

2007 Priorities and Recommendations  
Legislative and Implementation  
PathNet Strategies  
Education Integration Taskforce  
King County Systems Integration Initiative

Presented to the Resource Committee  
King County Systems Integration Initiative

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**BACKGROUND**

During May of 2005, the Resource Committee of the King County Systems Integration Initiative recognized “the paramount need to have the education system at the table for the successful integration of services with cross-system youth.” As a result, an education taskforce was created to address issues concerning the coordination and integration of the educational system with complex multi-system involved youth. A taskforce was convened on September 26, 2005 to address the authentic involvement of the educational system into the King County Systems Integration movement. The membership consisted of representatives that are involved with juvenile justice youth from education, the courts, probation, juvenile rehabilitation, community-based organizations, and workforce development programs. The taskforce focused on the opportunities for partnership with education in activities designed to prevent youth involvement with the juvenile justice system and reduce recidivism.

The Taskforce began monthly meetings that resulted in lengthy and focused discussions on the research and first-hand observations of youth on probation, in detention, as well as those who are incarcerated. It was noted that a large number of youth in the King County juvenile justice system had dropped-out of school or were expelled. These non-enrolled students did not have enough credits to approach graduation, became hopeless, remained as dropouts, became further involved with the law and were lost to the community.

To verify our perceptions, a survey was conducted by one of our Taskforce members regarding youth currently on probation in King County (Bridges-Weber, 2006). As expected, the results revealed that approximately 30% of the youth on probation had dropped out of school. What wasn't expected was that an *additional* 44% of youth on probation had so few credits that the prospect of graduation was bleak. In other words, over 70% of youth on probation in King County were either dropouts or at high risk to drop out. Consequently, it wasn't surprising to find additional research (Ashley, et al., 2006) that revealed one of the “major risk factors” for “court involved youth” is dropping out of school. In addition, we found it is also well documented that a high percent of young adults in today's prisons are high school dropouts. The strong relationship between juvenile justice involved youth and dropping out of school cannot be ignored, especially given the current findings that the dropout rate for Washington State high school students is approximately 30%. This figure represents enormous systems cost for

each individual student involved and for our economy and our society as a whole. The taskforce realized that drop out prevention is directly related to a reduction in criminal behavior and juvenile justice involvement. Consequently, the Systems Integration Taskforce concluded that one of the best strategies to reduce involvement in the juvenile justice system is to reduce the number of students who are dropping out of school. A problem that must be addressed systematically and immediately.

The Taskforce spent months developing a regional concept paper called PathNet (see attached). PathNet is intended to become a regional network of community, education, juvenile justice, and vocational programs that foster successful prevention, intervention, retrieval and connection for youth who are associated, in any way, with dropping out of school. PathNet is a systematic solution that will, over time, reduce the dropout rate and will provide a well-lit, well-built pathway to work and post-secondary education for those thousands of students who have already dropped out and those who, despite all our best efforts, will still drop out in the future and often become court involved.

The PathNet concept, with its broad constituency and related knowledge, resources, and expertise holds many of the answers to this quandary—both long and short term. These recommendations are being made within and in response to the following landscape:

- There are prevention and intervention programming and staffing in some districts and schools and not in others. Programming and systems vary tremendously. Funding is in particularly short supply—especially to ensure that youth have connections to caring adults who know them, advocate for them, and guide and mentor them to ensure that they stay on track to graduate and stay out of the justice system.
- There are drop-out retrieval programs that exist in some communities and not in others. These serve the youth who have clearly dropped out of school and are not going to return to high school. This “system” operates at a level that does not begin to meet the demand. It serves a high percentage of justice involved youth. This “system” operates at a level that does not begin to meet the demand. In addition, mechanisms for these programs to receive the State Basic Education funding necessary for continued operation are individually negotiated, inconsistent, and fragile. In addition, the legislative authority for these programs is hazy and, therefore, the programs themselves are threatened and shrinking.
- The staffing and procedures needed to help high risk youth effectively move between the justice, foster care, education, and mental health systems is largely non-existent. As a result, these youth—who need services the most—are often most likely to fall through the cracks.
- There are programs operating as best practices models throughout the state. But the state policies and laws often work against these programs and need to be amended. In addition, performance standards, data tracking systems, contractual agreements, and funding mechanisms are confusing, non-existent or vary from site to site. Systemic, clear solutions are needed. Local and state leadership needs to be involved, as do all stakeholders. Dedicated staff time is needed to accomplish this.

