

# Multiple Education Pathways

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All youth need to learn the skills required to succeed in school, work, and life. The pathway to success begins in high school and continues, usually through postsecondary education, to work and independent adult living.

## The Traditional Pathway

One education pathway is the traditional comprehensive high school, which typically includes a college-prep curriculum of academic subjects. Those subjects are often taught as abstractions, for their own sake, without any connection to the real world. Instruction tends to be teacher-focused, with lectures and reading assignments. That pathway works fine for some youth because it meets their needs.

## Different Youth, Different Needs

However, all youth are not the same. Youth have different needs, strengths, and histories. They live in home and community environments that vary widely. And they require different kinds and levels of assistance and different environments to learn.

Many youth, especially youth who are disconnected from school or at risk of dropping out, need a different education pathway to learn and thrive. Those youth need alternative learning environments with different settings, creative and innovative teaching, and support.

- High academic standards that align with graduation or certification requirements
- Creative and engaging instruction that emphasizes connections between learning and life
- High expectations for all youth
- Low student-to-teacher ratio
- High-quality teachers who
  - Are certified in their content area
  - Can establish rapport with youth
  - Use creative teaching techniques
  - Play a role in designing curricula
  - Participate in ongoing professional development
- Flexible schedules and individualized programming
- A few simple rules for youth, consistently enforced
- Well-maintained, clean, accessible, and safe facilities
- Opportunities to connect with caring adults who support and mentor the youth during his or her transition to adulthood
- Connections to community resources, including resources for career development
- Needed supportive services

## Different Pathways for Different Needs

There is no single alternative education pathway that would meet all the needs of all the youth in a local community. Rather, different pathways are needed. And in fact, even the smallest communities typically already offer a variety of different pathways.

## Alternative Education Pathways in Local Communities

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public high schools</li> <li>• Career centers or joint vocational schools</li> <li>• Private schools</li> <li>• Magnet schools</li> <li>• Community schools</li> <li>• Charter schools</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative schools</li> <li>• Smaller learning communities such as             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Career academy</li> <li>◦ Arts academy</li> <li>◦ IT academy</li> <li>◦ Math, science, and technology academy</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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In addition, many communities offer pathways that supplement the formal education pathways provided in schools, such as dropout prevention programs, dropout recovery programs, and youth development programs. In short, most communities already provide a variety of pathways for youth to achieve success.

### A Multiple Education Pathways Ecosystem

However, the different pathways already available in many communities do not make up a single integrated system. Instead, existing pathways are part of different, unconnected systems.

- Primary, secondary, and postsecondary public education
- Private education
- Employment and training programs
- Adult basic education
- Juvenile justice system
- Child protective services
- Health and human services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Shelters for homeless or runaway youth
- Youth development organizations like Junior Achievement, DECA, and 4-H
- Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth programs

To maximize each youth's chances for success, all those different systems and programs need to be integrated in a Multiple Education Pathways ecosystem. In such an ecosystem, public and private resources are coordinated to support youth during their initial primary and secondary schooling, reduce the dropout rate, and re-engage out-of-school youth in education. All local education systems communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with other youth-serving systems in the community to provide all youth the academic and social resources they need to complete high school or its equivalent prepared for work and further education.

A Multiple Education Pathways ecosystem

- Makes all the pathways in the community available to all youth
- Allows each youth to find a pathway that uses methods and strategies geared to his or personal and educational needs – rather than expecting the youth to adapt to a single pathway
- Help both youth and adults re-enter education easily as their careers develop or the needs of their workplace change

### A Multiple Education Pathways Ecosystem: Portland, Oregon

- **Portland Evening High School** offers opportunities for current students to make up credits during the evening hours.
- **Marshall High School** offers out-of-school youth opportunities to complete high school, obtain a GED in conjunction with taking community college classes, or complete high school while taking college classes.
- **LISTOS Alternative Learning Center**, a community-based school sponsored by the Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement, provides a bilingual/bicultural educational program to out-of-school youth, especially Limited English Proficient (LEP) youth.
- **Open Meadow Alternative Schools**, private schools contracted to the Portland Public Schools, offer multiple educational programs that emphasize small, relationship-based environments that stress personal responsibility, academic achievement, and service to the community.
- **New Avenues for Youth Alternative Education Center**, a community-based program, provides a structured, supportive, and safe short-term educational setting for homeless and runaway youth.
- **Portland Community College** offers multiple programs that bridge high school and postsecondary education.

## Principles for the Multiple Education Pathways Ecosystem

The National Youth Employment Coalition offers the following principles for Multiple Education Pathways ecosystems.

- Be operated by institutions that can award education credentials and include multiple pathways to a credential
- Offer competency-based and applied learning approaches
- Employ relevant and appropriate performance indicators for student achievement, programs, and schools
- Include a combination of pathways and structures such as charter schools, partnerships with departments or boards of education, and community-based organization
- Award credit based on proficiency and competency
- Use measures that consider student progress over time and relative gains
- Collaborate with a variety of partners
- Include characteristics, elements, and strategies that encourage students to stay in an education program or school
- Include work-based learning, career preparation, internships, and other opportunities to help prepare youth for employment

## Challenges for the Multiple Education Pathways Ecosystem

Multiple Education Pathways are an evolving and transformative concept for organizing education. The emphasis of Multiple Education Pathways on cooperation and collaboration allows the resources of many stakeholders to be leveraged to enable youth to achieve their educational and employment goals. However, ecosystems face challenges.

- **Collaboration.** Multiple Education Pathways require extensive collaboration between a variety of existing organizations and institutions all of whom have their own funding, ways of thinking, and missions.
- **Funding.** Federal, state, and local funding for alternative learning environments may be limited, require complex and frequent negotiation, and extensive recordkeeping to document compliance with federal programs such as WIA.
- **Placement.** Because there is no longer a single education pathway, it becomes necessary to have a method to place youth in the appropriate education pathway. More research is needed to determine best practices for placing youth when there are a variety of choices available.

Political and educational leadership will be necessary to overcome these and other challenges.

## What Should WIA Youth Programs Do?

WIA youth programs can participate in a local Multiple Education Pathways ecosystem and take full advantage of it.

- Local workforce investment boards, youth councils, and administrative entities should
  - Participate as full partners in planning and implementing a local Multiple Education Pathways ecosystem
  - Build relationships and connections with all ecosystem partners
- Case managers should
  - Familiarize themselves with all the pathways available in the local ecosystem
  - Place WIA youth participants in local pathways that meet their individual needs
  - Coordinate WIA youth activities with other pathway activities as needed

## To Sum Up

Each youth needs an education pathway to success; to meet the different needs of all youth, communities need an integrated ecosystem of Multiple Education Pathways of partners who all communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with each other. With a Multiple Education Pathways ecosystem

- Youth can acquire the knowledge and skills needed in school, work, and life.
- Employers have a pool of skilled, educated, and motivated employees.
- The public receives a benefit of \$209,000 in higher government revenues and lower government spending for each additional high school graduate.

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