant benefits in the work with their CBO partners. For some, the partnerships with local CBOs were seen as a

means of achieving the college's core mission of providing access and support to all students. For those institutions, the partnerships with local CBOs provided new access points to the college and an opportunity expand their connections into the community. For others, the partnerships with community-based organizations were a potential solution to resource constraints at the college – to the extent that CBOs and colleges could partner in supporting students, it enabled the colleges to leverage their own internal resources. For others, PSS and local partnerships served as a laboratory in which they could pilot new outreach strategies and support systems and learn how to monitor student progress and keep them on track. In that context, while few colleges made major structural changes as a result of PSS, most have added new programs or services or made adjustments in the way existing services operate.

For the community-based partners, the PSS partnerships represented an opportunity to move from an ad hoc approach to postsecondary education to a more organized and systematic strategy, and to take much of the guess-work out of college-going for their participants. The college partnerships gave them an opportunity to build awareness of their students' needs within the colleges, to provide a relatively seamless transition into postsecondary education, and to link their students to a more consistent set of supports. The result was a set of supports and opportunities for their participants that the CBOs could not have achieved on their own.

The value of these partnerships is one of the clearest lessons from the PSS initiative, a conclusion reinforced by the expectation among all of the local sites that the local partnerships would continue after the end of the PSS funding. ***One of the strong recommendations from this evaluation is that the Gates Foundation and the initiative partners find ways to work together to raise awareness of the value of this model and to encourage community colleges in particular to reach out to the nonprofits in their communities to build similar pathways.***

**Second, the PSS grants made a difference in helping the local partnerships develop and grow.** For the CBOs, the PSS grants provided an opportunity to expand staff support for college (through the transition counselors and similar roles), invest in curriculum development, create new courses and services, and cover the costs of critical 'extras' like college trips and testing fees. Equally important, both CBO representatives and college partners acknowledged that the CBO's ability to bring money to the table helped to get many of the partnerships started. Even where the college partners were initially supportive, the availability of grant funds to help pay for new courses, summer bridge programs, additional counselors, or tuition for dual enrollment courses made it easier to secure administrative support at the colleges and to move quickly from idea to implementation. And where college partners were initially less enthusiastic, grants funds still made it possible for CBOs to access college services and gain visibility as a potential partner. While a number of the college partners have now committed to support new pathways efforts past the end of the PSS grants, that commitment generally grew over time – the PSS grants helped to open the door. To the extent that the Gates Foundation and other PSS funders want to encourage the expansion of the PSS model, they should consider ways of providing at least seed funding to support the formation of the local partnerships.

**Third, the PSS intermediaries played a critical role in the initiative's success.** As discussed in detail in Chapter Five, the PSS intermediaries – JFF, NYEC and YouthBuild USA – developed the initial framework for the local partnerships and provided the ongoing training and support that the local programs needed to build and implement their local strategies. While all of the local partnerships brought considerable experience and expertise to the initiative, the project intermediaries helped insure that the local partnerships did not have to “reinvent the wheel” or search through the myriad program options on their own. Perhaps equally important, through the cross-site meetings, conference calls, working groups and other mechanisms the intermediaries created shared learning communities among the sites where sites able to learn from one another and gain confirmation and support for strategies they were pursuing. The sense that they were engaged in a common effort, and the opportunity to share ideas and learn from one another, was highly valued by the local partners, and it is likely that few of the local partnerships would have progressed as far as they did without that extra layer of information and support. The creation of the leadership team model, which brought the intermediaries, funders, evaluators and others together as a learning group also helped to leveraged the experience across networks and made it possible to develop a consistent set of messages about the value of the initiative and its lessons for both internal audiences (the local partnerships) and the outside world. The bottom line: the intermediaries represented significant value-added and support for that intermediary role should be built into any future efforts of this type.

**Fourth, relationships are key for both working with young people and developing strong CBO-college partnerships.** While programs varied widely in their specific structures, instructional approaches, and curriculum, the common ground across all of the sites was the formation of strong, supportive relationships between CBO staff – teachers, counselors, worksite supervisors, and others – and participants as the critical element in every design. Similarly, at the college level, the importance of personal relationships between students and adults continued, whether through the continued involvement of CBO staff, or a well-managed handoff to college counselors, advisors, and faculty. The adage repeated among program staff across sites that “students don’t care what you know until they know that you care” carried an important truth that was at the core of all of the efforts to nurture students through their educational programs. In the same vein, the need to keep in touch on a weekly, often daily basis was key to keeping students from falling through the cracks once they entered postsecondary. In the words of one college counselor, “This is not about case management – it is about relationships, relationships, relationships.”

