

**Statement of Martrice Manuel on behalf of Alternative Schools Network, Chicago, Illinois**

**Before the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources**

**May 17, 2017**

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee on behalf of Alternative Schools Network (ASN) on how opportunities for youth and young adults can break the cycle of poverty.

I am Martrice Manuel and I have worked with ASN for 12 years, serving as the Associate Director for the last 2 years. I am currently the senior director of ASN's Youth Scholars, Skills, and Services Program (YS3), which provides foster youth in the care of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services who are not enrolled in an educational or vocational program with the opportunity to achieve their educational goals and become independent, productive adults.

According to a student released by the University of Illinois in January, 2016, data compiled in 2014 indicates that youth between the ages 16 and 19 were unemployed at the following rates: 6.4 percent white males, 8.3 percent Hispanic males, and 18.6 percent Black males. Between the ages of 20 and 24, this numbers increase at disproportionate rates among races with 8.4 percent of white males, 20 percent of Hispanic males, and 45.7 percent of Black males being unemployed. Similar trends of unemployment are found within female data as well. Unemployed females between 16 and 19 years old are 4.9 percent white, 7.3 percent Hispanic, and 7.2 percent Black. Between 20 and 24 years of age, White females are less likely to be unemployed (4.4 percent); however, 16.4 percent are Hispanic and 33.7 percent are Black.

Across the country, there are over 5 million youth who are out of school and out of work, 16-24 years old, 4,840,361 as detailed in the report cited previously. This situation affects youth and young adults of all races and across the inner city, suburban and rural areas of our country. The situation of youth joblessness continues to increase in Chicago, particularly since 2000 for when the federal government ended its commitment to a summer youth employment program for low-income youth. This left over 600,000 low income youth and young adults across the country and over 30,000 youth and young adults in Chicago with no opportunity for employment from 2000 until 2009 when the American Recovery Act (ARA) provided funding for a summer youth employment program for low income youth in 2009 and 2010 in Chicago. Chicago has had a high percentage of youth who did not finish high school going back to 1985 when the actual dropout rate in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was calculated to be 65%. This detailed that many youth were on the street with no real option for education. This situation in Chicago is not unique, and the reason for youth becoming disconnected has multiple layers.

Many disconnected youth are youth in poverty, disproportionately youth of color, youth from single-parent homes, low academic achievement, mis or undiagnosed mental illness. The youth came to be disconnected through neighborhood violence, internal poverty, low self-efficacy, mass incarceration of parents, single parent homes, low academic achievement, poor academic preparation in schools.

The Alternative Schools Network (ASN) began in 1973 and works with over 2,500 high-risk high school dropouts. The Alternative Schools Network (ASN) is a membership organization of 22 comprehensive, small (150-200 students), community based schools that work with high risk, older high school dropouts to re-enroll them back into school, to build their educational and life skills, to graduate them and help them successfully transition to college, employment and/or training. Our website is [www.ASNChicago.org](http://www.ASNChicago.org). ASN has developed and supported our programs to reenroll high school dropouts utilizing the extensive research and practice that has demonstrated the effective way to reenroll, educate and graduate out of school youth. The way to succeed with reenrolled students is to utilize comprehensive schools that are smaller (150 to 200 students) with small classes, a strong and experienced staff and principal, comprehensive support services, innovative education approaches and funding of at least \$14,205 per student. These schools utilize performance standards measuring enrollment, attendance, skill gains, credit gains, graduations and entrance into college, employment and/or training.

The ASN in collaboration with our member schools local businesses, colleges and universities and community partners provide opportunities for employment and internships, extra academic resources (after school tutoring, credit recovery courses), transportation to and from school, mentoring, counseling, wrap around services, increased opportunities for hands-on and applied learning, Life Skill classes, student-centered skill assessment and focus (we assess students, meet them where they are at, and teach from that level to move them to grade-level skills), flexible scheduling, mentoring services and career readiness while utilizing trauma-informed approaches.

Educating teenage mothers is difficult for even the best prepared schools and educators; however, not providing educational services to teenage mothers has detrimental effects on the teenage mother and her child.

