OUR

A Framework for Accelerating Progress for Children and Youth in America

WORK

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE

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Foreword

Twenty years ago, I was lucky enough to be part of the team that organized the Presidents' Summit for America's Future and gave life to America's Promise Alliance. I remember thinking how improbable it all was – Presidents Bush, Clinton, Carter, and Ford and First Lady Nancy Reagan coming together in Philadelphia to refresh and deepen the nation's commitment to young people. I remember entertainers and governors, corporate and community leaders. Most of all, I remember the feeling of energy focused on creating more opportunity for young people and the sense of shared commitment and responsibility.

For the past five years, it's been my job and honor to lead America's Promise as we continue to focus the nation's attention on the challenges young people face and on the Five Promises all young people need to thrive – caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education, and opportunities to serve.

Over the years, we've worked with hundreds of communities and Alliance partners to come together for young people. We've led successful campaigns like GradNation, and built a powerful partnership of organizations and community leaders. Our Center for Promise has produced research that helps us better understand the lives of young people who are struggling.

We've seen and experienced progress, but the challenges for young people are deep and persistent. And deep and persistent challenges require smart and even more persistent responses.

Our Work distills our collective learnings and points the way to accelerate progress for the nation's children and youth. We intend *Our Work* as an invitation to spur us – all of us – to take on those deep and persistent challenges and work more collaboratively, effectively, and quickly to create the conditions for success for the young people of America.

Standing in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, General Powell issued a call to action 20 years ago that still rings in my head: "We have no choice. We cannot leave these children behind if we are going to meet the dreams of our founders." That call remains our north star as we once again commit to young people and our collective future.

I hope you find *Our Work* valuable and look forward to working with you toward the day we make the promise of America real for every child.

John Gomperts, CEO and President
America's Promise Alliance

OVERVIEW

"The American Dream is for real. This is the only place in the world where you can get an education, you can work hard, you can start a business, you can make it."

—Youth, age 24

"The American Dream? That's a fairy tale."

—Youth, age 21

The American Dream is both real and at risk.

This fundamental paradox — that today is a good time and a challenging time to be a young person in America — is at the heart of *Our Work*.

Many young people are better off than ever before in America. High school graduation is at an all-time high, and teen pregnancy is at a historic low. More young children are in preschool, and fewer teens are using drugs and alcohol. More young people are graduating college, and fewer young people are in prison.

But many young people still face enormous challenges. Just over 12 percent of youth are

How can we take what's been learned and accelerate progress for young people in America, especially for those young people who are most vulnerable? How can we create the conditions for success for more young people, more quickly?

not in school or working – almost the same as it was 10 years ago.[1] While the educational achievement gap based on race and ethnicity has narrowed, it remains conspicuous: 72.5 percent of African-American students and 76.3 percent of Hispanic/Latino students graduated from high school vs. 87.2 percent of white students.[2]

The child poverty rate is the same today as it was 20 years ago.[3] The rate of children living in low-income families (up to 200 percent of the poverty line) has increased from 39 percent to 43 percent.[4] Mobility is increasingly limited: Of those children born to parents in the lowest income bracket, 42 percent remain there as adults.[5]

The improvements of the past two decades in education, health, and other areas are encouraging. People, organizations, and systems have demonstrated an ability to learn, adapt, and come together across divides to serve children and youth in their communities and across the nation. There are many bright spots in programs, schools, and neighborhoods.

Still for far too many young people, especially young people of color and young people growing up in challenging circumstances, the American Dream seems remote – unlikely and unreachable. Millions of children and youth are still left behind. In a nation built on the promise of equal opportunity, that is simply unacceptable.

How can we take what's been learned and accelerate progress for young people in America, especially for those young people who are most vulnerable? How can we create the conditions for success for more young people, more quickly?

To answer these questions, we drew from academic and scientific research, from the experience and practice of our Alliance partners and others in the field, and from the voices of young people.

- *We went to the literature.* We looked carefully at changes that have affected the lives of children in the past 20 years, from technology to the economy. We also looked at changes in our understanding of those children, from brain science to educational psychology.

- *We went to our own experience.* We consulted the learning of our research institute, the Center for Promise; the experience of the GradNation campaign; and other work.

- *We went to our Alliance and the field.* We interviewed 200 people representing nonprofits, corporations, foundations, research and policy entities, educational institutions, government, and other systems.

- *We went to our broader public network.* We received feedback from 300 individuals on a public survey, and we solicited feedback from a wider group of supporters via social media.

- *And we went to young people themselves.* We interviewed dozens of young people to understand their lived experience and incorporated recommendations from thousands of others who were asked to contribute.

Out of this exploration, we identified two areas of research and learning over the past 20 years – the study of child and youth development and the study of economic mobility – that give us the best view of the road to greater progress. There is a better understanding of child and youth development, the process of growth and learning, and the barriers to that growth and learning. And there is clarity about economic mobility and the conditions that perpetuate and cement inequities, about the ideas that hold the most promise for interrupting the cycle of poverty and expanding opportunity. We dug deeper into both fields.

But the fields of child and youth development and economic mobility don't fully explain if

and how young people succeed. Complex and systemic inequities – based on race, class, disability, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, geography, and more – block children's path. Responses that fail to recognize and take on these realities are destined to fall short.

All that we heard and learned convinced us that to accelerate progress, to create the conditions of success for more young people, we need to:

- Provide every young person with *strong relationships and webs of support* that provide the safety, expectations, guidance, confidence, and accountability that can propel them forward.

- Create *clear, connected, and responsive pathways* for young people to travel, on their journey to achieve lives of contribution and choice.

- Envelop young people in an *engaged community and renewed civic spirit* that demonstrates active support, investment, and belief in their success.

Idealism and realism are both necessary in this work. We see the continuum of progress. We cheer each young person, family, school, program, and community making progress. We celebrate advances in interim goals, like graduation rates and youth employment, on the path to adult success. We continue to ask questions, learn, and push harder for progress.

There is no simple formula to overcome history, hopelessness, and the diminishing American Dream for some young people. But

"Focusing our work on every child means we aren't leaving groups behind just because they are hard to work with, or more vulnerable to the vagaries of life. Focusing on each child means we are focusing on the individual and particular needs of that child."

