cutting the current costs of crime, incarceration, welfare, and other supports, and raising the city's tax revenue. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that a 5% increase in male high school graduation rates would produce an annual net economic benefit of almost $70 million to the District of Columbia, if we include both increased earnings and revenue and the savings on crime-related costs and incarceration.[20]

SCOPE OF THE CHALLENGE

In Washington, D.C., there are approximately 87,000 young people between the ages of 16–24.[21] No one is sure how many of them are out of school and out of work, but estimates based on available census, school, and employment data suggest that between 11,000–14,000 young adults are not in school and are without high school degrees or the equivalent.[22]

It is difficult to get a more precise count for several **reasons**. First, though census data takes a "snapshot" of school enrollment numbers, the data is not otherwise tied to other school data. For example, none of the data collected so far has been able to mark which students left school and when. While the census data provides good **information** on youth unemployment, births to teen **mothers,** and child poverty rates, it is not easy to align that information with numbers of disconnected youth to provide an accurate picture of the problem. This data challenge has the effect of keeping the problem obscure and difficult to solve.

It is clear to all those assembling relevant data that the challenges of poverty, unemployment, and single-female-headed households are concentrated in certain areas of

the city, especially Wards 7 and 8. Unfortunately, we do not have data that combines all of these risk factors. For example, we know what percentage of births in Ward 7 were to teenage mothers, and we know the risks those young parents face. However, we don't actually have numbers on how many teen parents live where, and whether they are in school or not. More specific information would substantially improve the city's ability to provide services based on identified needs.

CURRENT EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF DISCONNECTED YOUTH IN D.C.

While the D.C. Public School System was in a continuous "state of emergency" and violence was reaching a crisis level over the last few decades, reformers in various sectors of the city have worked to research and document need, provide alternative education and training options, and offer services and opportunities to disconnected young people. As a result, there are a great number of organizations, services, programs, community centers, and activists in the city who are working on aspects of the problems affecting at-risk youth. Unfortunately, it is difficult to map these efforts given the details, the differences, and the variety.

An overview of efforts currently underway on behalf of disconnected youth in Washington, D.C., follows, divided into the broad categories examined in this report: data, policy change, programs, and citywide collaboration.

DATA COLLECTION AND OTHER RESEARCH

The poorest sectors of Washington, D.C., are uniquely invisible to the wealthiest. A number of organizations are trying to fill the information gaps in the District of Columbia to provide a clearer picture of the economic environment in the city. D.C. Kids Count is an advocacy organization and an alliance of public and private organizations[23] that conducts research and collects data related to child and family

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20 This estimate is part of a table created by the Alliance for Excellent Education in *Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings: An Issue Brief* (Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, August 2006), p. 4. Estimates based on methods used by L. Lochner and E. Moretti in "The Effect of Education on Crime," *American Economic Review*, 94 (1), 155-189.

21 Data from the most recent Annual Fact Book 2008 (Washington, D.C.: Kids Count Collaborative, 2008).

22 A number over 11,000 is derived from the KIDS COUNT database http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/compare_results.jsp?i=130&dt=1&rt=2&yr=7&s=a&dtype=&rtype=&x=129&y=12), which estimates both 16-19 year olds and 18-24 year olds; we combined both and subtracted the estimated overlap. Another unofficial estimate for the city puts the number higher, at over 14,000. The Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT data estimates 13%, or 9,000 youth between 18-24 are out of school and out of work in the District of Columbia. Extrapolating that percentage to the city's youth between the ages of 16-18 would add at least 2,000 to the number. http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/compare_results.jsp?i=130&dt=2&rt=2&yr=8&s=a&dtype=&rtype=&x=153&y=10

23 The Kids Count Collaborative includes the D.C. Children's Trust Fund, D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, D.C. Public Schools, Washington Hospital Center, D.C. Action for Children, D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, D.C. Early Care and Education Administration, D.C. Public Library, Office of D.C. City Council Member Vincent C. Gray, The Urban Institute, Neighborhood Info D.C., So Others Might Eat, East River Family Strengthening Collaborative, D.C. Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families, and Elders, D.C. Learns, Children's National Medical Center, D.C. Public Charter School Association, and the Metropolitan Police Department's Office of Youth Violence Prevention.

well-being. Their annual D.C. Fact Book is a useful resource for data on these issues, some broken out by Ward, including information about disconnected youth.[24] In addition, the advocacy group, D.C. Action, produces fact sheets called "Kid Bits"[25] intended to increase awareness and "drive better outcomes" for children and young adults. The Urban Institute maintains a database and website called Neighborhood Info D.C., which collects and synthesizes census, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamp, voter registration, mortgage lending activity, and crime data to provide information on each Ward and neighborhood cluster.