Statistics show that the rate of teen pregnancy is declining, from 59.9 per 1,000 teenagers in 1990 to 29.4 per 1,000 in 2012 (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). However, the impact of teen pregnancy and parenthood on society is immeasurable; there will still be 750,000 teen pregnancies in a year, 65% of these pregnancies will be carried to full term (Teen Mother Choices [TMC], 2010). Of that 65%, only 4% will choose adoption (Teen Mother Choices [TMC], 2010). Becoming a teen mother usually compromises a teen's ability to become a productive, contributing citizen due to the responsibilities of being a parent, especially a single, teen parent: 51% of teen moms never graduate high school; 80% end up on welfare; within 2 years, 31% will have a subsequent pregnancy (Boelens, 2010). The completion of high school alone allows for a \$344,457 increase in lifetime earnings as compared to someone who drops out of high

school (North & Smietana, 2008).

Presently, ASN is facilitating 4 programs within our partner schools to address the needs of disconnected youth, many of which are teenage parents.

Since 1999, The Youth Skills, Scholars and Service Program (YS3) has annually re-enrolled over 300 Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) out-of-school youth, which includes over 55 teen parents. Last year, 60 youth graduated and 120 carried over to the next school year. Seven months is the average time that participating youth were out of school before re-enrolling in YS3. This program partners with 14 small (150-200 students), community based, alternative schools that provide the personal support through full time mentors to ensure success for the participants (1 to 15 is the mentor to participant ratio). This program exceeds its measurable outcomes of enrollment, attendance, skill gains, credit gains, graduations, and transition to employment, training or college.

#### FY2015/16 YS3 Outcomes

- i.** Enrollment - 296
- ii.** Average daily attendance – 201 (68%)
- iii.** Skill Gains – Reading: 263 (89%); Math: 210 (71%)
- iv.** Credit Gains – 184 (62%)
- v.** Seniors that graduated – 55 (75% of seniors)
- vi.** Graduates who transitioned to college, employment and/or training – 55 (100% of graduates)

In 1994, ASN started the Added Chance Program (ACP), which has annually served over 240 DCFS youth who are out-of-school. ACP is an educational/work skills program that annually prepares and trains 240 youth with job preparation skills and places 130 of the participating youth into private sector jobs annually.

#### FY2015/16 ACP Outcomes

- vii.** 259 youth in foster care completed pre-employment training
- viii.** 197 (76%) received follow up counseling
- ix.** 180 (91% of counseled participants) received one or more job referrals
- x.** 143 total jobs entered by ACP participants

The Fostering Learning Program (FLP) began in 2005 and has annually served over 420 DCFS youth in schools attached to residential centers with a comprehensive computer based learning program by strengthening their educational and life skills. FLP enables high-risk DCFS youth to enhance their learning through significant hours of online education annually.

During FY2015/16, there were a total of 446 unduplicated registered youth. Of these 446 registered youth, 380 earned a total of 38,607.5 usage hours.

Project New Futures (PNF) operated from 2006 until 2014 and was a US Dept. of Labor National Demonstration Project involving 5 cities (New York, Detroit, Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles) preparing and supporting older foster care youth to successfully transition from high school into college, employment and/or training. The program was evaluated by the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies and was the highest ranked of the 5 cities.

PNF annually tracked and supported over 140 older DCFS youth after they had graduated from the YS3 program to help them through the summer after their graduation and then, the first two years after their graduation to assist them in a wide variety of ways to help them succeed in their placement in college, employment and/or further training

In 2013/14, PNF served 172 youth in foster care. 71% of in-school participants received their high school diploma or GED, and 64% of graduates transitioned to college, employment and/or training.

Attached to this testimony is a broader detail regarding best practices for schools to be designed to successfully work with high school dropouts.

To better illustrate the profound impact of the programs discussed above, let me tell you about Tia. Tia had her son, Jaiden, when she was 15 years old. At this point, she was already living with her great-grandma due to her mom losing parental rights. Due to fights at school and becoming pregnant, she missed most of her freshman year of high school. At the age of 17, she wasn't sure what options she had. Between childcare issues and working to support herself and her son, school was not a priority until she learned about the YS3 mentoring program. With the help of her mentor, she enrolled at CCA Academy and began to address her barriers to success. Presently, Tia is working on improving her grades in all classes. Though she struggled with the transition 1st semester, she has taken the initiative to obtain make up work from her teachers, improving her academic success. Tia is on track to pass all of her current classes while maintaining employment and parenting her son. When asked what motivates her she stated, "my son and my great-grandma make me want to do better. I want to be a pediatrician, and I know I can do it now. My mentor understands what I am going through and helps me stay focused."