**– Hal Smith,
National Urban League**

BOX 1

Snapshot of Children and Youth Over Two Decades

FIGURE A
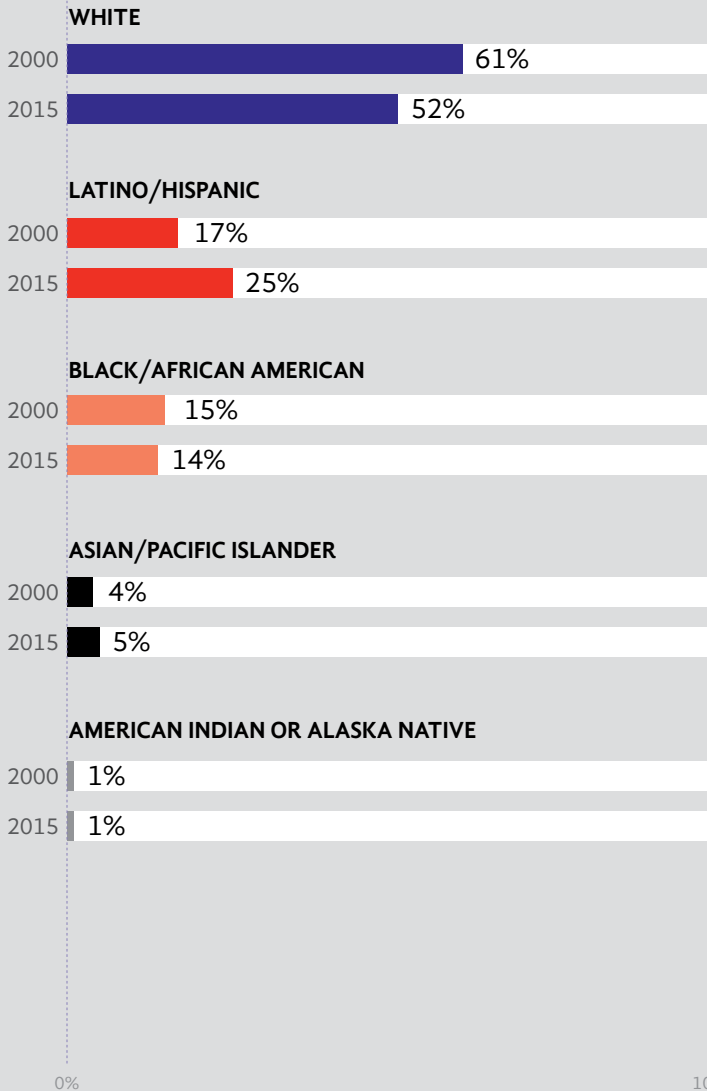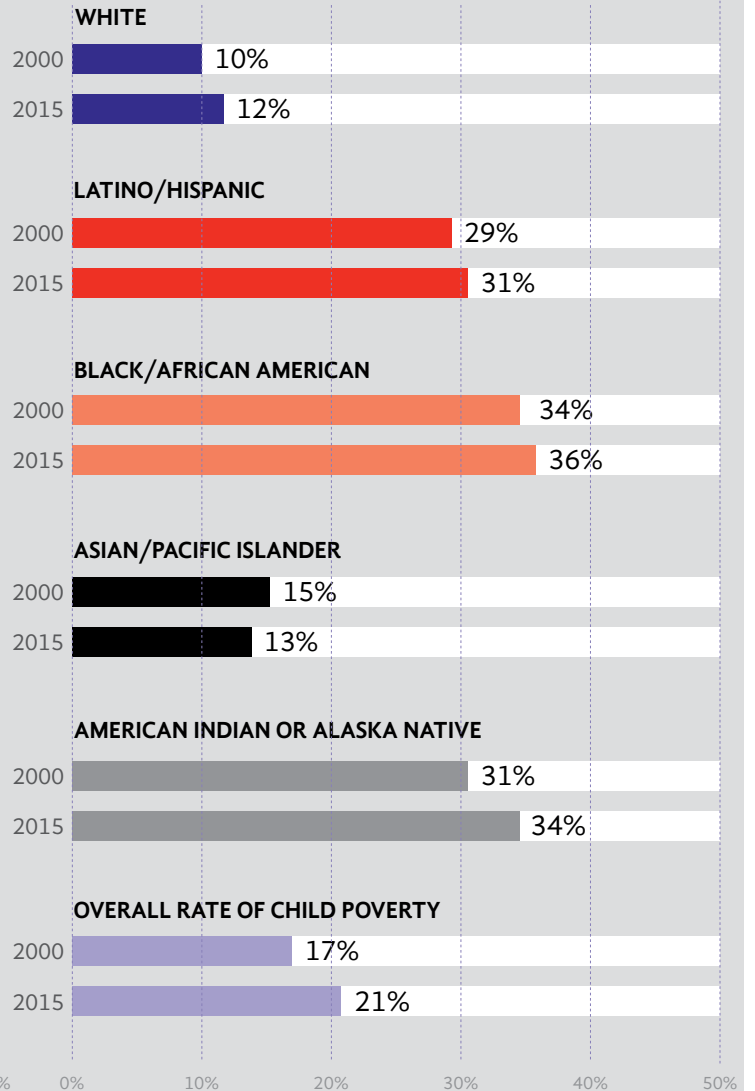### Racial and ethnic makeup of children and youth[6]

WHITE
- 2000: 61%
- 2015: 52%

LATINO/HISPANIC
- 2000: 17%
- 2015: 25%

BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN
- 2000: 15%
- 2015: 14%

ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER
- 2000: 4%
- 2015: 5%

AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE
- 2000: 1%
- 2015: 1%

0%   100%

FIGURE B
Child poverty rate[10]

WHITE
- 2000: 10%
- 2015: 12%

LATINO/HISPANIC
- 2000: 29%
- 2015: 31%

BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN
- 2000: 34%
- 2015: 36%

ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER
- 2000: 15%
- 2015: 13%

AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE
- 2000: 31%
- 2015: 34%

OVERALL RATE OF CHILD POVERTY
- 2000: 17%
- 2015: 21%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

What we learned...

An increasing proportion of our children are Hispanic.[7]

More children in America have immigrant parents — an increase of 34 percent since 1990.[8]

Most public school students are students of color.

Public schools are serving an increasing number of English-language learners.[9]

What we learned...

About the same proportion of children live in poverty today as lived in poverty 15 years ago.[11]

Nearly 29 million of today's children will live below the poverty line for at least one year before they turn 18.[12]

Inequity in poverty rate by race remains; Black children are three times as likely to be poor as white children.

Half of students in public schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch.[13]

this framework lays out a vision for how we – the people, organizations, and systems that surround young people – can incorporate what we've learned to create greater opportunity and accelerate progress for all young people.

We invite you to read and reflect, then join the conversation on *Our Work*. We, as a movement, can only succeed when all contribute. We, as a nation, can only succeed when all young people have the opportunity to succeed.

> "My version of the American Dream would be the freedom to be whoever you want to be, do whatever you want to do. It's the freedom to have to have the choice to do that."
>
> **—Youth, age 13**

BOX 2

Trends in Youth Outcomes

Here are 13 trends in youth outcomes, both positive and negative, over the past 20 years.

GOOD NEWS	BAD NEWS
Lower infant and child mortality rate[14]	**Higher obesity rates – more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents**[21]
Lower rates of smoking and alcohol use among teens[15]	**Higher adolescent suicide rates, especially among girls**[22]
Higher high school graduation rates[16]	**Higher prescription drug abuse and overdose deaths linked to opioids for older teens and young adults**[23]
Higher proportion of youth with postsecondary education[17]	**Bigger K-12 academic achievement gap based on family income**[24]
Lower teen birth rates[18]	**Lower postsecondary education completion rates, particularly among men, and an increasing completion rate gap between youth of color and other youth**[25]
Lower youth homicide rate[19]	
Lower youth incarceration rate[20]	**Higher number of children and youth experiencing homelessness**[26]

BOX 3

6 Comprehensive Data Sources On Young People and their Environments

Childstats.gov, from the Forum on Child and Family Statistics, is a bank of federally collected data on child well-being. Analyses and reports include *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being.* **www.childstats.gov**

Childstats.gov

Child Trends produces research and uses a data bank to track more than 120 indicators of child well-being, from early childhood to young adulthood. **www.childtrends.org**

Child Trends

Community Commons is a data-sharing platform that compiles data, creates visualizations, and provides tools for measuring community assets and issues. The Vulnerable Populations Footprint and Community Health Needs Assessment are especially helpful for community-level data. **www.communitycommons.org**

Community Commons

Kids Count Data Center and annual Kids Count Data Book, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, houses a wealth of indicators on child and family well-being by topic (education, health, behavioral, economic); geographic location (state, county, zip code); and characteristic (demographic, income-level, age). **www.datacenter.kidscount.org**

Kids Count Data Center and annual *Kids Count Data Book*

Opportunity Index, jointly developed by Measure of America and Opportunity Nation, provides community- and state-level data that have some bearing on level of opportunity and likelihood of economic mobility. **www.opportunityindex.org**

Opportunity Index

Youth.gov houses federally available sources of child data, youth program tools, and best practices. **www.youth.gov**

Youth.gov

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Outcomes for children and youth have changed over the past 20 years. Our understanding of young people has changed, informed by research and practice, science and experience, the voices of those who work with youth, and the voices of youth themselves.