Recently, the lack of data about school attendance and graduation rates has been spotlighted by a national effort to standardize the way that graduation rates are determined. The District's Office of the State Superintendent of Education commissioned a longitudinal data analysis, the State Longitudinal Education Data (SLED) system, and recently introduced the use of "unique student identifiers" to track students.

POLICY CHANGE

Two major changes in local education policy marked periods of reform in the District. In 1995, The District authorized The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board in the District of Columbia School Reform Act of 1995 (amended in 1996), which allowed the development of public charter schools in Washington, D.C. The District's charter schools have had a major impact on education in the city, raising standards and challenging D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) to compete for students and per-pupil funding.[26]

The D.C. Public Schools are in the midst of another phase of significant reform. Mayor Fenty's Education Reform Act of 2007 restructured the administration and oversight of local education agencies and established a bold agenda for education reform. Mayor Fenty took control of the schools and hired a school's chancellor focused on improving teaching, school facilities, and student scores. Under Mayor Fenty and continuing with Mayor Gray, the District's education leaders have made a commitment to preventing dropouts, raising graduation rates, and providing more alternative pathways to graduation. New policies are continuing to be built upon the strong foundation of promising reforms that have already been set in motion.

24 The Annual Fact Book 2008 is not yet online, but the last several years' editions can be found at http://www.dckidscount.org/dckidscount.htm

25 http://www.dckids.org

26 http://www.urban.org/publications/411769.html

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

A great variety of programs have been created by local education agencies, city agencies, community organizations, non-profits, and faith-based organizations focused on serving the area's most vulnerable youth. Several initiatives are listed below, though it has proven very difficult to map the terrain.

D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION OPTIONS

D.C. Public Schools offer supplementary services to students of traditional high schools who are off-track: credit recovery opportunities, tutoring, twilight programs, and other after-school programming. For students who are not succeeding in the traditional high school setting or who have already dropped out, DCPS offers alternative options:

- DCPS is working to create smaller, higher-quality alternative schools receptive to dropouts. **The Luke C. Moore Academy** is a newly renovated school currently serving 400 students of all levels. The academy takes students at any time of year, at any level.

- The **School To Aid Youth (STAY)** programs are housed in three, traditional high schools: Roosevelt SHS, Springarn SHS, and Ballou SHS. These STAY schools offer second chances at high school diplomas to youth and adults from a wide range of ages—from 16 up to 80. Each of the three programs offers a variety of afternoon and evening classes towards obtaining diplomas, GED, and career skills training.

- In 2008, DCPS opened the **Youth Engagement Academy**, now called the Washington Metropolitan High School, run by Big Picture Schools, which currently serves approximately 120 9th and 10th graders in the fall of 2010. There are plans to open a similar school in the next few years. http://www.bigpicture.org/2008/09/youth-engagement-academy.

- DCPS also offers programming to students who have been detained and/or incarcerated at **Youth Services Center**, and to those who have been suspended for an extended period at **CHOICE Academy**. While these are not specifically education options, they provide important opportunities for disconnected youth. http://dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/How+Students+Are+Supported/Alternative+High+Schools.

D.C. PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Other important alternative education options in the District are provided by charter schools. Though charter schools in the District have evolved into a complex array of institutions with different foci and strengths, they provide viable alternatives to all students, including the city's low-income students. The following is a sampling of some of the schools that serve disconnected youth or reconnect youth/young adults to educational opportunities. Some offer housing, programs for young parents and their children, evening classes, and GED programs.

- The mission of the **Booker T. Washington Public Charter School for Technical Arts** (www.btwschool.org) is to educate students in grades 9 through 12, adults, and others for the construction and building trades and prepare them for lifelong learning by educating students to meet college matriculation requirements; training students for construction apprenticeship programs; developing life skills for long-term success; and creating opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

- **Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School** (www.carlosrosario.org) provides education that prepares the diverse young adult/adult population of Washington, D.C., through evidence-based adult education practices with comprehensive services, including GED, counseling, job readiness and placement, leadership training, among others.