The federal investment in Chafee funds to build independence of older foster care youth as well as employment has been very helpful, and it would be a smart investment for the federal government to significantly increase this investment because for each reenrolled high school dropout that graduates from high school, the savings to taxpayers is over \$290,000.

Federal investment would also help increase access to adequate child care, resources for child care in schools (this would increase attendance for parents who struggle with child care), one-on-one mentoring for the parent, financial literacy training for disconnected

youth, access to affordable and safe housing, increase in high school to career training programs (Youth Build, SPCI, dual credit and enrollment and certificate programs.)

In closing I would like to thank each you for the opportunity to discuss ASN programing and the best practices we use to reengage disconnected youth back into school and embrace civic duty.

# Characteristics of Successful Comprehensive Best School Practices for Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School

These re-enrolled students are being asked to run a marathon, but the preparation these schools provide is like walking around the block a few times.

There is clear research, decades of experience and very specific schools' outcome data demonstrating what practices and types of schools work to successfully re-enroll students who have dropped out of school and educate, graduate and help these students make the transition into postsecondary education, training or employment.

Small, community-based alternative schools have a long history of effectively educating and graduating re-enrolled students.

Schools that are smaller (150 to 200 students) with small classes, a strong and experienced staff and principal, comprehensive support services, innovative education approaches and appropriate funding of at least \$11,500 per student (the statewide high school district average for 2004-05 was \$12,004 38) are able to succeed with re-enrolled students. The cost per re-enrolled student would be adjusted according to the local conditions. **The \$11,500 figure was in 2008. This figure should be \$14,205 in terms of 2016 funding.**

Re-enrolled student schools should be held to strict performance standards measuring enrollment, attendance, skill gains, credit gains, graduations and entrance into jobs or college.

Listed below are key points for developing high performance schools for re-enrolled students based upon 30 years of successful school experience and research.

- A. Schools are small (150 to 200) at a separate school site that site-governed and administered with a distinct identity.**
  - **Small School Size (70 to 200)** with small, personalized classes (1 to 10 students), and a unified and common focus for the entire school, with personalized and comprehensive schooling.
  - **Local, Separate School Site with Local Decision-Making** on school and budget issues.
  - **Specific Performance-Based Goals and Outcomes** measuring enrollment, attendance, skills, credits, graduations, and transition to college, training or employment as well as other competency-based measures.
  
- B. Strong leadership is provided by the principal/director that builds high teacher and staff expectations for student success. Teachers and staff have high expectations for students, knowledge of and experience of effective teaching methods, and a high level of commitment supporting student success.**
  - **Strong, Experienced Principal and Experienced, Competent Teaching Staff** who have high expectations for every student to learn deeply and broadly.
  - **Respect and Responsibility Are Key Values for Everyone Involved with The School** – staff, students, parents, and community residence.
  - **Continuous Staff Training** with time for staff to plan and collaborate.
  
- C. Students choose to attend and a positive peer culture develops in a family atmosphere built on a cooperative effort to succeed.**
  - **Students are there by their choice.**
  - **A positive peer culture develops** and students support school goals.
  - **A family atmosphere is developed**, and students engage in a cooperative effort to help one another achieve and succeed.
  
- D. Comprehensive long-term school combines education, employment, skill training and other needed support**

services. There are high school standards and expectations for student learning; work experience and learning are integrated so that students have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma, find a decent paying job, go to college, or get advanced skill training.

- **Per Student Funding Close to the average 2005-06 operating cost of \$12,300** for Illinois secondary schools. **In 2016 dollars this would be \$14,205.**
- **Comprehensive School Focus** combining education, employment and support services.

**Employment and Internship Schools** are offered during the school year, after-school and summer school schools that link internships, work and learning.