While there are many important lessons learned over two decades, we focused on two disciplines closely connected to opportunity for young people – *child and youth development* and *economic mobility*. While these disciplines may seem worlds apart, they both speak to the experiences of young people and the many levels of influence around them.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model of child and youth development (adapted for simplicity below) captures the impact of different levels of influence on the life of a young person, including the dynamic interactions between those levels. Some of these influences are easy to see and touch – family members, peers, teachers. Other are more elusive but also powerful – technology, culture, the economy.

The lessons of the past 20 years can be applied both within and across these levels of

Children are the product of influences:

Their own choices

Their relationships with individuals in their family and community

The influence of systems and policies

influence to maximize their positive impact on each young person. Increasingly, people engaged with and studying youth (child and youth development), and those working to understand the ability of young people to move out of poverty (economic mobility), have paid attention to the need for intervention and collaboration across family, local environments, and macro environments — not just at the level of the individual child. This point of intersection can be powerful for both understanding and directing action in support of positive outcomes for young people.

An ecological systems model of children and youth

Macro Environment

Economy, technology, policy, culture

Local Environment

Schools, neighborhoods, businesses, local organizations, and institutions

Parents and Families

Young Person

CHILD AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:

Lessons on young people and how they interact with their world

....

"We want to prepare our girls — and our boys — to be responsible and confident adults, economically independent, and personally fulfilled."

—Patricia Driscoll, Girls Inc.

....

Researchers working in the disciplines of cognitive neuroscience (brain science), educational psychology, and other developmental sciences have uncovered new insights into how young people develop. These insights continue to inform practice.[27]

Early ages: Brain science has contributed new perspectives on how young people think, feel, learn, and adapt. The ages 0-5 are critical for children in laying the groundwork for lifelong outcomes, underscoring the need for focus on the environments around children at early ages. The connection to parents in those years is especially important, along with high-quality early learning experiences in and outside the home. Equity gaps, including exposure to words, begin early.

Defining positive youth development[28]

An intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.

. . . .

Adolescence: For older children, there is new data revealing the plasticity of the adolescent brain, far beyond what was previously known. Many practitioners have advocated for not giving up on seemingly at-risk or troubled teens, and science now supports this determination by showing how teens can continue to learn and grow. Similarly, the identification of continued frontal lobe development into early adulthood points to the need for a renewed focus on supporting youth beyond 18, through age 25. Young adults continue to develop in significant ways, and thus need space and appropriate supports from people and institutions to continue to practice the habits of success in school, work, and civic life.

"Kids growing up with hardship are focused on survival, not on school or their future."

—Youth, age 22

Adversity: Researchers have found more evidence that the adversity faced by some young people has significant impact on their developmental outcomes. Adverse experiences – including abuse, neglect, family instability, and exposure to violence – may produce toxic stress and traumatic responses in young people. Those responses negatively impact the architecture of a developing brain and can prevent a young person from achieving success in school, work, and life. Children living in poverty often have more adverse experiences, more sustained exposure to those experiences, and less support to buffer those experiences. Furthermore, a parent's own adverse experiences can impact their ability to effectively support their children, compounding the traumatic effects across generations.[29]

There is emerging evidence suggesting effective ways to prevent and buffer the impacts of adversity for both children and parents, including the value of caring adult relationships, trust, and social support networks.[30] Organizations and systems are also increasingly taking a trauma-informed approach to their work, equipping professionals with tools to address the needs of the children they serve.[31]

"Human brains don't divide things into soft skills and hard skills."

—Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Temple University

Social and emotional skills: Today, there is a greater appreciation of the importance of social and emotional skills, alongside traditional content knowledge, in preparing young people for the demands of modern society and economy. These skills include collaboration, communication, content knowledge, critical thinking, creative innovation, confidence, compassion, competence, character, and connection.[32]

Before young people can gain these skills, they must develop self-regulation and executive function. Over time, they build perseverance and move toward independence and sustainability. While social and emotional skills, mindsets, and abilities elude easy measurement, it is widely accepted that youth need many opportunities across many settings and throughout their growing years to develop these skills, not just on their own but through relationships with peers and adults.

Developmental practices: The child and youth development field has converged on several practices necessary to equip young people for adulthood.[33]

- **Developmental relationships** that are authentic, positive, and productive. These relationships are caring, motivating, equipping, and empowering. They are most effective when they are sustained over time. High-quality relationships help young people reflect on and understand their learning experiences.

- **Developmental experiences** that keep young people challenged and engaged. These experiences can occur within a classroom, home, or community, through service, instruction, or play. They give young people the chance to actively learn and participate in ways appropriate to age and stage of development. They connect to individual passions, promoting engagement and agency.

- **Developmental environments** that are welcoming, safe, and structured. These are positive places where young people want to spend time, know what to expect and know what is expected of them. Increasingly, school climate and inclusive practices are viewed as an important part of this environment. Sports, afterschool programs, and other activities outside classrooms often create this level of enrichment and connection for young people.

- **Developmental time** that provides opportunities for young people to learn, practice, and demonstrate skillsets and mindsets. Young people start at different

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BOX 4

5 Efforts Identifying and Measuring Social and Emotional Skills

1

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) strives to make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school nationwide.

2

CORE Districts, in partnership with Policy Analysis for California Education, have developed a shared data system that works across districts to measure academic outcomes alongside non-academic measures of student success, including chronic absenteeism, students' social-emotional skills, and school climate and culture.

3

The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development unites leaders to envision how to make social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) part of the fabric of every K-12 school.

4

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) serves as a cross-sector catalyst around 21st century learning and readiness for students, supporting areas such as early learning, 21st century citizenship, and life-long learning.

5

Skills for a Changing World, a project of the Brookings Institution and Lego Foundation, seeks to ensure that all children have high-quality learning opportunities that build the breadth of skills needed to create a productive, healthy society in the face of changing social, technological, and economic demands.

points and learn at different paces, and systems are often designed for an average that may not exist. We must meet them where they are, providing space to try and fail, and have supportive space for continuous improvement.

These developmental practices occur not just in formal educational or programmatic settings, but across the ecosystem surrounding a young person. In the ecological model (page 9), this ecosystem includes family and home settings, schools, out-of-school settings, and neighborhoods.

"It was a very good program...They didn't judge us or criticize us or looked at us any type of different way, you know? They allowed us to be us."

—Youth, age 17

10 Must-Reads on Child and Youth Development

Becoming Brilliant, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff and Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek

Building Blocks for Learning: A Framework for Comprehensive Student Development, Turnaround for Children

Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework, University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, National Research Council, Institute of Medicine

The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us about the Relationships Between Parents and Children, Alison Gopnik

The Good Teen: Rescuing Adolescence from the Storm and Stress Years, Richard M. Lerner

Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why, Paul Tough

Ready by Design: The Science (and Art) of Youth Readiness, Stephanie Malia Krauss, Karen J. Pittman, and Caitlin Johnson

Relationships First: Creating Connections that Help Young People Thrive, Search Institute

Sparks: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers, Peter L. Benson

ECONOMIC MOBILITY:
Lessons on how young people move out of poverty

Over the past two decades, researchers have focused on how young people experience economic mobility. This field explores how young people move up and down the economic ladder, and in particular, how young people can move out of poverty into the middle class. A young person's ability to move out of poverty matters. Longitudinal analyses have demonstrated that the conditions of poverty have a deeper and more lasting negative impact on young people than we previously believed.

Researchers, including Isabel Sawhill, Ron Haskins, and Richard Reeves of the Brookings Institution, have identified clear milestones linked to a young person's likelihood of advancing to the middle class. Reaching these milestones depends in part on a young person's choices and abilities. But success also depends on a child's parents – their socioeconomic status, educational level, and other characteristics – and on the community where they live.

