



# POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS INITIATIVE FACT SHEET

SUPPORTING LOW-INCOME YOUTH TO AND THROUGH POSTSECONDARY  
EDUCATION, CAREERS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Since fall 2009, 15 local programs affiliated with YouthBuild USA and the National Youth Employment Coalition and their community college partners have collaborated to build a new pathway for disconnected youth. Collectively these partnerships have worked with more than 1,700 young people who had left high school without a degree, helping them work towards completion of their high school diplomas or GED, entry into, and completion of postsecondary education. As of the beginning of 2012, more than 850 of these students have entered postsecondary education.

The programs are part of the Postsecondary Success Initiative (PSI), which is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, and New Profit Inc. The initiative is improving education outcomes for off-track and out-of-school youth, aged 16-26. The initiative is led by two major national youth serving networks—the National Youth Employment Coalition and YouthBuild, USA, in partnership with Jobs for the Future. Brandeis University's Center for Youth and Communities serves as the project's evaluator. This year, the effort expanded to include a third national organization—The Corps Network.

## SERVING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH<sup>1</sup>

During three years of operation, the PSI has supported more than 1,700 youth. The majority of these young people were facing significant barriers to postsecondary attainment.

- > Seventy-eight percent (78%) of youth in the initiative entered without a high school diploma or GED (17% had already earned a high school diploma, and 6% had a GED).
- > 54% of those who entered without a high school diploma or GED tested below an 8th grade reading level; 72% tested below 8th grade in math.
- > Approximately 64% of participants were African-American, 16% were Hispanic, and 25% were white. The average age at entry into the program was just under 20 years old (19.6 years).

## RESULTS (TO AND THROUGH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION)

These programs are making a difference. Of the young people who entered PSI programs before January 2011, 50% (over 750 students) entered college by the end of the year (December 2011) and a total of 866 (57%) entered some form of postsecondary education (college and/or technical training programs). At least 59% of those entering postsecondary were first-generation college goers.

Among young people entering college:

- > Over 60% enrolled as full-time students. Full-time participation in college is a significant predictor of college persistence.<sup>2</sup>
- > Early data on enrollment indicate that the majority of PSI college entrants stayed in school through their first year of college. Among YouthBuild students, for whom longer-term data is available, 48% had persisted into their second year of college (i.e., enrolled in 3 semesters of school or more). These figures compare favorably with national data on college persistence for all public 2-year colleges.<sup>3</sup>
- > By December 2011, 36% of PSI college enrollees had tested out of or passed developmental math, and 47% had completed the developmental English requirements. By comparison, a recent report estimates that only 20% of low-income students in 2-year colleges ever complete remedial education and



associated “gateway” college courses. Nationally, 65% of low-income students entering 2-year colleges require at least some remedial education.<sup>4</sup>

- > While many PSI students worked to complete their developmental education requirements, which generally do not provide credit towards graduation, over half (53%) had begun to accumulate college credits by the end of 2011. Movement toward credit accumulation is associated with persistence in college and represents a particular accomplishment for students who were frequently the first in their families to enter postsecondary education.<sup>5</sup>

## HELPING STUDENTS STAY ON TRACK

The local partnerships in the PSI provide a wide array of services and supports aimed at helping youth prepare for and succeed in postsecondary education, ranging from case management and counseling supports to full education programs offering college-ready secondary education instruction. All programs offer bridge programming to facilitate a smooth transition to college and academic and support services during students’ first year in postsecondary education. Specifically:

- > Over 80% of youth receive some form of individualized support services—a mix of case management (82%), academic advising (61%), mentoring (50%), and individual tutoring (21%).
  - > Nearly all students receive enriched academic support, with a focus on improved academic skills, test preparation, and development of career-related skills:
    - » 67% take high school-level courses.
    - » 78% participate in test preparation programs (for high school graduation, GED preparation, and college admissions testing).
    - » 77% work on reading and writing skills throughout the curriculum.
- » 67% work on college-ready research papers and projects.
  - » 25% take college-level math (generally algebra).
  - » 60% take vocational/technical education courses.
  - » 13% participate in college-level courses (and received credits) through dual enrollment arrangements.
- > Most participants also take part in college awareness and orientation activities, including college search classes, FAFSA preparation and financial aid counseling, college tours, and campus orientation programs:
  - » 66% take college awareness classes, including college search, application preparation, and college planning.
  - » 79% get assistance with financial aid planning and counseling.
  - » 75% participate in campus orientation programs, some as long as 2 weeks in residence on a college campus.<sup>6</sup>
- > Most programs also include a focus on careers and on a broader set of life and workplace-related skills.
  - » 71% of participants have career-related courses or workshops, and 39% were involved in career-related internships, work experience, or apprenticeship activities.
  - » 68% participate in life, workplace, and leadership skills development activities, including financial literacy programs, and over 40% participated in some form of volunteer service as part of their activities.

Data continue to be collected by the programs in the PSI and updated information on the programs and participant outcomes will be available in spring 2013.

<sup>1</sup> Opportunity Youth are young people (mostly low-income) aged 16-24 who are not in school/college or the workforce.

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Educational Statistics (2007). Part-Time Undergraduates in Postsecondary Education: 2003-04. U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2007-165)

<sup>3</sup> Nationally, the most recent figure (2010) for first year retention rates for all 2-year public colleges is 53%. Data from the NCHEMS Information Center (<http://www.higheredinfo.org>), tables on “First Year Retention.”

<sup>4</sup> Complete College America. (2012) *Remediation: Higher Education’s Bridge to Nowhere*; also Thomas Bailey (2009). “Rethinking Developmental Education in Community College,” *Community College Research Center Brief*, no. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, Colleen and Nancy Shulock (2009). *Student Progress Toward Degree Completion: Lessons from the Research Literature*. California State University, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy.

<sup>6</sup> Data on financial aid planning and counseling, campus tours, and campus orientation from NYEC sites only.