

Innovation Brief

PathNet: An Innovative School Reengagement System

Juvenile justice-involved youth are overrepresented in the nation's high school dropout statistics. These youth are often credit deficient, reading below grade level and in need of supplemental cross-system supports to achieve academic and vocational success. Secondary schools offering traditional diploma pathways and guidance counselor services struggle to meet the needs of this population. PathNet provides a solution through a networked reengagement system that is strategically coordinated among youth-serving organizations and key institutions. The PathNet initiative focuses on systems change by addressing three core areas: (1) the promotion of the core components of the model; (2) the continuous expansion of the partnership to ensure services are coordinated, leveraged and aligned; and (3) the ongoing development and sharing of policy through effective practice and partnership.

The Issue

The United States is facing an economic and social epidemic in which approximately 30% of students are dropping out of school. High school dropouts are three-and-a-half times more likely than high school graduates to be in jail. They represent 75% of Washington State's prison inmates and 70% of youth in King County detention. On-time graduation rates for youth involved in the juvenile justice system fall far below their peers. Youth involved in the state juvenile justice system graduated at a rate of 14% as compared to the state average of 75%.¹ However, only a portion of all drop-outs end up in the juvenile justice system.

Nationally, youth who are ages 16-24 years and disconnected from school or employment have been labeled as "opportunity youth." Similar to high school

drop-out statistics, youth involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems are overrepresented in the opportunity youth population as well. Studies estimate societal costs of an opportunity youth over a lifetime to be \$258,240.² This number includes costs for loss of taxes due to lower income, increased use of social services and publicly funded health care and higher criminal justice involvement.³ This number does not account for the substantial lifetime costs to the youth themselves, including lower incomes and higher likelihood for unemployment. Effects on self-esteem and personal relationships are unquantifiable.

Innovations

PathNet Initiative: PathNet is not a brick-and-mortar institution. It is a systems-change initiative driven by an education reengagement approach that creates a

system of strategic coordination among youth-serving organizations and key institutions. The mission of PathNet is to expand educational reengagement and career-training opportunities through systemic coordination among youth-serving agencies and institutions. The PathNet initiative is research based. It utilizes four cornerstones, policy change, cross-systems coordination and *GEDplus* pathways to create effective reengagement pathways for opportunity youth. The four cornerstones are: (1) *A Strength-Based Assessment*, which focuses on the youth's strengths rather than their barriers; (2) *A Student-Driven Plan*, which is designed to apply the strength-based assessment toward the development of a meaningful and individualized plan created by the youth; (3) *A Care Manager*, who is a supportive adult who fosters the youth's education and vocational goals; and (4) *Access and Connection* to education and employment training with the end-goal of a living-wage job and career.

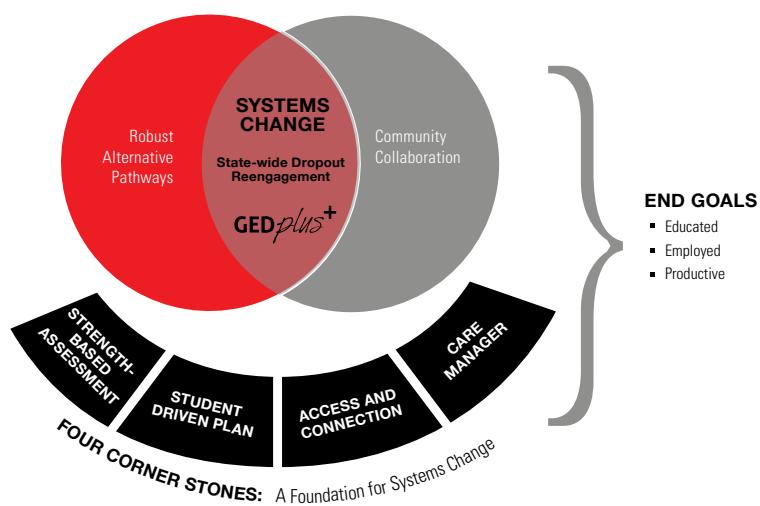
PathNet is guided by an Executive Committee with representation from the justice system, K-12 education, community colleges, community-based organizations, labor and industry and social service agencies. With support from the Models for Change Initiative, the PathNet model has served as the foundation for several successful programs including the PathNet Demonstration Pilot and Washington State's innovative Open Doors Reengagement.