Other research has demonstrated how variables – place, income, education, health, race, and ethnicity – interact to create or inhibit opportunity for young people. Raj

Defining economic mobility[34]

Americans' movement up and down the economic ladder.

Absolute mobility measures whether a person has more or less income, earnings, or wealth than his or her parents did at the same age.

Relative mobility measures a person's rank on the income, earnings, or wealth ladder compared to his or her parents' rank at the same age.

. . . .

Chetty of Stanford, Caroline Ratcliffe of the Urban Institute, Robert Doar of the American Enterprise Institute, and others have led in illuminating the complex interplay of these variables. Their work in economic mobility mirrors what Bronfenbrenner, Karen Pittman, and others in youth development have found: A young person is influenced by outcomes at the family level, the local school and community level, and the macro-level.

Advances in socioeconomic status across a lifetime depend on not only avoiding barriers but being equipped to take advantage of opportunity. Class and race can ease or restrict access to that opportunity. Discriminatory practices in housing, education, and elsewhere reverberate through multiple generations and can keep young people of color in poverty

despite their best efforts to take advantage of opportunity.

Economic mobility research demonstrates that a child's ability to move up the economic ladder – especially to move out of poverty and into the middle class – depends on both his or her own choices and abilities, and on the surrounding environment at home, school, in the community, and in the world. Together, these influences can create the opportunity for young people to move out of poverty or erect significant barriers that keep young people in place.

These tables summarize the milestones associated with a young person's economic mobility and the aggregate status of indicators that are linked to those milestones.

Children and youth:

Some researchers have shown that if young people graduate high school, get a full-time job, and wait until age 21 to get married and then have children, 75 percent of them will reach the middle class, and only 3 percent will live in poverty.[35] Other researchers note the strong **impact of race on a young person's chances of reaching these milestones; young people of color are less likely to reach them. Even if young people of color reach these milestones, their chances of moving out of poverty are still hampered by their race.[36]**

Milestones	Status of associated indicators
Graduate high school	High school graduation is at an all-time high.[37] But wages for those with only a high school degree fell relative to those with a college degree, from over 80 percent to less than 60 percent.[38]
Delay childbearing until after age 21, and then have children intentionally and/or after marriage	Teen pregnancy has declined, but unplanned pregnancies among women 18 to 24 are up.[39]
Avoid incarceration before age 20	The youth incarceration rate has declined.[40]
Obtain some postsecondary education and/or achieve full-time employment by age 25	There has been growth in college enrollment and degree attainment. But college completion rates have fallen, and there is an increased gap in completion rates between youth of color and other youth.[41]

Parents and family:

Research confirms the important role of parents and family. A parent's socioeconomic status, education level, and other characteristics are predictive of child's likelihood of moving out of poverty, particularly when a child lives in poverty for a year or more.[42] A parent's educational attainment, employment, residential stability, and marital/head-of-household status have all been shown to impact a child's increased economic mobility.

Parent and family characteristics	Status of associated indicators
Parents' educational attainment, especially whether parents completed high school and postsecondary education	The increased high school graduation rate has had a positive effect on families. More children are living in homes with parents who graduated high school.[43]
Parents' employment	The rate of children living in homes with parents who lack secure employment is unchanged.[44]
Residential stability	While fewer families report moving within or between counties,[45] housing instability for children and youth has increased.[46]
Single head-of-household status	Family structures have changed, with a greater proportion of children living in homes headed by a grandparent[47] or a single parent.[48] More children have a parent who has been (or is currently) incarcerated.[49]

"My legacy for my son will be a better social status or economic status. It's gotta get better from one generation to the next."

—Youth, age 25

"Programs come and go. The constant in the child's life is the parent."

— Oscar Cruz, Families in Schools

Community:

One of the most striking recent findings is that the environment around young people, especially the environment around low-income young people, has a strong impact on their economic mobility. Quality schools, low rates of violent crime, a strong middle class, high social capital, and low rates of segregation by race and income are all associated with greater economic mobility for children and youth.[50]

Community characteristics	Status of associated indicators
Quality of school system	The past 20 years have seen improvements in standards and curriculum, growth in accountability-focused reforms, use of data, and more recognition of the connection between outcomes at different points in the academic pipeline. More children are in preschool today than ever before.[51] Fewer children feel unsafe at school on a regular basis.[52]
Amount of concentrated poverty	The proportion of people living in concentrated poverty has increased in the past decade, particularly in the Midwest and in smaller and medium-sized metro areas.[53]
Social capital	Measures of trust, social connectedness, and civic engagement are all down over the past 20 years, with a growing gap between low-income adolescents and their peers.[54]
Size of the middle class	About 43 percent of Americans are classified as middle class, down over the past 20 years. The middle class's median income has declined by 4 percent.[55]
Crime	Violent crime is down nationwide, and more parents feel their children live in a safe neighborhood than ever before.[56] Low-income young people are more likely than their higher-income peers to be victims of crime.[57]
Segregation by race and class	There has been a deepening of racial and income segregation, not just within but across municipalities.[58] Schools in the K–12 system have become more segregated by race and income.[59]

"There is an organized structure within every community — a church, a school, a library — that can support young people in breaking the generational curses that trap them into poverty and hopelessness."

—Rev. Dr. Wilson Goode, Amachi

BOX 6

10 Must-Reads on Economic Mobility

Billion Dollar Bets to Create Opportunity for Every American, The Bridgespan Group

Economic Mobility in the United States, The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Russell Sage Foundation

Child Poverty and Adult Success, Caroline Ratcliffe of the Urban Institute

The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility Since 1940, Raj Chetty, David Grusky, Maximilian Hell, Nathaniel Hendren, Robert Manduca, Jimmy Narang – a report of the Equality of Opportunity Project

Closing the Opportunity Gap, Saguero Seminar: Civic Engagement in America

Opportunity, Responsibility, and Security: A Consensus Plan for Reducing Poverty and Restoring the American Dream, AEI-Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity

Creating an Opportunity Society, Isabel V. Sawhill and Ron Haskins

Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis, Robert D. Putnam

Creating Mobility from Poverty: An Overview of Strategies, David Ellwood, Mary Bogle, Gregory Acs, Kelly S. Mikelson, Susan J. Popkin, a project of The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty at the Urban Institute

Saving Horatio Alger: Equality, Opportunity and the American Dream, Richard V. Reeves of the Brookings Institution

3 THE ROAD AHEAD

As described previously, youth development and economic mobility, while seemingly disparate disciplines, both teach how essential it is to consider the ecosystem surrounding young people when seeking to understand their experiences and support their life outcomes.

Recognizing the different levels of influence on a young person, and their interconnectedness, we set forth three focus areas and organize them in a framework that we believe will support the cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaboration necessary to accelerate progress.

- *Strong relationships and webs of support*
- *Clear, connected, and responsive pathways through education and into the workforce*
- *Engaged community and renewed civic spirit*

While research points to numerous effective approaches, these three focus areas establish a foundation for future action by organizations, funders, policymakers, and systems that interact with and surround young people.

These focus areas are designed to work together, not separately nor competitively. Together, they create a set of circumstances that generate more opportunity for young people and a greater likelihood that young people will be able to successfully take advantage of that opportunity.

Each focus area is described briefly below and is accompanied by potential implications for work going forward. In each section, we present questions meant to prompt reflection, conversation, and organizational action.

