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 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 73%. 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. 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. 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
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
performance-based outcomes, such as GEDplus, 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 GEDplus 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 GEDplus 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 strengths-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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GED Earned (N=81)</th>
<th>GED Enrolled 0 of 5 (N=57)</th>
<th>GED Enrolled 1 of 5 (N=13)</th>
<th>GED Enrolled 2 of 5 (N=9)</th>
<th>GED Enrolled 3 of 5 (N=14)</th>
<th>GED Enrolled 4 of 5 (N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolled in Post-Secondary Education (N=38)</th>
<th>Enrolled in Job Training (N=102)</th>
<th>Enrolled in Employment (N=37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero Re-Referrals (N=168)</th>
<th>One Re-Referrals (N=27)</th>
<th>Two Re-Referrals (N=8)</th>
<th>Three Re-Referrals (N=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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: [www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/StudentRetrieval.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/StudentRetrieval.aspx)

**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. 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 GEDplus.

**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: [www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/StudentRetrieval.aspx](http://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 GEDplus 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](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](http://www.k12.wa.us/GATE/SupportingStudents/pubdocs/OD1418_ImplementationGuide.pdf)

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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.