

PathNet

Executive Summary

King County Systems Integration Project

May 6, 2006

“Increasingly, it is being recognized that the issues of dropping out and dropout prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting our total economic and social structure. These issues include poverty, unemployment, discrimination, the role of the family, social values, the welfare cycle, child abuse, and drug abuse.”
(Peck, Law and Mill, 1987)

A partnership of community leaders from diverse youth-serving organizations in King County have met for over the last year to strategize on the growing problem of school dropouts, especially those who are unemployed and/or involved in the juvenile justice system. These leaders, comprised of representatives from education, juvenile justice, the Washington State legislature, social welfare, and mental health agencies, created the *King County Systems Integration Project*. As a result of recognizing the severe negative impact of students dropping out of school at epidemic levels, an *Education Integration Task Force* was organized and has set forth to design and implement a *path of networked* organizations called PathNet that will focus on a systems-wide, community-based approach to decreasing youth dropouts. Currently, educational, mental health, juvenile justice and social welfare agencies in King County have only been able to provide a minimal number of referrals to services within the scope of their own responsibilities for this population. This has left many youth 14-21 years unrecognized or uncounted and therefore without the coordinated services they need to continue their education and/or gain livable wage employment, and become productive citizens. This pilot program will focus on systemic change to decrease current and potential dropouts (prevention), and increase the number of youth becoming responsible citizens (drop-out retrieval).

School dropout is a serious and growing national problem. The Gates Foundation has recently published a report calling the drop out situation in the United States the “Silent Epidemic”. Time Magazine (April, 2006) provided a “special report” calling America the “Dropout Nation” because “30% of America’s high school students will leave without graduating”. Penn, Schoen and Berland (2006) recently reported that the national average of high school drops outs is approximately 32% while African American and Hispanic students are dropping out of high school at a higher rate of approximately 50%. These numbers would suggest that in King County, based on current enrollment data, there will be over 40,000 students who dropout of our local high schools this year! This figure does not take into account those students who are in school but have so few credits that the likelihood of graduation is bleak. This notion became quite evident in a recent survey (Bridges-Weber, 2006) of King County youth who are on probation. The results indicated that approximately 26% of the youth were not in school and an additional 61% who were in school, were significantly behind in grade level/credits. This data would therefore suggest that 87% of those youth on probation in King County will drop out of school or are at risk of dropping out.

Program Description

PathNet will have two parallel efforts. One effort will concentrate on the retrieval of unemployed out-of-school youth, 14 to 21 years of age who cannot, or chose not, to return to public high school. **Out-of-school youth** are defined as those who are: (1) enrolled, significantly disengaged and chronically truant; (2) participating in a GED program; or (3) a “dropout” who is not enrolled in any school and does not have a diploma. The second effort will be a concentration on prevention of dropping out for youth who are in school. **In-school youth** are defined as those who are (1) enrolled and (2) at-risk of dropping out due to chronic truancy/behind in credits but (3) with a goal of achieving a diploma. The program will concentrate on youth who have involvement with the juvenile justice and court systems. The pilot program will originally work with 200 students and approximately 60 community organizations in King County. A complete list of partners is included in the addendum. Students will be referred to the program from juvenile justice/court systems, schools, parents, mental health agencies, social service agencies, community based organizations or can be self-referred. Expansion of the pilot program to other Educational Service Districts across the state will be addressed after the successful model has been implemented.

Through extensive networking, PathNet partners will more efficiently coordinate and link existing alternative educational/vocational programs and employment to a wider population of previously unidentified out-of-school youth. PathNet partners will successfully engage or re-engage, evaluate, case manage, train (educate) and foster job placement for youth who are currently underserved or not yet identified. A regional coordinating agency will establish a single point of entry for identified out-of-school youth and will network the community to increase referrals, place youth in appropriate college or community-based programs, and provide care management.

Project partners are discussing the following action steps to accomplish their goals:

1. Develop a formal Consortium of providers and lead organizations that include schools, juvenile justice programs, the courts, social welfare organizations, community and technical colleges, community-based youth organizations, mental health organization, and related organizations serving youth. Develop on-going working partnerships with service organizations such as Rotary International, chambers of commerce, cities, private industry, and political entities.
2. Designate a regional coordinating agency such as Puget Sound Educational Service District, to oversee the Consortium, provide administrative structure and fiscal accountability, and supervise the centralized staff needed for transitional support, individual care management, intervention strategies for schools, and Special Education. Hire and train staff members.
3. Involve parents or those acting in a parental role in all phases of the program.
4. Coordinate with schools to develop common educational standards that coincide with the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), and establish protocols for Special Education student identification and in-take.

5. Assist school districts with intervention strategies to prevent increased high school dropouts.
6. Develop a regional map of service locations to establish linkages to geographic areas with insufficient services, and/or support programs that are functioning without linkages.
7. Develop a management information system between Consortium partners to identify and support youth from one city to another, from one school district to another, and from juvenile justice institutions to schools, to avoid youth “falling through the cracks.”
8. Develop communication links with the juvenile justice system.
9. Establish links between youth and employers, schools, and/or mental health and social services.
10. Design portfolio intake and follow-up procedures for program accountability.
11. Secure an adequate funding base through development of public and private financial resources.
12. Provide barrier reduction funds for youth needing case management services.
13. Develop a legislative strategy for long-range, statewide solutions.
14. Develop and implement outreach and marketing strategies to identify youth, particularly those who are low-income, special education, minority, disabled and/or incarcerated.
15. Initiate a web site to improve communication with Consortium partners, parents, and students.
16. Complete an evaluation at the end of the pilot program.
17. Disseminate program procedures and successes.
18. Anticipate program replication.

Financial Support

It is anticipated that PathNet funding will come from three different sources:

1. Leveraged, untapped school district funds made available when previously unknown students are counted by school districts for basic/special education dollars. A percentage of these dollars will go to the school districts, and a percentage directly to PathNet.
2. The King County Systems Integration Project presently has financial support from Casey Family Programs and the MacArthur Foundation. The Taskforce will apply to three additional funders in the next year in support of PathNet.
3. The Consortium will establish formal agreements with community partners that will include fiscal responsibility.

Innovation/Benefits

PathNet is innovative because it involves a broad spectrum of agencies and the community making an investment in the lives of youth who have been ignored and/or underserved. The program is systemic, involving multiple agencies operating efficiently as a group without an overlapping of services. PathNet will be replicable, and once the

pilot program is completed and evaluated, information on replication will be available on the PathNet web site or from program staff.

Schools will benefit from PathNet because they will have fewer students dropping out and will receive unexpected revenue from basic or Special Education funding sources. The juvenile justice system will benefit because the program will assist youth in finding employment and alternatives to crime. The community will benefit from having more productive citizens who have a positive rather than negative economic impact on the community. Most importantly, youth and their families will benefit by having alternatives to negative behaviors and becoming self-contributing citizens.

Although the concept of providing post-secondary vocational training for out-of-school youth is not unique, there are very few successful models that involve the extensive networking that PathNet is proposing. The demonstration of successful marketing strategies, case management techniques, curricula development, skills development and the successful employment of graduates (including students with disabilities, Special Education, and those with criminal backgrounds) will make a large impact on our educational communities. The development and dissemination of PathNet has implications locally, regionally, and nationally for those focused on creating a network of wrap-around services for youth who are currently without education, without career options, and without hope.

Former Seattle Public Schools Superintendent John Stanford said: “You cannot have a great public school system without having the entire community involved. Without community, any school system is lost. (Our Towns interview October,1998)

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