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AND WEBS OF SUPPORT

Strong relationships are vital to a young person's chance of success, from the earliest days after birth through school and into the world of work. Relationships help young people learn and develop skills, imagine a bright future, and find a way to get there.[60] Researchers have uncovered a great deal about the power of high-quality, sustained relationships, including relationships with parents and family, near-peers and peers, and mentors. Studies have also shown how different types of relationships come together around a young person in a web of support.[61]

Among many other things, strong relationships can:

- **Help young people develop a sense of self and a set of beliefs about the world.**

- **Provide a sense of physical and psychological safety.**

- **Provide role models and space for natural failure and learning.**

- **Show young people that they matter.**

- **Help young people learn to be accountable to others.**

- **Teach young people how to manage difficulty and complexity.**

- **Enable young people find and access supports, as needed.**

- **Create the social capital young people need to secure a foothold in the adult world.**

- **Serve as a critical buffer against the negative effects of adversity.[62]**

> **"Nobody has ever said that they were proud of me. And my mentor said, 'Someday I hope that I can grow up to have your strength and your determination and your motivation.' That really touched me."**
>
> **—Youth, age 18**

Research shows that even the absolute ratio of adults-to-children living in a community matters. A recent study from the Center for Promise documents that the more adults living in a community, the more young people stay on a path toward academic success, regardless of other factors.[63] For every seven more adults in the neighborhood, one fewer young person leaves school. In predominantly Black or African-American communities, race amplifies this effect by 10 percent. While there are no extensive studies of why the adult capacity is low in some communities, early analyses point to higher mortality rate and early death, along with incarceration.[64]

There is real progress to report in connecting young people with the relationships they need. Since the late 1990s, the number of structured mentoring relationships for at-risk youth in the U.S. has increased from an estimated 300,000 to 4.5 million. Still, as many as 9 million at-risk youth want and need a mentor of some kind, but do not have one.[65]

BOX 7

5 Programs that Build Relationships

1

AARP Foundation Experience Corps is an intergenerational, volunteer-based tutoring program that engages adults over 50 as literacy tutors for struggling students in public schools

2

City Year empowers AmeriCorps members to support students and schools in high-need communities.

3

First Tee trains volunteer coaches to help youth build character, instill life-enhancing values, and promote healthy choices through the game of golf.

4

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership supports adults nationwide in using evidence-based models to connect with and support young people.

5

Thread provides a family of committed volunteers and increased access to community resources to help underperforming high school students succeed.

Creating more and better relationships, especially for young people growing up in the most challenging circumstances, starts by working to strengthen and support the naturally occurring relationships in the lives of children and youth — relationships with parents, guardians, and families. Yet over the past decades, parents have often been either blamed for the negative outcomes of their children or ignored. Instead, parents need support for the act of parenting itself and support for basic family needs that often impact effective parenting.

Young people need more than parents. They need to forge multiple relationships and to develop a web of support over the course of their development. This is an essential part of any effort to accelerate progress for young people.

Implications for organizations and systems

"We should all share the deep belief that parents, more than anyone else, love their children."

—Yolie Flores, Campaign for Grade Level Reading

Respect and engage parents. Engaging, supporting, and empowering parents and family members will help create the conditions for youth success at home. Given the power of the parent-child relationship in children's lives, parents need knowledge and capacity,

not judgment and blame, to be most effective. Many children are living with grandparents, guardians, foster parents, or other non-traditional parent figures, and those individuals are just as powerful — and require the same respect — as other parents.

Support parenting knowledge and skills development, either through formal programming (such as home visiting) or informal settings (such as community centers and places of worship). Research has documented the types of parenting knowledge, attitudes, and practices associated with positive outcomes for children at all ages.[66] Aside from expanding access to strong, evidence-based programs designed to inform parents, systems that work with children must be better equipped to engage with parents around parenting topics in school, child care, and health settings.

Identify and provide supports for basic family needs. Family stability is crucial to creating a nurturing, growth-oriented environment for children in their home. A family's financial and housing stability, in particular, have a strong influence on a child's ability to take advantage of opportunity. Systems working with young people can embed screening, referrals, and networks of services into their interactions with families.

"Young people need to believe that someone cares about them. And if they don't believe it, we must give them experiences that change their minds."

—JD Hoye, NAF (formerly the National Academy Foundation)

Enlist people within institutions to focus on cultivating positive relationships with young people. Create opportunities for young people to build relationships with adults in a variety of settings – including schools (teachers, counselors, and other non-instructional school personnel), extracurricular programs, sport (coaches), and workplaces – to create a web of support. Identify and cultivate both natural and structured mentors across developmental settings.

Invest in professional support. Some young people need relationships with highly trained professionals, including school guidance counselors, social workers, and intervention specialists. While episodic volunteering can be a great way to bring more human capital into systems, it must be accompanied by professionals when the needs of young people demand more advanced supports. The wraparound or integrated services model, exemplified by Communities In Schools, combines a variety of services that help youth engage in learning opportunities.

Identify communities that have a low adult capacity and work to target root causes, while deploying programming that focuses on bringing more caring relationships to youth who live there. Systemic and policy changes may address the causes of low adult capacity, but more exploration and targeted action is needed here. In the short term, however, programs with a relationship component can prioritize their work by concentrating on serving those communities with a low adult-youth ratio. They can bring additional caring adults via mentoring, national service, and other avenues.

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS
AND WEBS OF SUPPORT

Reflection, Conversation, and Organizational Action

How does your organization or program currently enlist adults to create positive relationships with young people? What untapped assets could you deploy to create more of these relationships for each young person, thereby strengthening webs of support?

What gaps in relationships are you observing for the young people you serve? What partnerships, shifts in priorities, or new capacity could help bridge those gaps?

How can you or your partners strengthen both support for and involvement of parents and other types of primary family relationships?

How can you partner with systems or services currently working with parents and families to help you realize your mission?

If you were going to do one thing differently related to the implications in this section, what would it be?

CLEAR, CONNECTED, RESPONSIVE PATHWAYS

While it is tempting to describe a young person's journey to adulthood as a single, linear road, the reality is that all young people do not reach milestones at the same time or in the same way. They begin at different points, with different abilities, interests, and lived experiences. They learn and develop at different paces, gaining skills needed for adult life through a tapestry of experiences. Relationships – and the social capital they create – can help young people identify and access the right educational and work experiences, and stay on track to reach their goals. This reality suggests a vision of learning that is multi-faceted, continuous, and supported.

All young people need access to clear, connected, responsive pathways through education, other learning and developmental opportunities, and into the workforce. These pathways must include K-12 education; postsecondary education such as two- and four-year degrees and credentialing programs; exposure to work, service, and extracurricular activities; and settings that help young people learn and practice the skills they need to thrive.

The economic mobility canon increasingly points to the need for young people to obtain education beyond high school, or at least a high school education that clearly and purposely connects to paid work after graduation. For young people, academic instruction and content mastery must both be connected to life after high school and accompanied by career exposure and work experience.

"Readiness for adult life – not just employment or a credential – should be our goal."

—Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment

Today's economy is more dynamic than ever before and requires young people to be prepared to adapt and learn throughout their career. The skills, mindsets, and abilities of "readiness" outlined earlier in this report can help equip young people for their future work. These mindsets and skills include self-regulation, executive function, communication, collaboration, compassion, and others.

For some young people, life is complicated. Personal and family instability, choices, and circumstances can all lead a young person

away from a productive pathway – and getting back on track is not easy. Detours too often turn into off-ramps. Young people of color and those growing up in poverty are more likely to experience disruption or even exclusion that makes it more likely that they will disconnect from school and work. Systems should be alert to policies and practices that contribute to this inequity and adapt to help young people persist through challenges.

All youth are vulnerable during times of transition. These transitions may occur between school grades, between life stages (e.g., adolescence to adulthood), between living situations, and between systems (e.g., juvenile justice and education).

To create more opportunities, and a far greater chance that young people will make the most of those opportunities, we need a set of pathways that are clear, connected, and responsive.

- **Clear:** Young people need a full view of their options for learning, serving, working, and practicing skills they will need as adults. Destinations in adult life, such as college and career, need to be clear, realistic, and attainable. The steps to those destinations need to be well marked, and young people need navigational support along the way.