- The **Maya Angelou Public Charter School** (www.seeforever.org) is a national alternative educational program model specifically designed to support lower income students with a particular focus on court-involved youth, students who have failed in traditional school settings, and students with special needs. The program offers small classes, individualized instruction, and a wide range of wraparound services that give at-risk students the opportunity to move on to postsecondary programs or employment.

- **Next Step Public Charter School** (www.nextsteppcs.org) provides students who face extraordinary challenges and who are not supported in traditional high schools the opportunity to continue their education. The Next Step provides a full-time, academic program and has designed a curriculum that addresses students' needs. It is an ungraded school, and students are placed in steps according to their academic level in their native language: Spanish or English. Content courses are taught in the students' native language and English Language Learners have classes in English as a Second Language. Classes are

small; there is one teacher for every 10 students. Two full-time counselors, as well as a full-time Transitions Coordinator provides wraparound services to meet the spectrum of students' needs.

- The **YouthBuild Public Charter School** (www.ycpcs.org) serves young people ages 16–24 who have dropped out of traditional high schools. At YouthBuild, students transform their communities by building housing for homeless or low-income families as they learn the construction trade, and they transform themselves as they prepare to earn their GED.

GED PREPARATION PROGRAMS

An increasing number of older youth are deciding to take the GED rather than finish high school. In fact, school-aged young adults (16–18 year olds) accounted for 30% of all GED candidates nationally in 2007.[2] The GED programs in Washington, D.C., are more numerous and more accessible than many alternative education programs. GED preparation programs are offered by a great variety of city agencies and community-based organizations all over the city, with a variety of schedules and locations, making them more accessible than most school options.

GED/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BLENDS

Some of the best programs for disconnected young adults in the city are the combined GED and workforce development programs offering young people a small, school-like environment with committed staff, a youth development approach, and academic skills taught in preparation for and in the context of real work situations. All of the following also work to place youth in jobs and then track their success.

- **Alexandria Seaport Foundation** (www.alexandriaseaport.org), offers a boat-building apprenticeship program in Virginia (but accepts District of Columbia youth), and has developed a program that teaches construction through boat-building and unique GED preparation classes that employ boat-building and construction concepts in the classroom.

- **Fresh Start** (www.livingclassrooms.org), run by Living Classrooms, offers GED preparation and teaches metalworking. Students have the opportunity to sell their work for money.

2/ *2007 GED Testing Program Statistical Report* (General Educational Development Testing Service: The American Council on Education, July 2008).

- The **Potomac Job Corps Center** (www.potomacjob-corps.gov), funded by the Department of Labor, offers a comprehensive diploma, GED, and career-training program that provides housing, food, transportation, and a stipend.
- **Youthbuild** (www.ybpcs.org), which runs three well-established community-based organizations (Latin American Youth Center, ARCH, and Sasha Bruce), provides GED preparation classes, training, and work experience in construction, as well as a stipend.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

There are a myriad of job-training programs in the city for both youth and adults, ages 16 and up, ranging from job-readiness classes that teach resume preparation and interview skills, to training and certification in particular industries. Most programs teach computer skills and repair, construction, automotive repair, customer service, and Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning (HVAC) skills. Many of them also provide Adult Basic Education and workplace literacy classes. Examples include:

- **ARCH** (www.archdc.org) provides a variety of skills training programs in addition to its Youthbuild program and GED programs, including construction, computer skills, and customer service.
- **D.C. Central Kitchen** (www.dccentralkitchen.org) conducts outreach to homeless, unemployed, and low-skilled adults, and provides a comprehensive culinary arts training program that results in certification and job placement.
- The **Department of Employment Services' School Program** (www.does.dc.gov) offers skills workshops, career awareness and work readiness modules, basic education, GED preparation and basic computer training, as well as vocational skills training.
- **Earth Conservation Corps** (www.ecc1.org) is a non-profit youth development and environmental service organization that uses the challenge and promise of restoring the Anacostia River to engage unemployed youth in workforce training, environmental education, and media arts to help them learn the skills they need to become candidates for the emerging workforce and environmental stewards through advocacy, action and community service.
- The **Maya Angelou Transition Center** (www.seeforever.org) works with youth who have been released from the juvenile correction center and helps them transition back into their communities through a range of programming and supports including: diploma-granting educational program, GED preparation program, social service support, personal success and life skills training, access to job training and vocational education, and career development services.