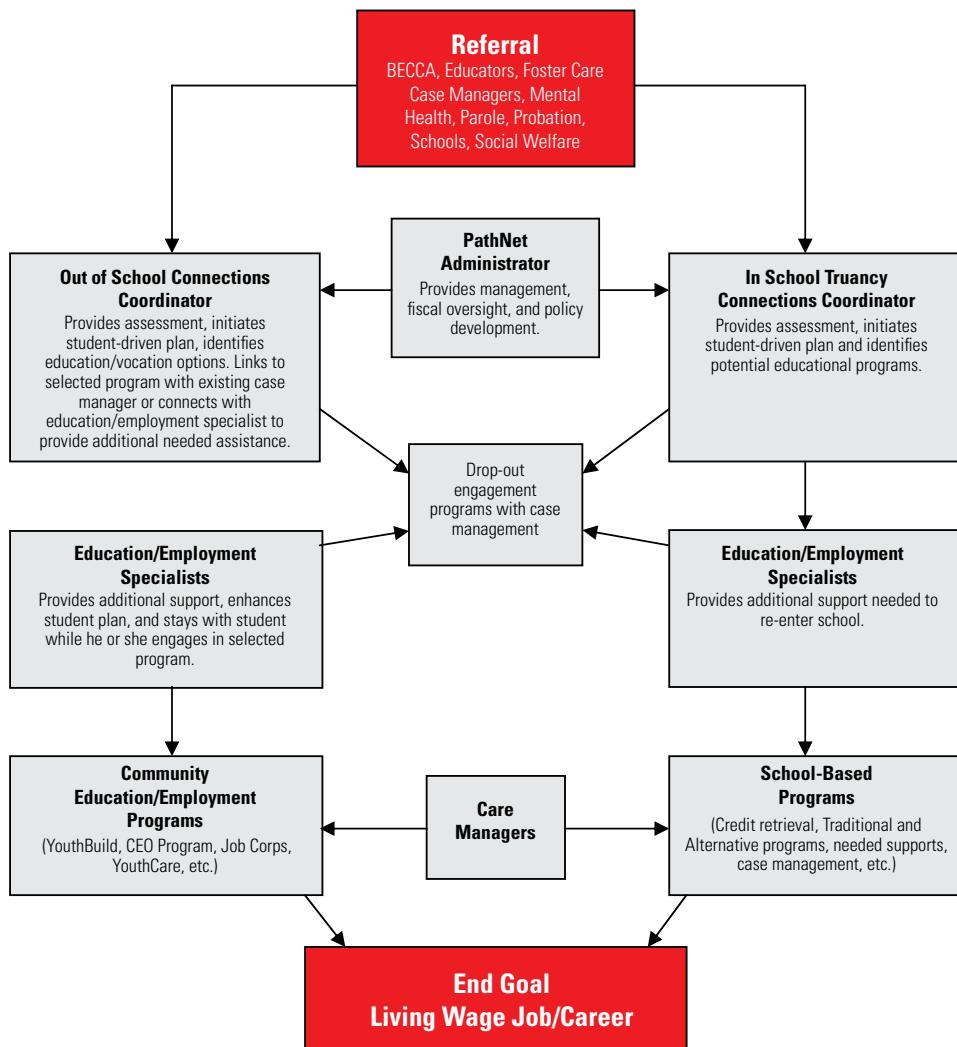
GEDplus Concept: PathNet has evolved into an approach to reengage juvenile justice-involved youth who have either dropped out of school and/or have so few credits that receiving a high school diploma is nearly impossible. Traditional education pathways do not meet the diverse needs of this older, under-credited population. The Graduation Equivalency Degree (otherwise known as GED®) or other high school equivalency exams are often the most realistic pathways for reengaging disconnected students in an education and vocational program. PathNet members recognize that the GED® is often stigmatized by society as being a lesser credential when in fact it is an opportunity for further education. PathNet has branded the term "*GEDplus*" as a means to shift the concept of the GED® from being an end-product to being a stepping stone for future career and educational opportunities.