- **Connected:** Systems that serve young people from birth through work should communicate and collaborate. What young people do and learn in one system (K-12 education) is more effective when connected to the needs of another (postsecondary education, work). Systems should create

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BOX 8

5 Programs that Build Pathways

1	2	3	4	5
Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Out of School Program serves youth 16-24 who have left the traditional school system, providing them with counseling, skills development, and other supports that help them achieve a stable job or post-secondary enrollment.	**Linked Learning Alliance in California** brings together state-wide stakeholders to align efforts and create a collective voice around Linked Learning— an approach to high school that integrates rigorous academics with real-world learning opportunities in various industries.	**NAF Educational Academies** across the country bring educators and business leaders together to provide a high school experience that ignites students' passions and integrates work-based learning into the curriculum.	**To & Through Project in Chicago** works to increase the number of students who successfully complete college by providing research, data analysis, and training resources to educators, families, and policy-makers.	**UNCF Career Planning Initiative** supports historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly black institutions (PBIs) by increasing the number of undergraduates who immediately transition to meaningful jobs in their chosen fields.

more opportunity for young people who do not have the resources to easily access and participate in the types of academic and non-academic experiences they need to be equipped for adult life.

- **Responsive:** Young people are more likely to succeed when systems demonstrate flexibility. Young people start at different points, and bring different sets of life experiences, impacting their ability to navigate learning. Also, a mix of choices and circumstances may lead them to disconnect from a productive pathway. By presenting more options than barriers, systems can invite young people to reconnect to school, work, and productive citizenship.

....

"If you put youth in a position to flourish, they will!"

—Youth, age 19

....

Implications for organizations and systems

Make all available options to learn, work, and serve clear to young people and families.
Young people, particularly those growing up in challenging circumstances, may not be exposed to the many options available to them beyond high school. While many families can help young people navigate options and make the best choices for themselves and their futures, young people need additional navigational support to get a clear picture of postsecondary

options (including service) and prepare for careers. Mentors, guidance counselors, and others can fill this crucial role.

Embed experiential learning, and expose young people to work and postsecondary options.
Young people need to better connect what they learn in school with their educational and employment future. Project-based and experiential learning gives young people the chance to practice needed skills and explore passions, while internships, apprenticeships, and other experiences can expose young people to career and education options.

Create connections between organizations and systems that align with different phases of a young person's education (e.g., K-12 and postsecondary) and employment. As young people transition from K-12 settings into life beyond high school, they need clear and varied options for postsecondary learning. These options may include two- or four-year college degree programs, technical credentials, national service, and other paid opportunities to connect learning and work. Recognizing that today far more young people begin their postsecondary education than complete it, access to these options must be accompanied by support through completion and post-education employment. Accomplishing these goals demands greater collaboration, data sharing, and communication between K-12, postsecondary education, and employers.

Pay attention to times of transition. People, organizations, and systems should be particularly attentive and bring additional support and positive relationships to bear at these critical times.

Maintain flexibility through clear entry, exit, and re-entry points. There are 5.5 million opportunity youth in America who are not in school or at work. Early warning systems and inclusive policies can help prevent young people from getting off track. Multiple, barrier-free on-ramps can help them get back on. Dedicated professionals, including guidance counselors, and quality alternative pathways are important in reconnecting young people.

Identify and respond to the many factors that impact a young person's ability to get and stay on a productive pathway. Public schools serve a more diverse group of young people than ever before, including diversity of language and nation of origin. Many students also come from families without stable housing or income. These non-academic factors impact academic performance. People, organizations, and systems must continue to recognize the unique needs of each young person, providing supports and personalized learning opportunities as needed.

CLEAR, CONNECTED, RESPONSIVE PATHWAYS

Reflection, Conversation, and Organizational Action

Considering the ecosystem that surrounds a young person's development, where could your organization strengthen pathways for young people to explore lifelong learning, paid work, or active citizenship?

How could every young person have a paid work experience before they graduate high school?

What role could you play in strengthening connections between a variety of postsecondary pathways (e.g. two- and four- year degree programs, professional certificates, national service) and paid work experiences?

Where do you encounter young people who are at transition points between grades, life stages, housing situations, or public systems like foster care or juvenile justice? How could you provide support to young people during these transition times?

What specific changes in policy or practice could you recommend, advocate for, or implement that would give young people who have hit a bump in the road the flexibility to get back on a positive path?

ENGAGED COMMUNITY AND RENEWED CIVIC SPIRIT

Young people are more likely to reach developmental milestones and move up the economic ladder when the people, organizations, and systems that surround them believe in them and act with a sense of collective responsibility for their success. This sense of responsibility begins in communities and relies on individual, organizational, and collective action.

The combination of active support and subtler signaling from the community sends a powerful message to young people about the expectations and values of the organizations and adults around them. An engaged community makes the American Dream a shared dream, not just the responsibility of a child.

Achieving this vision of an engaged community requires organizations and systems to act, lead, and invest in new ways. It begins by placing youth at the center of systems and recognizing that problems and solutions facing young people today are too complex for any one program or organization to tackle. Work must happen across traditional divides of funding, governance, and sector in service of an overall goal: the success of every child. Each sector and organization can contribute to this goal, regardless of their proximity to the daily lives of children.

Systems should be informed by the voices of children and youth, and those young people must be equipped to contribute to their own success. Systems must be authentic in both learning and listening, and humble enough to face the hard truths about historic and current racial and economic divides in America. Discrimination, both explicit and implicit, stands in the way of a vibrant civic spirit. It will take the commitment of many organizations, institutions, and systems – and all those adults who work within them – to address these destructive forces.

BOX 9

Policy Frameworks

These frameworks support collaborative and evidence-informed work for children.

Collective Impact for Policymakers: Working Together for Children and Youth, The Forum for Youth Investment

Moving America Forward: Innovators Lead the Way to Unlocking America's Potential, America Forward

Investing in What Works: The Importance of Evidence-based Policy Making, Results for America

Our Opportunity Nation: A Plan to Fulfill America's Dream as an Opportunity Nation, Opportunity Nation

Pathways for Youth: Strategic Plan for Federal Collaboration, Interagency Youth Working Group

Better Evidence for Decision-Makers, Friends of Evidence at the Center for the Study of Social Policy

BOX 10

5 Programs Cultivating Youth Voice

1

Massachusetts Promise Fellowship at Northeastern University trains emerging leaders who commit one year of service to support and provide the 5 Promises to youth around the state.

2

Mikva Challenge: Project Soap Box is a public-speaking competition that calls on young people to speak out on issues affecting them and their communities.

3

Minnesota Alliance with Youth: Minnesota Youth Council uses a youth-adult partnership model, including Promise Fellows, to empower and mobilize youth across the state to exercise their voices, opinions, and ideas on youth issues.

4

Opportunity Youth United, hosted by YouthBuild USA, is a national movement of young people and allies working to increase opportunity and decrease poverty in America.

5

Peace First: The Peace First Challenges is a campaign that calls for young people around the world to identify injustice and develop solutions using a peacemaking lens.

While organizations and systems are necessary forces in creating an engaged community and renewing civic spirit, everyday citizens are also important. The power of service, both from adults and young people, can build trust and empathy, and help solve problems.

Implications for organizations and systems

Investigate and implement effective models to structure and sustain cross-sector collaborations. Greater recognition of the complexity of social problems has led to the growth of cross-sector collaboration and a renewed emphasis on systems thinking. Collaborative structures can build sustainable bonds and goals that survive personnel changes and the routine cycles of funding and elections. While goals and models of cross-sector collaboration vary, the animating civic spirit remains the same — all are responsible for the success of our children.

