

Executive Summary
PathNet Strategies
Education Integration Taskforce
King County Systems Integration Initiative

January 23, 2007

“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, and 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 nearly two years to strategize on the growing problem of youth who drop out of school, 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 decrease the number of youth who dropout of school.

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 14 to 21 year-old youth unrecognized or uncounted and therefore without the coordinated services they need to continue their education, and/or gain livable-wage employment in order to become productive citizens. The PathNet pilot program will focus on systemic change to decrease current and potential youth who are going to dropout (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 published a report (March, 2006) calling the dropout situation in the United States the “Silent Epidemic”. Time Magazine (April, 2006) provided a “special report” calling America the “Dropout Nation” because current data is now revealing “30% of America’s high school students will leave without graduating”. The percent of all students who did not graduate on time for the class of 2004 in Washington State was 29.9%. Penn, Schoen and Berland (2006) recently reported that the national average of high school youth who dropout is approximately 32%. These numbers would suggest that in King County, based on current High School enrollment data, there would be over 41,000 students who are currently in high school but will leave before the completion of their senior year during the next four years. This large number of youth does not reflect the recent findings that

African American and Hispanic students are dropping out of high school at higher rates (Penn, et al., 2006).

Furthermore, there is a large population of 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 and/or 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.

To make matters worse, there is yet another large population of students who are not academically behind, but do not recognize a value or connection to their school experience and therefore drop out. The Silent Epidemic (2006) revealed that 88% of American high school students who dropped out of school had passing grades, with 62% having C's and above. Approximately 70% of these former students said they were confident they could have graduated from high school. In the 2004 Healthy Youth Survey, the results for King County show that more students in the 6th grade report "low commitment to school" than students in the 12th grade. This recent information suggests that current prevention efforts for students who may drop out of school must go beyond the traditional academic focus and address the choices and perceptions of students who are becoming terminally disconnected from the school environment, especially during the middle-school years.

Program Description

(1) The first of two parallel efforts will focus 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: (a) not enrolled in any school and do not have a diploma; (b) participating in a GED program; or (c) significantly disengaged, chronically truant and without hope of achieving a high school diploma. 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.

(2) The second parallel effort will be a concentration on *prevention* of dropping out for youth who are still attending school at some level. **In-school youth** are defined as those who are (a) enrolled and (b) at-risk of dropping out due to chronic truancy/behind in credits but (c) with a goal of achieving a diploma. These students will receive individualized support following the National Student Assistance Association model, which is considered best practice in the field of prevention. The basic process begins with initial fact-finding and the creation of "a plan" by the student. The plan allows for

interventions, recommendations for support, the monitoring of progress, and the provision of clear lines of communication.

The keys to success for prevention and retrieval are: (1) Having a plan, because without a plan there is no hope; (2) The use of a care manager, not a case manager who provides direct service, but a care manager who assists the student in the management of their own plan. This practice has been successfully modeled in the King County Blended Funding Program; and (3) The use of a cadre of special education certified staff who can provide specially designed instruction and monitor the additional requirements of the Individual Education Plan required by federal mandates since a high percent of students who drop out of school have a history of special education.

The pilot PathNet program will initially 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. Students will be referred to the program from juvenile justice/court systems, schools, parents, mental health agencies, social service agencies, and community-based organizations or can be self-referred. Expansion of the pilot program to a broader population and eventually to other Educational Service Districts across the state will be addressed after the successful model has been implemented. 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 colleges, technical colleges, community-based youth organizations, mental health providers, 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, fiscal accountability, and supervise the centralized staff needed for transitional support, individual care management, and intervention strategies for schools, training, networking, special education support and replication.
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. Focus on specific strategies to reduce the disproportional rates of dropout and disconnection among youth of color.
6. Assist school districts with intervention strategies to prevent increased high school youth who dropout.
7. 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.
8. 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.”

9. Develop communication links with an emphasis on the education and/or vocational training of youth involved with the child welfare (foster and kinship care), juvenile justice and mental health systems.
10. Establish links between youth and career by developing “a plan” for each student.
11. Design portfolio intake and follow-up procedures for program accountability.
12. Secure an adequate funding base through development of public and private financial resources.
13. Provide barrier reduction funds for youth needing case management services.
14. Develop a legislative strategy for long-range, statewide solutions.
15. Develop and implement outreach and marketing strategies to identify youth, particularly those who are low-income, special education, minority, disabled and/or incarcerated.
16. Initiate a web site to improve communication with Consortium partners, parents, and students.
17. Complete an evaluation at the end of the pilot program.
18. Disseminate program procedures and successes.
19. Anticipate program replication.

Financial Support

It is anticipated that PathNet funding will come from several 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 the Casey Family Programs and from the MacArthur Foundation; (3) Reinvesting in Youth has made a decision to focus their next phase of work on the drop-out crisis, have dedicated funds to review and determine best practice, and has made a decision to move their headquarters to the Puget Sound Educational Service District when the next funding cycle begins in 2007; (4) The PathNet consortium will establish formal agreements with community partners such as the Workforce Development Council (WDC) that will include fiscal responsibility; (5) The Consortium will also engage additional private funders who recognize the need to reverse the dropout trends.

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, care 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)

*For further information on **PathNet**, please contact:*

John Mick Moore, Ph.D.
Chair, Education Integration Task Force
Assistant to the Superintendent for Interagency Relations
Puget Sound Educational Service District
800 Oakesdale Ave. SW
(Phone) 425-917-7615 (Email) mmoore@psed.org