Within its PathNet Executive Summary, the Education Integration Taskforce has made many recommendations and has outlined an entire system and action steps that will take

place over multiple years. However, in an effort to prioritize its work and its requests of Local and State Leaders for 2007, it has reduced its focus down to two areas: legislative strategies and implementation strategies. Each of these two areas has five specific recommendations. These are listed below:

## **Pathnet Legislative Strategies—2007 Recommendations**

**Put the funding, legislative, and systematic underpinnings in place for a systematic solution to address the re-engagement of high school dropouts.** . Advocate for the modification of Washington Administrative Code (WACs) so that high quality programs serving high school drop outs are clearly and legally authorized to exist and receive State Basic Education funding. Such programs exist and serve hundreds of high school dropouts per year but their continued existence is currently being threatened and some are being closed down despite local school district and community support. This threat exists because of recent OSPI concerns about the centers' compliance with existing State laws.

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**Recommendation 1:** *State Basic Education funding should be available to community college-based dropout reengagement programs that provide post-secondary education to eligible high school-age students who have dropped out but want to pursue post-secondary professional technical certificates or degrees. Eleven such community college programs currently exist. They currently receive State Basic Education funding. They serve students who did not succeed at high school but are given a second chance as they enroll in post-secondary courses that will teach them marketable skills and help them earn a diploma, certificate or degree. These students receive intensive support as they navigate the college campus and programs. The OSPI funding that these programs receive is threatened because the students' level of participation is based on the number of credits in which they are enrolled—not on their seat-time as required by current law.*

- a. Colleges should receive full State Basic Education funding at the same vocational rate as traditional high schools for students who are enrolled as full-time college students and pursuing vocational technical degrees or certificates.
- b. Funding should be based on the number of college credits in which students are enrolled and not on the 25 hours per week seat-time attendance requirement.
- c. Such legislation exists for Running Start and should be the model for similar legislation for existing and future college-based dropout reengagement programs.

**Recommendation 2:** *State Basic Education funding should be available to community-based learning centers that serve high school age youth who have dropped out but want to re-engage in education and work toward a GED or earn*

*high school credits, master competencies key to academic and workplace success, receive intensive support in addressing personal barriers, and move on to college and/or work. These centers are needed for the students who clearly did not succeed and will not return to traditional high schools. Several such programs exist and receive State funding but standards and funding are haphazard. Legislation or Washington Administrative Code needs to be in place that:*

- a. Authorizes programs to receive State Basic Education funding if they provide GED instruction and basic skills remediation in accordance with Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements AND provides access to at least 25 hours per week of instruction(in order to receive 100% of the State Basic Education FTE funding for students attending the center.)
- b. Recognizes the validity GED instruction and expends State Basic Education funds accordingly while holding centers to strict, meaningful performance standards.
- c. Does not base funding on seat-time attendance. Instead defines performance standards that center must attain in order to receive continued State funding: gains in basic math and reading levels as measured by standardized tests; passing of GED tests; GED attainment; demonstration of mastery of defined occupational or academic competencies; transition to post secondary school; transition to employment.
- d. Allows centers to receive State Basic Education FTE funding on a monthly basis for each student attending these centers— as long as 1) students are dropped after 20 days of consecutive non-attendance, 2) the centers offer access to a minimum of 25 hours per week of basic remedial instruction and GED preparation, 3) students receive individualized instruction, 4) student progress is tracked in terms of academic skills gains, completion of projects or assignments, GED test scores and competency attainment, and 5) the center meets the negotiated performance standards.
- e. Does not penalize the school districts in which these students are enrolled by counting these students' Washington Assessment of Student Learning scores in the district's tally.
- f. Does not penalize the school districts in which these students are enrolled by continuing to count these students as dropouts when they achieve their GED's.