Cross-sector approaches to youth issues with promising results include Purpose-Built Communities, Communities that Care, Say Yes to Education, and "collective impact" efforts across the country.[67] Communities taking this approach range from Parramore Kidz Zone in Orlando, Florida to the Ohio Appalachian Collective. Funders and policymakers can support collaboration and community-wide goals through continued innovation in how they structure and manage funding, guidance, regulations, and data.

Find leaders who address community need alongside organizational goals. The complexity of problems facing young people demands both a new way of working across organizational silos and a new style of organizational leadership. In this collaborative world, leaders who are inclined toward service, learning, and humility are more likely to succeed. Informed by both data and experience, these new leaders are more adaptive than rigid and must be identified and cultivated more intentionally. They are more responsive to the voice of all members of a community, not just those in traditional organizational roles of power and influence.

"One thing that is so powerful in our community — and should be in all communities — is the civic mindset, an ethos and expectation that business will show up and connect with its neighbors, customers, employees, and beyond."

—Bob Harvey, Greater Houston Partnership

Embed youth voice, empowerment, and capacity building into planning and implementation. The voices of young people are valuable in informing and evaluating programs, and systems that explicitly serve young people should harness that power. Organizations can build youth capacity and agency to advocate and serve — ultimately, this equips young people to better influence their own positive outcomes. Organizations can employ techniques of human-centered and participatory design but must also value and respect the voices of those they serve.

Recognize the role business must play. While businesses may not see themselves as primarily connected with youth, they can contribute enormously to a positive local and macro environment for young people. Businesses are increasingly paying attention to their interaction with society, demonstrated through an increased focus on corporate social responsibility, family-supporting practices, and sustainable business practices. These practices can and do affect individual young people every day. Business can enhance the pathways available to young people by identifying opportunities to give young people the chance to experience work and connect it to their education.

Identify and work to overcome the historic barriers to trust in a community. Trust is the foundation for collaboration between organizations, and between organizations and the individuals they serve. Through their actions, organizations and systems can create a sense of welcome and belonging – or a sense of fear and mistrust. People can overcome mistrust thought the hard work of recognizing and correcting explicit and implicit discrimination and disenfranchisement.

Offer opportunities for various types of service, for both adults and young people. Service in its many forms – volunteering, national service, and informal acts of neighborly care – builds awareness and empathy.[68] While the use of personal technology has created new opportunities for engagement, a text message cannot replace a conversation when it comes to creating trust, connection, and civic identity. Organizations in communities can signal the importance of active citizenship by creating more opportunities for young people to serve throughout their development and more opportunities for adults to serve alongside them.

ENGAGED COMMUNITY AND RENEWED CIVIC SPIRIT

Reflection, Conversation, and Organizational Action

What forms of collaboration are most effective in your community? What additional knowledge about measurement, best practices, and governance models would accelerate progress to your community goals?

How are you engaging, or how could you engage, young people in shaping the work of your program, your organization, your company, or your community?

What implicit values, norms, or practices of your organization might make youth feel welcome or unwelcome?

Whether or not you serve young people directly, how could your organization or company contribute more strongly to a positive environment for young people in your community?

What formal and informal service opportunities exist in your community that encourage cross-generational, cross-racial, and cross-sector connections? Are there ways to create more of these trust-building opportunities?

CONCLUSION

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"When it comes to young people, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. We need to summon the will."

**—General Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret.)
and Mrs. Alma J. Powell**

....

Our work – to improve the lives of children and youth – attracts a group of people who have much in common. We believe change is possible. We work hard within and outside of our organizations to achieve it. And we succeed often enough to keep going.

We are bolstered by stories of change – one child at a time, one family at a time, one school or community or organization at a time.

At the same time, we know that our efforts are not enough. We see the magnitude of the problems we are trying to solve and we are pained, humbled, and dissatisfied. How can we work differently – faster, more collaboratively, more effectively – to help more young people reach for their American dream?

Through secondary research and interviews, we identified three areas of focus that have the most potential to accelerate progress for young people. These areas of focus reinforce each other, and each one makes the others stronger.

We can prioritize and grow *strong relationships and webs of support* around young people, especially supporting parents as they strive to be present for their children.

We can work to build *clear, responsive, and connected pathways* through education into the workforce, paying attention to transition points where young people are most vulnerable to disconnection. We can welcome young people back on track, not push them away, when they need another chance.

We can ignite *engaged communities and renewed civic spirit*, building systems more aligned with the needs of young people, driven by data, and animated by humility. We can create more opportunities for service to build empathy, trust, and understanding.

This is *Our Work* and an invitation to you. Together we can accelerate progress for young people in America.

Appendices

A. Appreciation

This document reflects the input of many outstanding researchers, practitioners, advocates, policymakers, and young people. A special thanks to those who gave their time and expertise in speaking to us:

- **The 200 individuals who generously lent their expertise in interviews and focus groups. Your input was valuable to this effort and we look forward to continuing to partner with you.**

- **The Youth Build National Alumni Council and youth involved in PeaceFirst and other programs, who gave generously and honestly of their time, experience, and perspective to discuss the American Dream.**

Thanks to those thought leaders who continue to inspire us:

- **Researchers in the youth development space, particularly Karen Pittman and her colleagues at the Forum for Youth Investment; the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research; Jon Zaff, Linda Sprague Martinez, and others at Boston University; and Richard Lerner and colleagues at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University.**

- **Groundbreaking researchers in the opportunity and mobility space, particularly Richard Reeves, Isabel Sawhill (also a member of the Center for Promise Research Council), and Ron Haskins of the Brookings Institution; Bob Doar of the American Enterprise Institute; Raj Chetty of Stanford; and Caroline Ratcliffe of the Urban Institute.**

And special thanks to Erin White, America's Promise staff member and principal author of this report.

B. Methodology and Interview List

Secondary research

To produce this report, America's Promise Alliance reviewed literature across child and youth development, economic mobility, equity, education, health, and other disciplines. Information on these sources are captured in the endnotes and in the callout boxes.

Interviews and focus groups

America's Promise Alliance gathered the perspectives of over 200 individuals through individual interviews, group interviews, and focus groups. All individuals interviewed serve youth through a variety of functions—from direct service provision to policy development to executive leadership. Individuals represent national nonprofit organizations, local nonprofit organizations, academia, corporations, foundations, and other organizations and institutions.

Below is a list of all individuals who participated, in alphabetical order of their organization and then their last name:

Keanne Henry, AARP Foundation

Lester Strong, AARP Foundation

Sandy Husk, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

Jodi Grant, Afterschool Alliance

Wilson Goode, Amachi

Deborah Smolover, America Forward

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Shirley Brandman, Aspen Institute

Stephen Patrick, Aspen Institute

Hilda Crespo, ASPIRA Association

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Nicole Anderson, AT&T Foundation

Jessica Cervantes, Avance Houston

Nakia Edwards, Avance Houston

Luz Flores, Avance Houston

Washington Jackson, Avance Houston

Nilia Jimenez, Avance Houston

Otilia Martinez, Avance Houston

Julie Baker-Finck, Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation

Roger Nozaki, Barr Foundation

Tom Bartlett, The Boeing Company

Jennifer Lowe, The Boeing Company

Dave Young, The Boeing Company

Kristin McSwain, Boston Opportunity Agenda

Lydia Ramos, Boston Public Schools

Jim Clark, Boys & Girls Clubs of America

Susan Curnan, Brandeis University

Alan Melchior, Brandeis University

Richard Reeves, Brookings Institution

Joshua Boyce, Café Momentum

Yolie Flores, The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Ralph Smith, The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Antoinette Malveaux, Casey Family Programs

Peter Pecora, Casey Family Programs

James Youniss, Catholic University of America

Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts University

Peter Levine, Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts University

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Jane Quinn, Children's Aid Society NY

Brandee McHale, Citi Foundation

Shannon Callouri, City of Allentown, Department of Community and Economic Development