Similarly, in building partnerships between CBOs and colleges, the key was in finding the right champions and building a relationship. While CBOs and colleges noted that formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOU’s) had an important place in the partnerships, documenting each partner’s respective roles and responsibilities, those agreements needed to grow out of a carefully built sense of mutual goals, respect and trust among CBO and college representatives. And the development of those trusting relationships took energy and persistence and a sense of commitment on all sides.



**Fifth, while the PSS initiative was successful in building new working relationships and encouraging new services, the local partnerships were not an effective means of promoting major structural or systemic changes among the college partners.** Though the colleges clearly learned from their partnership with community-based organizations and in some cases made changes in specific programs as a result, the funding and numbers of youth involved in PSS were not large enough to leverage change in institutions that served thousands of students annually. In those colleges where changes in developmental education or the structure of student advising and support were taking place, it was generally the result of other state or national community college reform efforts.

That said, it is clear that community-based organizations have substantial knowledge and skills to bring to the education reform efforts at community colleges. One recommendation is that funders of those efforts begin encouraging colleges to include outreach to community-based partners as part of their efforts to improve college access and completion.

#### **Sustainability and Scaleability**

One of the key questions for the Gates Foundation for the evaluation of the PSS initiative was whether the local partnerships that grew out of the initiative were sustainable and what elements of the PSS model were scaleable. The answer to the sustainability question is a cautious “Yes,” recognizing that in some cases the PSS grants are still in place and in others relatively little time has passed since their end. At the local level, as noted earlier, the colleges and their CBO partners are committed to maintaining their partnerships and postsecondary focus. The CBOs have worked hard to build a postsecondary emphasis into their programs, and that ‘college culture’ is unlikely to disappear in the near future. For many of the colleges, the local partnerships are seen as helping to address important needs and goals at the institution. Where that is the case, the college partners have said, in effect, “we will find a way to continue.”

At the same time, both CBOs and colleges are likely to struggle to fund important pieces of the PSS effort, ranging from college visits to the extra staffing that provided transition support. Among the PSS sites, the larger CBOs, and particularly the charter schools that can access local educational funding and can spread costs across a larger organizational structure, are more likely to have the capacity to fill some of those gaps. However, at the smaller programs, sustainability will likely involve trimming some level of support and working with their college partners to access new funding and to find other creative ways to fund their postsecondary activities.

In their analysis of the costs of the Back on Track model, Jobs for the Future came to similar conclusions. JFF estimated that the cost per student for a Back on Track approach in a school-based setting was approximately \$14,750, about 28% higher than the average expenditure per student in schools nationally. The estimated cost to operate a Back on Track approach in a GED program setting was \$8,400. In both cases, JFF found that the ability to share those costs across a larger organization (for example, a school district, charter school network, or larger CBO) was essential, as was collaboration and cost sharing between the CBOs and their higher education partners. JFF’s concluded that:

“All of the schools and programs in JFF’s study benefit financially from being embedded in larger organizations and from partnerships with postsecondary institutions.”<sup>31</sup>

The national partners are also expecting to continue and expand their support for the PSS model. All three of the primary partners – JFF, NYEC and YouthBuild USA -- have integrated postsecondary access and success into their organizational goals and have begun developing additional initiatives aimed at expanding the PSS model within their networks and into other programs and communities. Examples range from JFF’s work to bring the Back on Track model to school districts around the country to YouthBuild USA’s addition of 12 new PSS sites through its New Profit/Social Innovation Fund grant and proposals to numerous other funders, to NYEC’s effort to create a Postsecondary Workgroup among its membership. Here, too, resources are likely to be an issue, but it is clear that having built the capacity to work in the postsecondary “space,” these three national organizations are expecting to continue those efforts and to build a postsecondary focus into their national advocacy efforts as well.

Is PSS scalable? Here, too, the answer is a cautious “Yes,” but with the recognition that scaling the PSS initiative or the Back on Track model will take a significant investment in the types of supports provided by the PSS intermediaries and in a concerted effort to raise awareness about the value of the PSS partnerships. What JFF, NYEC and YouthBuild USA have demonstrated is that the PSS approach – built around the Back on Track model – can be defined and developed in multiple sites with appropriate support and with the likelihood that it will be sustained by the local partners once fully established. YouthBuild’s establishment of an additional 12 sites through its New Profit/Social Innovation Fund grant and the expansion of PSS to 5 more sites through the Corps Network also suggest that the “approach” is portable and can be carried out in new and diverse settings with an appropriate level of support. As of the end of the initial PSS initiative, however, the effort to promote the PSS model within the higher education community or to raise awareness among community-based providers outside of the NYEC and YouthBuild networks has been limited. If PSS is to grow more fully as a scalable national model, there will need to be a concerted effort to raise awareness of its value within the education funding community, among nonprofits, and especially among community colleges around the country.