**Recommendation 3:** *The Educational Service Districts should be given the lead role in overseeing the statewide system of high school reengagement programs: ensuring standardization of payment rates, payment methodology, contracting with school districts, quantity and quality of instruction and compliance with mandated special*

*education requirements. Currently programs that serve high school dropouts do receive State Basic Education funding. However, the requirements, instruction, eligibility, billing procedures, and payment rates are each individually negotiated with school districts and can be amended and/or withdrawn at will. There needs to be uniformity and stability and standards for existing and future programs.*

- a. A single fiscal agent with the authority to work with individual drop-out re-engagement programs and school districts should be established. In King County we are recommending that this be the Puget Sound Educational Service District and we believe that this makes sense on a statewide basis in the future.
- b. Programs would work with the ESD to ensure that their curriculum and performance standards meet agreed-upon State standards.
- c. Programs would submit their monthly billing in a standard format to the ESD and would all be paid across the board at standard rates.
- d. The ESD would work with the individual school districts where students reside to ensure that these students are enrolled and the appropriate districts bill the State for their students.
- e. The ESD would ensure that after the districts receive a percentage of the State funding for their administrative role, and after the ESD retains a percentage for its administrative role, the reengagement programs actually educating the students receive the bulk of State Basic Educational funding for each youth that they serve.
- f. The ESD could also provide oversight to ensure that special education requirements for the significant number of students with disabilities are being met at the individual programs and could provide educational referral and linkage services to youth and their parents or advocates trying to locate an appropriate program.

**Recommendation 4: The concept of GED Plus should be adopted.**

- a. GED preparation combined with transition to post-secondary education and/or employment (GED plus) needs to be recognized as programming that can be legitimately funded with State Basic Educational funding. When students have dropped out of school and are clearly not going to return to traditional school, they still need education and a pathway to college and work.
- b. Reengagement programs that offer individualized basic skills remediation and GED preparation and provide a minimum of 25 hours per week of approved instruction should receive State funding as long as programs meet agreed upon performance outcomes.

- c. Programs should not be funded on seat-time or simply because a program exists. The goal should be that students make measurable gains in basic academic skills, receive a GED or diploma or college degree or certificate, demonstrate mastery of academic and/or occupational competencies AND move onto post-secondary education or employment.
- d. Performance standards related to these outcomes should be established (and already exist within all federal employment and training programs) and funding should be dependent upon performance against these standards.

**Recommendation 5: State Basic Education funding should be available on a year-round basis for programs educating high school dropouts.**

- a. Current legislation allows nine months of funding to be paid to schools for each student. This generally translates to funding for a September through May school year. If high school dropouts enter a reengagement program in the middle of a traditional school year and have not attended any other school that year—the program providing instruction should be able to receive funding for those students through the summer or until such point as nine months of funding has been paid on that student’s behalf.

**Pathnet Implementation Strategies—2007 Recommendations**

The Educational Integration Taskforce has also looked at implementation steps that should be prioritized in 2007. While there are many to choose from within the PathNet proposal, two came to mind immediately.

**Recommendation 1: Secure funding and implement a 24 month Systems Linkage pilot program that will provide one-stop linkage and advocacy services to 200 justice involved youth and/or foster care youth per year.** The Education Integration Taskforce PathNet recommends the implementation of a pilot program coordinating legal, educational and employment services for justice involved and foster-care youth. We are making this recommendation because these special populations, which are also disproportionately made up of children of color and need coordinated services that are not currently in place. Systems and service integration for these youth have been one of the main focuses of the Education Integration Taskforce since its inception. Because the needs of these youth are so pressing and the lack of coordinated services so evident, we are recommending

- a. Secure funding for two direct service staff, one justice specialist, for internship wages for 50 youth and limited funding for emergency financial assistance with clothing, food, shelter, transportation, or medical services.
- b. Hire one direct service staff to work as a Connections Specialist—a single person to whom Court and DSHS foster care staff can refer youth for educational linkage services. This person would:

- Be familiar with all the in-school and drop-out reengagement programs in the community and the staff involved with these programs.
  - Make sure that each youth is connected to a case manager or staff person at the program or school to which the youth is referred—a person who will stay in regular contact with them and provide that critical caring adult support.
  - Be the single point of contact for Court and DSHS workers working with academically at-risk or dropout court-involved or foster care youth.
  - Meet with the youth and assess their background and needs.
  - Do a facilitated referral to an appropriate dropout reengagement program or traditional or alternative secondary school.
  - Track the activities, progress and attainments of each youth serve through this pilot program against performance measures related to academic progress, school engagement, and employment
- c. Hire a second direct service staff to work as a Education/Employment Specialist. This person would:
- Provide direct case management and employment services for a limited number of youth within the total pool of 200 youth served. This service would be provided to youth enrolled in programs or schools that do not have on-site case management or employment services.
  - Work with targeted students and their educational sites to provide support as needed to ensure academic success.
  - Provide counseling, referral, advocacy and linkages to help targeted youth address personal barriers to academic and employment success
  - Provide employment services to targeted youth including: job search and work readiness training, job search assistance, and paid internships—all leading to unsubsidized employment.
- d. Hire a Justice Liaison to work with the Connections Specialist and the Education/Employment Specialist and to act as a consultant to direct service staff working with other justice involved youth in educational settings. This person would:
- Do Risk Assessments as needed for the 200 youth served in the Systems Linkage pilot program.
  - Provide information, consultation, and assistance in navigating the juvenile justice system to the Education/Employment Specialist and the outside system case managers who are working with the 200 youth. Assist these staff in helping minimizing barriers that will hinder their success at school and work.
  - Act as a one-stop resource person for direct service staff based in educational and employment programs that serve justice involved youth other than the 200 pilot program youth. Approximately 200 additional justice involved youth who are enrolled in programs for high school dropouts or at-risk of dropping will benefit from the services of the Justice

Liaison. Often their case managers lack information, expertise, and access to adequately serve their clients. The Justice Liaison will be a single point of contact in relation to the juvenile justice system for these staff and clients as well.

- e. Set aside funding for paid internships for 50 of the 200 youth. Paid internships would be developed for youth who are successful in school can be placed in order to gain both basic work place skills and specific occupational skills.
- f. Set aside funding for a comprehensive evaluation with recommendations for replication
- g. Assign the following responsibilities to the PathNet Coordinator and Administrative Assistant (described below):
  - o Define the performance outcomes and data collection methodology for this project.
  - o Track the identity and demographics of each youth served in this project.
  - o Track the activities, progress and attainments of each youth served against performance measures related to academic progress, school engagement, and employment.

***Recommendation 2: Secure funding for two staff people to work on the PathNet priorities for a twenty-four month period—a coordinator and an administrative assistant.*** *Staff people from various agencies have come together to work on the Education Integration Taskforce over the last year. They have worked hard to develop the PathNet concept and recommendations. They have met with organizations from throughout the State and King County who are concerned about systems linkage for high risk youth and the high school dropout crisis. One of many conclusions that have been reached in relation to this complex problem is that dedicated staff time is needed.*

- a. Hire a PathNet Coordinator and Administrative Assistant for an initial 24 month period to work with state, county and local leaders and stake holders to refine and implement the nineteen action steps outlined in the PathNet Executive Summary, to develop and replicate model programming that will ensure that justice involved youth and foster care youth are systematically connected to educational, employment, legal, mental health and other social services, to facilitate the development of a high school drop-out re-engagement system in the state of Washington that will ensure that appropriate educational services are available to all high school dropouts and particularly to the significant number of justice involved and foster care youth who are dropouts, and to plan next steps in relation to prevention and intervention for justice-involved and foster care youth.
- b. Hold these staff responsible for the administration and future replication of the proposed pilot program described above—a pilot program designed to

systematically link 200 justice involved youth and foster care youth in King County to educational, employment, legal, mental health and other social services.

- c. Base these staff at the Puget Sound Educational Service District, which has provided the greatest commitment of staff time in the last year under the leadership of Dr. Mick Moore, Assistant to the Superintendent for Interagency Relations.