While the PathNet four cornerstones represent the fundamental foundation, *GEDplus* is the driver that allows youth to move forward academically and vocationally. *GEDplus* is defined as a "GED®" with an immediate or embedded "plus" or connection to the next educational/vocational step, with the end-goal of obtaining a GED®, post-secondary credentials and an ability to earn a living wage. Students enrolled in *GEDplus* are expected to complete further education or vocational credentialing. Programs with

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A Networked Reengagement System





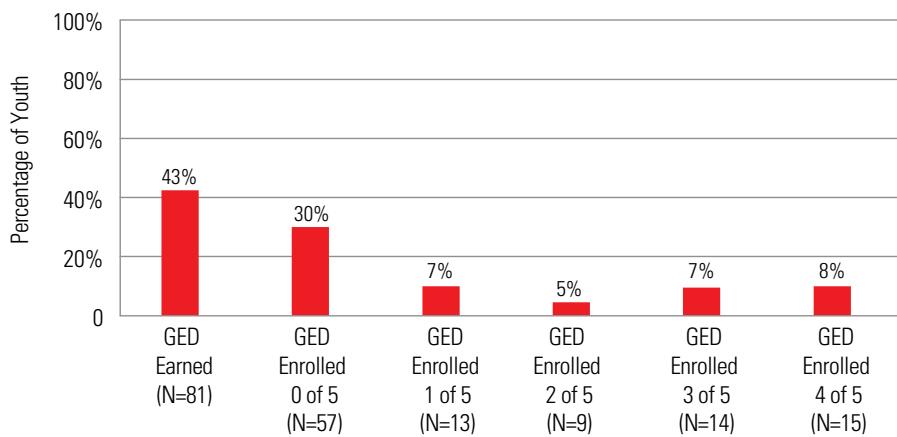
performance-based outcomes, such as GED*plus*, offer older students the flexibility to spend the six hours a day of seat time traditionally required to earn a high school diploma in more meaningful and relevant activities such as job training, employment, childcare, community service and treatment. Through PathNet's Executive Committee advocacy, the GED*plus* concept was integrated into Washington State's Open Doors Youth Reengagement legislation.

PathNet Demonstration Pilot: The two-year pilot program provided an opportunity to prove that PathNet's four cornerstones and emphasis on cross-systems coordination would lead to positive educational, employment and recidivism outcomes for juvenile justice-involved youth. YouthSource, a multidisciplinary one-stop shop for youth employment, education and basic-need referrals, served as the primary site for the GED*plus* education and employment services. The target audience consisted of youth involved in the juvenile justice system

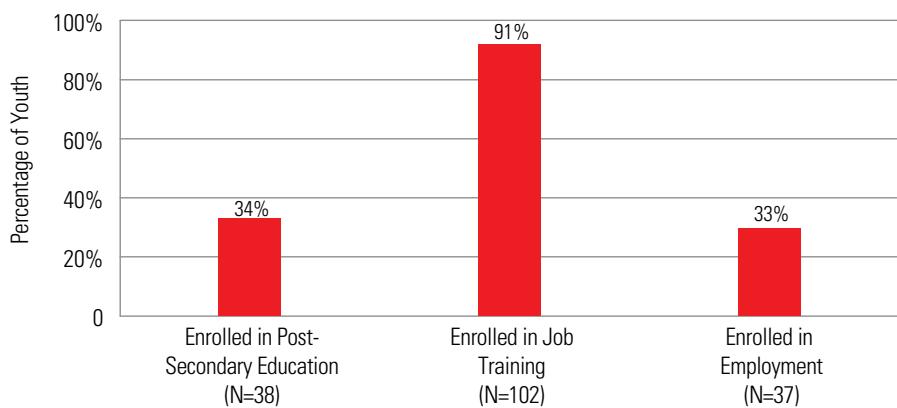
who were identified as moderate or high risk for reoffending using the Washington State Juvenile Court Risk Assessment. Youth engaged in the pilot program completed a strength-based assessment and student-driven plan, and were provided with a care manager to assist them in identifying and enrolling into an education and employment program that met their individual needs. Partners in the program represented multiple youth-serving systems.

Open Doors Youth Reengagement Legislation: PathNet members recognized policy change was needed in order to create sustainable reengagement programs for all opportunity youth, including those with criminal histories. In response to this need, PathNet members assisted in drafting and passing legislation (ESSHB1418) in 2010. This legislation allows school districts with programs meeting the strict standards outlined in the Open Doors (1418) Youth Reengagement Implementation Guide to use State Basic Education funding to create reengagement