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<sup>31</sup> Cheryl Alameda, Adria Steinberg and Janet Santos. May 2013. *What it Costs: Financing Back on Track Designs*. Boston: Jobs for the Future, May 2013. Available at: [http://backontrackdesigns.org/sites/default/files/WhatItCosts\\_050813.pdf](http://backontrackdesigns.org/sites/default/files/WhatItCosts_050813.pdf)

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**PSS PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND SITES**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Website</b>
<b><i>National Partners</i></b>		
Jobs for the Future	88 Broad St., 8th Floor Boston, MA 02110 Tel: 617.728.4446	<a href="http://www.jff.org">www.jff.org</a>
National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC)	1836 Jefferson Place, NW Washington, DC 20036 Tel: 202-659-1064	<a href="http://www.nyec.org">www.nyec.org</a>
YouthBuild USA	58 Day Street Somerville, MA 02144 Tel: (617) 623-9900	<a href="http://www.youthbuild.org">www.youthbuild.org</a>
<b><i>YouthBuild Sites</i></b>		
Metro Atlanta YouthBuild	818 Pollard Blvd Atlanta GA 30315 Tel: (404) 546 – 3060	<a href="http://www.youthbuildatlanta.org">http://www.youthbuildatlanta.org</a>
YouthBuild Brockton	c/o YouthBuild USA	
YouthBuild Columbus	YouthBuild Columbus Community School 1183 Essex Avenue Columbus OH 43201 Tel: (614) 291-0805	<a href="http://www.youthbuildcolumbus.info">http://www.youthbuildcolumbus.info</a>
YouthBuild McLean County	YouthBuild McLean County 360 Wylie Drive Normal IL 61761 Tel: (309) 454-3898	<a href="http://youthbuildmcleancounty.org">http://youthbuildmcleancounty.org</a>
Operation Fresh Start	Operation Fresh Start YouthBuild 1925 Winnebago St Madison WI 537045314 Tel: (608) 244-4721	<a href="http://www.operationfreshstart.org">http://www.operationfreshstart.org</a>
YouthBuild Philadelphia	YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School 1231 North Broad Street Philadelphia PA 19122 Tel: (215) 627-8671	<a href="http://www.youthbuildphilly.org">http://www.youthbuildphilly.org</a>
Portland YouthBuilders	Portland YouthBuilders 4816 SE 92nd Ave. Portland OR 97266 Tel: (503) 286-9350	<a href="http://www.pybpdx.org">http://www.pybpdx.org</a>
<b><i>NYEC Sites</i></b>		
X-Cel	7 Glenvale Terrace Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 Tel: (617)522-2590	<a href="http://www.x-celeducation.org">http://www.x-celeducation.org</a>
MY TURN	156 Main St. Brockton MA, 02301 Tel: (508) 580-2659	<a href="http://www.my-turn.org">http://www.my-turn.org</a>

Organization	Address	Website
ISUS (Improved Solutions for Urban Systems)	140 N. Keowee St. Dayton, Ohio 45402 Tel: 937.223.2323	<a href="http://www.isusinc.com">http://www.isusinc.com</a>
LA Conservation Corps	Los Angeles Conservation Corps 605 W. Olympic Boulevard Los Angeles CA 90015 Tel: (213) 362-9000	<a href="http://www.lacorps.org">http://www.lacorps.org</a>
The College Initiative	29-76 Northern Boulevard Long Island City, NY 11101 Tel: (347) 669-2864	<a href="http://www.collegeinitiative.org">http://www.collegeinitiative.org</a>
Youth Development Institute (YD)	121 Avenue of the Americas, 6th Fl New York, NY 10013 Tel: (212) 590-9476	<a href="http://www.ydinstitute.org">http://www.ydinstitute.org</a>
Good Shepherd Services	305 Seventh Avenue, 9th Fl New York, NY 10001 Tel: (212) 243-7070	<a href="http://www.goodshepherds.org">http://www.goodshepherds.org</a>
Cypress Hills Development Corporation	625 Jamaica Avenue Brooklyn, New York 11208-1203 Tel: (718) 647-2800	<a href="https://sites.google.com/a/cypresshills.org/cypress-hills-local-development-corporation/home">https://sites.google.com/a/cypresshills.org/cypress-hills-local-development-corporation/home</a>
Open Meadow Alternative Schools	7621 N. Wabash Ave. Portland, OR 97217 Tel: (503) 978-1935	<a href="http://www.openmeadow.org">http://www.openmeadow.org</a>
Larkin Street Youth Services	701 Sutter Street, Suite 2 San Francisco, CA 94109 Tel: (415) 673.0911	<a href="http://www.larkinstreetyouth.org">http://www.larkinstreetyouth.org</a>

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