OTHER PROGRAMS/SERVICES

There are a great number and variety of programs teaching literacy, computer skills, and basic job readiness skills all over the city. Some of them are listed on an interactive database called **D.C. Learns**, which requires organizations to become members before being listed. A variety of other organizations offer programs in areas such as life skills, health, sexuality, parenting skills, gang prevention, substance abuse counseling, and conflict mediation in a holistic way. The **Alliance for Concerned Men**, for example, partners with an HVAC certification program and with Sasha Bruce Youthwork to offer both GED and work certification as needed. Many of these programs will do whatever it takes to get young people connected to resources, help them develop skills, and help them find a path to a degree and a good job.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND CITYWIDE COLLABORATION

There is no shortage of partnerships and collaborative efforts in the District, and the effectiveness of local non-profits and community organizations depends in part on such partnerships. Several large-scale collaborative efforts have formed around the problems of disconnected youth in Washington, D.C., including:

- The **D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation** (CYITC) mediates between city agencies and community organizations to deliver services to disconnected youth. CYITC managed the District's Effective Youth Development plan (2005) aimed at engaging the District's disconnected youth, ages 16 to 24, in non-traditional, out-of-school settings. They are also currently managing DYRS' aftercare contracts for youth leaving detention, and a new outreach initiative to youth at risk of criminal or gang activity in Focused Improvement Areas.
- In the fall of 2006, the D.C. Mayor's Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect and the D.C. Children's Trust Fund, in cooperation with the D.C. Kids Count Collaborative for Children and Families, released a report, "**The Unemancipated Youth Project,**" which focused on a sub-group of disconnected youth, ages 13

to 17, "who are virtually living on their own without formal parental or guardian supervision."

- Mayor Fenty's **Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission** (ICSIC) meets monthly to review progress on each of the major city goals and makes decisions on new initiatives.

- The **Department of Health Services and Child and Family Services** are planning a Youth Transition Center. Many organizations are interested in the idea of "co-locating" programs and services to facilitate coordination and to make it easier for youth to access services.

This is only a partial list of organizations and initiatives, but each of them is providing elements that support the transition from difficult childhoods to successful adulthoods for the District of Columbia's vulnerable young people.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

On paper, the number and variety of organizations providing services to disconnected youth in the District seems exhaustive. Conversations and interviews with youth workers and program directors clarified that these efforts are working on parallel issues, with limited budgets and timetables. They are competing for access to the same pool of disconnected youth. But, there are thousands of youth who are not being served, as a result.

Following, is a review of the challenges this report outlines, alongside recommendations for short-term actions that can be taken to pave the way for long-term goals that can be met to help more disconnected youth get back on track.

CHALLENGE: INCOMPLETE DATA AND INFORMATION GAPS

- **Existing data systems do not provide enough information** to assess the status and needs of disconnected youth or the effectiveness of current services. Despite data-gathering efforts cited above, we do not know how to locate the over 11,000 disconnected youth between the ages of 16–24 who left school and never earned a diploma, and we are therefore unaware of their needs. We do know that 1,421 mothers age 19 or younger gave birth in 2006, and that 60% of those mothers live in Wards 1, 7, and 8. We do not know how many teen parents do not have diplomas.

- **Existing data systems are obstacles to coordination around youth service.** In our conversations with agency and program directors, the problem of sharing information about youth was raised due to the legal obstacles and the differences in agency goals, timelines, and cultures.

- **Initiatives and programs are working in silos and not communicating** about youth, resources, or strategies. Caseworkers from different programs are looking for the same information, researchers are duplicating efforts, and organizations pursue "instant gratification funding," resulting in program fragmentation, overlaps, and gaps.

- **It is difficult to find information on options for disconnected youth.** For youth not involved in the juvenile justice, foster care, or other systems, finding opportunities is too complex and requires life skills they do not yet have. Most programs rely on word of mouth. Caseworkers and mentors face the same problem: most said they spent a large portion of their time on the phone trying to discern the quality, culture, and policies of various programs. Most agreed that a comprehensive, up-to-date online database of services for disconnected youth would be an enormous help.

