



## **BACKGROUND**

*With more than 12,000 youth aged 24 and younger currently disengaged from school without a HS diploma or equivalent, a Re-Engagement Center provides a one-stop portal where youth can access referral services to successfully re-connect. Joining other cities such as Philadelphia and Boston, the District is establishing a physical center to serve as a “single-door” through which youth can enter to reconnect to educational options and other critical services, and to serve as a high-profile focal point around which to organize currently disjointed District re-engagement efforts.*

- **Youth disengagement can jeopardize workforce entry, lessen the chance of earning a family-supporting wage and increase dependence on public systems.**
  - Economic estimates show that nationwide investments in reconnection of 3.3 million “under-attached” opportunity youth could save as much as \$707 billion or \$214,242 per re-attached young person, from a combination of crime-related, health, and welfare costs avoided, as well as other uncollected taxes.<sup>1</sup>
  - Current re-engagement activities exist within DCPS, DYRS, and CFSA but are limited in scope, and result in disconnected youth to making multiple attempts through various offices to access the services they require.
  
- **In tandem, multiple partners in the District should begin efforts to increase alternative education capacity, so that a growing number and variety of placements are available to accept referrals of formerly disengaged students.**
  - At least 80% of the nearly 3,000 existing seats for 16-24 year olds are already occupied by students<sup>2</sup>.
  - Consideration of the barriers to re-engagement must be taken into account when considering where within existing programs capacity should be increased.
    - According to a DCAYA survey of nearly 500 disconnected youth in the spring of 2013, 32% of respondents reported that they were wither pregnant or parenting. Forty percent of all female respondents indicated they were pregnant or parenting.
    - Nineteen percent of DCAYA survey respondents reported having ever been on probation or committed to the District’s juvenile justice agency (DYRS). These

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<sup>1</sup> NLC-IYEF Re-engagement Center Feasibility Study, 9/30/13

<sup>2</sup> According to an NLC-IYEF-administered online survey in the summer of 2013 to forty pre-identified alternative education and adult basic education programs.

youth require high-quality programming that incorporates case management, education, counseling, and mentoring services.

- A growing number of English Language Learners in the District also require a higher level of service and support that take into account the cultural competencies necessary for long-term success and sustained engagement in school and the workforce.

- **A Re-Engagement Center would serve a number of critical functions in addressing the population of disconnected youth in the District by:**

- Gathering data to better define the District's dropout population
- Assessing educational and psychosocial needs of disconnected youth
- Providing informed and up to date referral services to best-fit programs
- Assisting in the process of re-enrollment
- Continuing support of re-engaged youth for a year

- **In concert with the creation of a Re-Engagement Center, a significant barrier to reconnection can be eliminated by extending the eligibility of existing transportation subsidies to age 24.**

- Currently, the Kids Ride Free Program does not extend to young people older than 22 or to those who take classes outside of the traditional school calendar.
  - DCAYA's *Connecting Youth the Opportunity Report*: "12% of surveyed youth identified that they could not always afford to get to school/class... Nearly one-third (29%) of students reported spending more than \$30 a week or \$120 a month getting to and from school. 47% of students spending that amount came from Wards 5, 7, and 8."
- In revisiting the transportation subsidy, considerations regarding hours of availability for students in alternative school settings and taking classes at later hours should be taken into account to further reduce barriers to reconnection.