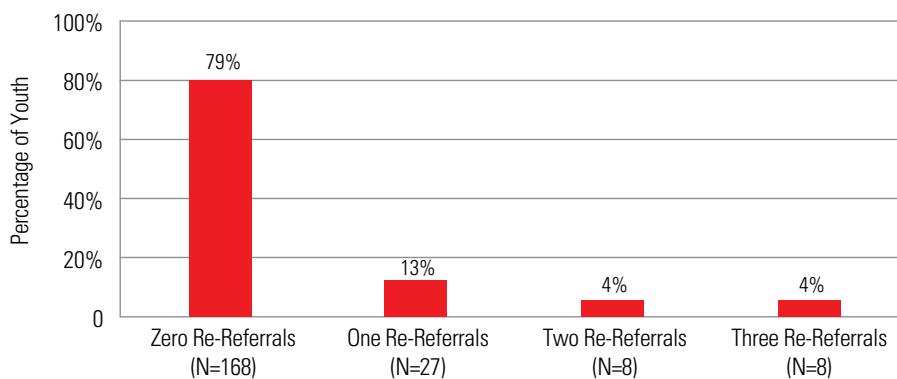
PathNet Pilot Year Youth GED Achievement Level (N=189)



GEDPlus Involvement for Youth Who Earned a GED in PathNet Pilot (N=112)



PathNet Pilot Youth by Number of Juvenile Justice Re-Referrals at Six Month Follow-Up (N=211)



pathways for older, credit-deficient youth. Key features of the Open Doors program standards are the shift to performance-based outcomes as the means of school/program accountability, the requirement of case managers for each student and the development of multiple reengagement pathways, including GED*plus*.

Results and Lessons

PathNet Executive Committee: PathNet partner agencies have a formal memorandum of understanding and a strategic plan supporting the vision of a networked reengagement system with multiple points of entry.

PathNet Pilot: A formal descriptive analysis of the pilot project was conducted in 2013.⁴ Overall outcomes were promising. The analysis found that students involved in PathNet were less likely to reoffend than their peers. At the six month follow-up, only 20% of the youth had one or more new criminal referrals to juvenile court. Forty three percent of the youth completed all five subject tests and earned a GED®. Of those who earned a GED®, 91% also enrolled in job training fulfilling the “plus” in GED*plus*.

Open Doors (1418) Youth Reengagement: Currently there are 26 Open Doors Youth Reengagement programs operating in the State of Washington, with new programs being approved monthly. Preliminary data analysis reveals the model is effective, as youth are shown to be reengaging with academic programming and achieving measures of academic progress. A statewide convening was held in the spring of 2014 to highlight existing Open Doors programs

and to provide an opportunity for new program development through structured discussion and networking. A list of the current Open Doors programs is available at at: www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/StudentRetrieval.aspx

Looking Forward

PathNet continues to engage in national, statewide and local efforts to support effective reengagement policies and practices. Areas of focus include: technical assistance and coordination of a regional reengagement system, ongoing technical assistance on the Open Doors Steering Committee, promoting positive school-court partnerships to reduce the school-to-prison pipeline, support of substance abuse recovery schools and the creation of new GED*plus* onramps for older, under-credited youth.

Resources

A Pilot Phase Analysis of King County, Washington's PathNet Program Years 1 and 2 Combined

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/465>

Dropout Re-engagement Legislation Supports Statewide Replication of Washington Models for Change Project, Models for Change Newsletter

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/reform-progress/135>

Profile for Change, Models for Change Newsletter

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/reform-progress/153>

OSPI Open Doors Implementation Manual

www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/pubdocs/OD1418_ImplementationGuide.pdf

1. Coker, L., He, L., Lucenko, B., Mancuso, D., Mayfield, J., Qinghua, L., Felver, B., High School Outcomes for DSHS-Served Youth", *RDA Report 11.181* (November 2012)

2. Belfield, Clive R., Henry M. Levin, and Rachel Rosen. "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth." Corporation for National and Community Service. Washington D.C. (January 2012).

3. National Center for School Engagement, *Washington State's Models for Change Truancy Interventions: A Cost-Benefit Analysis* (August 2013).

4. Vera Institute of Justice: A Pilot Phase Analysis of King County, Washington's PathNet Program. March 2013. Lead researcher Reagan Daly.

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This brief is one in a series describing new knowledge and innovations emerging from *Models for Change*, a multi-state juvenile justice reform initiative. *Models for Change* is accelerating movement toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system by creating replicable models that protect community safety, use resources wisely, and improve outcomes for youths. The briefs are intended to inform professionals in juvenile justice and related fields, and to contribute to a new national wave of juvenile justice reform.