RECOMMENDATION: Improve Data and Information Systems

- **Develop a data system that can track the size of the disconnected youth population and monitor outcomes.** Leverage existing databases (i.e., D.C. Kids Count, Neighborhood Info D.C., and the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLED) to build on available data.

- **Create an index of all programs available to dropouts and other disconnected young people in the city.** The database should be easy-to-use and easy-to-read, (fourth grade level), be searchable by program details, culture, and success, so that both youth and caseworkers can more easily refine searches for appropriate programs. It should also be updated continually by those running the programs, and by those using the programs, as well.

CHALLENGE: EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM OPTIONS DO NOT MEET THE NEEDS OF A DIVERSE DISCONNECTED YOUTH POPULATION

There are model schools and training programs in Washington, D.C., but not enough to serve even a tenth of the city's 11,000+ disconnected young people.

- **Too few alternative paths to a high school diploma** exist for the number of youth who have dropped out, are over-aged and under-credited, and who face other life challenges. Often, in both public school systems and public charter schools, there are fewer seats available than the number of youth seeking re-engagement. Furthermore, most charter schools do not want to accept older students, or students arriving mid-year. They accept some students by lottery, have extensive waiting lists, and often apply strict requirements for admission and retention of students (i.e., family commitments or rigorous schedule). As a result, even if a transitioning student would benefit from a program in a particular charter school, there is a good chance he or she will have to wait too long, or will not be able to get in at all.

- **Existing alternative education options offer insufficient supports.** Many youth who have dropped out of high school have difficulty accessing individualized attention, remedial skill development, and high quality, relevant education and training. Moreover, some have trouble getting even their basic needs met: housing, food, childcare, clothing, and money, not to mention counseling and close guidance. While a few programs offer these supports, most can only offer referrals: tutoring here, jobs there, housing help in a third agency. As one caseworker put it, it is "difficult to put all the necessary pieces together" in one program for many young people.

- **Over-reliance on, and under-investment in, the GED as an alternative education credential.** For most over-aged and under-credited youth in Washington, D.C., the GED seems to be the only option, though a high school diploma is preferable and leads to better life outcomes.[28] One reason for its popularity is that GED preparation classes are offered widely: in alternative schools, in adult education programs, in workforce training programs, and in community centers. But they vary significantly in quality and are not aligned with local education agencies. They lack shared standards, resources, professional development and accountability. Many of them also lack the youth development component that dropouts have missed in school.

- **There is a significant and unmet need for accessible and effective programs for older youth reading below the 7th grade level.** Although exact data is not available, a significant number of transitioning young offenders are reading at a low level. Such young people are not eligible for GED preparation programs and will not function well in school or job training programs without improving their skills. For a 17-year-old reading at a 4th grade level in the District, the opportunities are few. Youthbuild programs might take some on, depending on their references and cognitive ability; otherwise adult education literacy programs and adult job training classes are the only options. These programs are generally not trained in youth development or are ill-equipped to handle the immaturity and liability of adolescents.

- **There is a significant and unmet need for programs willing to handle problem behavior and other infractions.** Youth who need the most help—those with significant emotional, learning, behavioral, and substance abuse problems—are often excluded from the programs that could most benefit them. When asked where they would refer an under-credited, 15-year-old with emotional or behavioral problems, our workgroup had no ideas.

- **Not enough in place for transitioning young offenders.** Juvenile offenders have very poor chances of reconnecting with school or work.[29] Youth who have been incarcerated have trouble re-entering their communities on new terms, and schools and employers are often apprehensive about taking them back. These youth need intensive supervision, logistical and financial support, counseling, and case management. The Maya Angelou Transition Center has a limited capacity of up to 30 youth at a time for several months, which is not nearly enough space to serve this transitioning offender population. Recognizing this need, the See Forever Foundation is expanding this programming to include a Young Adult Learning Center.

The Young Adult Learning Center will offer a high-quality academic program to prepare students to obtain a GED or earn a high school diploma through credit recovery, and successfully transition to post-secondary education or employment. The program will include:

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28 S.R. Ou, "Do GED Recipients Differ From Graduates and School Dropouts? Findings From an Inner-City Cohort," *Urban Education* 43 (1) (Sage Journals Online: 2008), pp. 83-117.

29 D. P. Mears & J. Travis (2004).