- **Small Teams of Students Supported by Full-Time, Paid Mentors** who worked to retain and graduate students.
- **High Expectations for Students to Learn Both Broadly and Deeply** linked to the highest state standards.
- **A Comprehensive High Technology Learning Center** providing high speed Internet access and a broad-based, highly sophisticated curriculum focusing on academic and world of work subject areas,
- **Students Learn Actively Through Study and Action.**
- **Summer School Combining School and Work.**

These schools characteristics of effective schools for schools serving high-risk and out-of-school students come from the following reports:

1. Ford Foundation Report on Alternative Schools 1974
2. Alternative Schools for Disruptive Youth, Robert Arno, Indiana University 1976
3. The U.S. Department of Labor Youth, Knowledge, Development Reports 1980
4. Effective Schools for the Marginal High School Student, Gary Wehlege, University of Wisconsin, Madison 1982
5. Can We Help Dropouts: Thinking About the Undoable, Dale Mann, Columbia University 1986
6. School Dropouts – Survey of Local Schools, General Accounting Office 1987
7. Reducing the Risk – Schools as Communities of Support, University of Wisconsin 1989
8. Effective School Options for Serving Out-of-school Youth, Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University, Cary Grove 1984
9. Key Components and Characteristics for Effective Schools for Dropouts and At-Risk Students. A Joint Statement to Congress by sixteen leading education and training researchers 1995
10. Alternative Schools: The State of the Art, Mary Anne Raywid, Hofstra University.
11. Models of Reform: A Comparative Guide, Herbert Walberg, University of Illinois, Chicago 1998
12. Numerous books and articles on small schools from 1995 to present.
13. Successful experience of Alternative Schools Network youth, skills, development and training school for out-of-school foster care youth as reported in annual school reports measuring attendance, skill gains, credit gains, promotions, graduations and transitions/placements since 1999. Also the Youth Connections Charter School successful experience of re-enrolling out-of-school students since 1997 as documented in its annual school reports.

**This comes from the State Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students Who Dropped Out-of-School Final Report January 2008**

**These successful school characteristics were also endorsed by the following leaders and experts in education in 1995. Their positions are listed as of that date:**

- Dr. Robert Taggart, Professor, Howard University; Director, Remediation and Training Institute; Former Director, U.S. Department of Labor National Youth Employment Schools.
- Dr. Stephen F. Hamilton, Professor and Chair, Department of Human Development and Family Studies; Director of the Cornell Youth and Work School, Cornell University.
- Norm Fruchter, Co-director, Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University; School Advisor, Aaron Diamond Foundation.
- Dr. Mary Anne Raywid, Professor of Administration and Policy Studies; Director of the Center for the Study

of Alternative Education, Hofstra University.

- Dr. Michelle Fine, Professor of Psychology, City University of New York; Graduate Center.
- Dr. Gary Wehlage, Associate Director, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, University of Wisconsin – Madison.
- William Spring, Member, Boston School Committee; Former White House Domestic Policy Advisor.
- Dr. Alexandra Weinbaum, Co-Executive Director, School and Community Services, Academy for Educational Development, New York.
- Dr. Donald Moore, Executive Director, Designs for Change, Chicago.
- Dr. Richard Lacey, President, Lacey Associates; Former School Officer, Ford Foundation.
- Dr. Paul Osterman, Professor, Human Resources and Management, Sloan School Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Tony Baez, Faculty, University of Wisconsin Center for Urban Community Development, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Professor Andy Sum, Director, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Dr. G. Alfred Hess, Jr., Executive Director, Chicago Panel on Policy.
- Dr. Joe Nathan, Director, Center for School Change, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.
- Gary Walker, President, Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia.

### **Performance Outcomes for Schools Re-enrolling Out-of-School Students Who Dropped Out-of-School**

The Task Force has identified the following outcomes as essential in terms of monitoring student and overall school progress.

- 1) **Enrollment** – Schools would report monthly and yearly enrollment levels, measuring student continuity.
- 2) **Attendance** – Schools would report individual student and total student monthly and yearly attendance.
- 3) **Skills Gains** – The skill gains of each re-enrolled student would be measured, as well as data collected about the skills gained by all students in an individual school and for the project as a whole, if there is more than one school.
- 4) **Credit Gains** – The credit gains of each re-enrolled student would be measured, as well as data collected about the credit gained for all students in the individual school and for project as a whole, if there is more than one school.
- 5) **Promotions** – Individual re-enrolled student promotions would be measured, i.e., the number of freshmen who became sophomores, sophomores became juniors, and juniors became seniors, as well as matriculation levels for individual schools and the project as a whole, if there is more than one school.
- 6) **Graduation** – The graduation rate is determined for each individual school and the project as a whole, providing the number of students who graduate for each. A reasonable percentage range would be based upon the difficulty and high-risk status of the students who are re-enrolled.
- 7) **Transition** – Measure the transition of students to post-secondary education (community college, four-year colleges, graduate school), employment, career and technical education, and military service.