Jim Balfanz, City Year

Michael Brown, City Year

Kris Kurtenbach, Collaborative Communications

Jeff Carlson, College Board

Stefanie Sanford, College Board

Tracy Kirtley, College Possible™ National

Jim McCorkell, College Possible™ National

Dale Erquiaga, Communities In Schools

Steve McCollough, Communities In Schools

Debra Montaninon, Communities In Schools

Mary Chance, Consortium of Florida Education Foundations

Sheila Sarem, consultant

K. Brooke Stafford-Brizard, consultant

Heather Rieman, Corporation for National & Community Service

Wendy Spencer, Corporation for National & Community Service

Stephanie Aaronson, Corporation for Public Broadcasting

Margaret Reed Miller, Council of Chief State School Officers

Alan Kelly, Diana Davis Spencer Foundation

Veronica Chapa, Early Matters

Jim Postl, Early Matters

Katherine Neas, Easter Seals

Jeremy Anderson, Education Commission of the States

Michael Conn, Educational Research Center of America

Denise Smith, EMERGE Fellowship

Elena Marks, Episcopal Health Foundation

Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center

Oscar Cruz, Families in Schools

Kyle Zimmer, First Book

Joe Louis Barrow, The First Tee

Ryan Graff, The First Tee

Noorain Khan, Ford Foundation

Thad Ferber, Forum for Youth Investment

Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment

Eliza Byard, Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

Patricia Driscoll, Girls Inc.

Radhika Hoshing, Grace Montessori School

Bob Harvey, Greater Houston Partnership

Jose Antonio Tijerino, Hispanic Heritage Foundation

Lisa Hall, Houston Endowment

Daniel Cardinali, Independent Sector

Marty Blank, Institute for Educational Leadership

Lili Allen, Jobs for the Future

Adria Steinberg, Jobs for the Future

Naila Bolus, JumpStart

Mark Reilly, JumpStart

Abby Weiss, JumpStart

Dan Casey, K&L Gates, LLP

Duncan Klussmann, Kinder Foundation

Larry Pickens, Lehigh Conference of Churches

Beth Careyva, Lehigh Valley Health Network

Helen Julia, Lehigh Valley Health Network

Brett Williamson, Lehigh Valley Health Network

Becky Bradley, Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

MaryAnn Przekurat, The Literacy Center

Robert Murphy, Maryland State Department of Education

Nyal Fuentes, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Lisa Harney, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

David Shapiro, MENTOR

Javier Alberto Soto, The Miami Foundation

Cammy Leher, Minnesota Alliance With Youth

Kori Redepenning, Minnesota Alliance With Youth

Kate Suchomel, Minnesota Alliance With Youth

Avia Kaner-Roth, Minnesota Youth Council

Deb Halliday, Montana Office of Public Instruction

Jennifer Sirangelo, National 4-H Council

Rebecca Kelley, National 4-H Council

JD Hoye, National Academy Foundation

Ann Stanton, National Academy Foundation

Jason Patnosh, National Association of Community Health Centers

Michael K. Powell, NCTA – The Internet & Television Association

Ginny Ehrlich, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Andrea Kane, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Moore Andrew, National League of Cities

Mary Pat King, National PTA

Hal Smith, National Urban League

Raul Caceres, Peace First

Farhat Jilalbhoy, Peace First

Lori Lowinger, Peace First

Franklin Onuoha, Peace First

JC Considine, Pearson

Laura Howe, Pearson

Kate James, Pearson

Shilpi Niyogi, Pearson

Scott Overland, Pearson

Stacy Skelly, Pearson

Erika Webb-Hughes, Pearson

Linda Quinones-Lopez, Per Scholas

Gregg Petersmeyer, Personal Pathways, LLC

Sam Albertson, PlayWorks

Briana Gilvarg, PlayWorks

Tracy Hoover, Points of Light

Rich Bland, Save the Children

Colleen Vivori, Save the Children

Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, Say Yes to Education

Claire Blumenson, School Justice Project

Michael Brotchner, Schultz Family Foundation

Danel Pitasky, Schultz Family Foundation

Kent Pekel, Search Institute

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Shirley Sagawa, Service Year Alliance

Lydia Emmons, Sociedad Latina

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Bob Johnson, Special Olympics Massachusetts

Rasheed Merritt, State Farm

Chris Stiles, State Farm

Carmita Vaughan, Surge Institute

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Temple University

Brigid Ahern, Turnaround for Children

Pam Cantor, Turnaround for Children

Nora Gomperts, Turnaround for Children

Lori Sywensky, Turning Point of Lehigh Valley

Michael Lomax, United Negro College Fund

Ollie Cantos, U.S. Department of Education

Michelle Boyd, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Cheri Hoffman, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Sarah Oberlander, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Lisa Trivits, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Gary Bowen, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Martha Cox, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Geoff Foster, United Teen Empowerment Center

Erin Harris, United Teen Empowerment Center

Annette Grays, United Way for Southeastern Michigan

Jones Tamara, United Way for Southeastern Michigan

Aeyola Fortune, United Way Worldwide

Brian Gallagher, United Way Worldwide

Alicia Lara, United Way Worldwide

Evan Hochberg, United Way Worldwide

Stacey Stewart, United Way Worldwide

Christi Dominguez, Valley Against Sex Trafficking

Paul Koehler, WestEd

Spencer Bonnie, YMCA of the USA

Aaron Smith, Young Invincibles

Joel Miranda, Youth Build USA

Steven Culbertson, Youth Service America

Dorothy Stoneman, YouthBuild USA

Lesa Booker, High school teacher

Tina Greenwood, High school teacher

America's Promise Alliance 2016 Community Convention focus group (15 participants)

Surveys of partners

We launched several surveys to better understand views of partners nationwide.

1. **MENTOR national network of affiliate Mentoring Partnerships and National Partners**

2. **America's Promise Alliance web survey: 350 respondents**

Youth input

We consulted several partner resources driven by youth voice, including:

- *Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America*, National Council of Young Leaders, **https://www.youthbuild.org/sites/default/files/Policy_Document-FEB-2015-d4.pdf**

- *Today's Student Town Halls*, America Forward (2016) **http://www.americaforward.org/tag/todays-student-town-hall/**

- Gallup Student Poll **http://www.gallupstudentpoll.com/home.aspx**

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Youth interview and focus group participants:

The young people, ages 14 to 30, are from a diverse range of economic, geographic, and racial backgrounds.

Langston Keys, 6th grader from Little Rock, AR

Avia Kaner-Roth, Minnesota Youth Council

Heather Quarnstrom, Minnesota Youth Council

Jackie Smith Soto, Baltimore

Katie Schroeder Walsh, Baltimore

Kelly Smith, Baltimore

Avalon Theisen, Peace First

Ryan Traynor, Peace First

Stephanie Watkins-Cruz, America's Promise Alliance

Zartashia Javid, America's Promise Alliance

Sanah Jivani, America's Promise Alliance

Malcolm Davis, America's Promise Alliance

YouthBuild Alumni Council members

C. Endnotes

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About America's Promise Alliance

America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest network dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth. We bring together more than 400 national organizations and thousands of community leaders to focus the nation's attention on young people's lives and voices, lead bold campaigns to expand opportunity, conduct groundbreaking research on what young people need to thrive, and accelerate the adoption of strategies that help young people succeed.

The Center for Promise is the applied research institute for America's Promise Alliance, housed at the Boston University School of Education and dedicated to understanding what young people need to thrive and how to create the conditions of success for all young people.

America's Promise got its start 20 years ago when all the living presidents came together in Philadelphia to call on every adult to help provide every child with the Five Promises they need to thrive – caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, an effective education, and opportunities to serve. America's Promise was created to carry on – and build on – the energy created, alliances formed, and commitments made that day.

Every child should have the
chance to succeed.

Every adult has the responsibility
to make it happen.