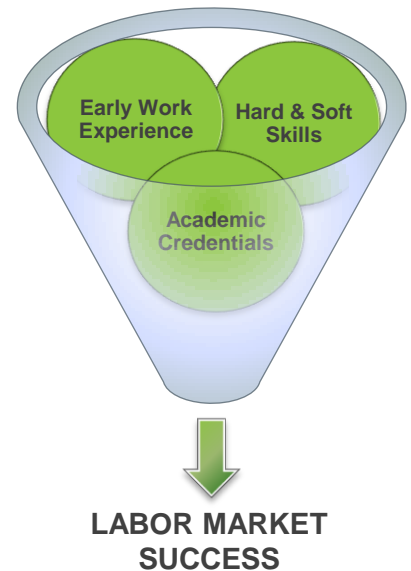


BACKGROUND

Jobs that pay a livable wage in the 21st century economy require workers to have educational credentials, a mix of hard and soft skills, and usually some form of work experience. Unfortunately, traditional indicators of future labor market success demonstrate that the District’s young people face a steep uphill battle when it comes to transitioning successfully into adulthood and securing employment. For instance:

- In 2013-2014 only about **two-thirds of DC’s students graduated high school** within four years¹ and college completion rates remained below the national average.²
- **Young people also struggled to find entry-level employment opportunities** which serve as important foundations for lifelong success. Just 12% of 16-19 year old District residents were able to find paid, unsubsidized employment in 2014.³
- **Older youth struggled to find employment as well;** only 59% of the city’s 20-24 year olds were employed full time in 2014.⁴
- **About 8,300 young people in the District are categorized as disconnected youth,** meaning they are neither in school nor employed.⁵ This represents 9% of all District youth 16 to 24.⁶

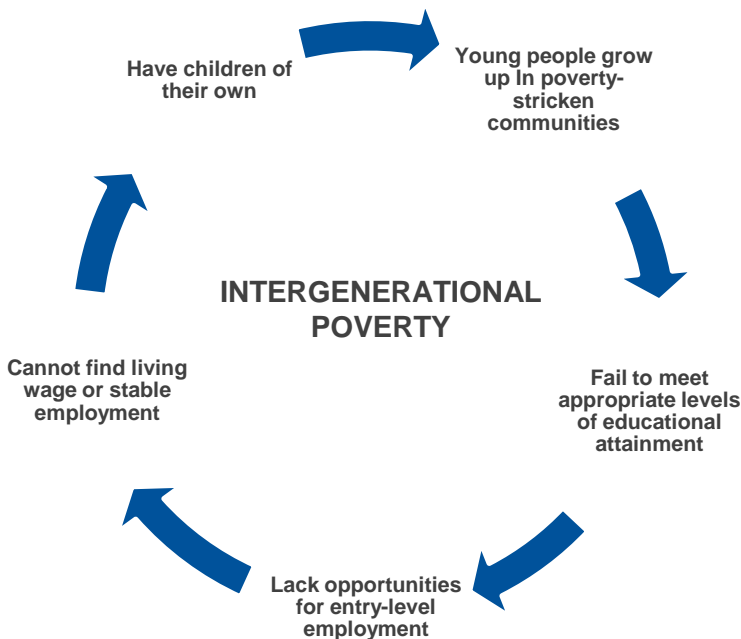


This data points to a crisis-level issue in DC. Young people who lack educational credentials and work experience will struggle to become self-sufficient adults. In many cases, these young people already have children of their own, exacerbating the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

In 2015, the city reported more than 5,000 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) heads of household between the ages of 18 and 25, signaling that a large pocket of low-income youth are turning to public assistance to reach a family-sustaining income in the District.⁷

We cannot stall until unprepared youth become unemployed adults. Early investment will increase the likelihood that youth maintain consistent employment into adulthood; adding to both their lifetime earnings and their contributions to the District’s tax base.

In turn, a thriving workforce also undercuts a major factor to some of the District’s most pressing problems: homelessness, dependence on public assistance and intergenerational poverty.



1) Office of the State Superintendent for Education. "DC 2014 ADJUSTED COHORT 4-YEAR GRADUATION RATE". Available: http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2014_ACGR_summary_wnograd.pdf
 2) Office of the State Superintendent for Education. "District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DC TAG)". Available: <http://1.usa.gov/1hMDtE4>
 3) Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2014. Available: www.bls.gov/lau/table14full14.xlsx
 4) Ibid.
 5) American Community Survey microdata, 2013 1-year estimates conducted by M. Ross and M. Thakur.
 6) Ibid.
 7) DC Department of Human Services, Economic Security Administration, 2015.



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Invest in year-round workforce preparedness programming for young people:

The District must expand its year-round youth workforce portfolio to complement the hefty investment made in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). The District must invest in year-round opportunities that complement the investment made in summer experiences. Six-weeks of SYEP can provide valuable career exposure and soft skill development opportunities, but it is not a sufficient timeframe to serve youth who lack academic credentials and skills, or who are continuously disconnected from the labor market.

For **in-school youth** further investments should be made in opportunities for career exploration and work readiness activities like internships and volunteer opportunities, increased attention to post-secondary/career planning, and increased access to school-based training such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses of study and opportunities to “dual” enroll in college-level classes while finishing secondary coursework.

For **out-of-school youth**, the city needs to expand its services and supports that allow young people to gain “hard”- occupational skills that put them on direct career pathways while also increasing their level of educational attainment. These educational services can range from adult basic education (ABE) services, to GED preparation, to the attainment of a post-secondary credential or degree.

Build a comprehensive youth employment system based on a career pathways framework:

In spite of growing collaboration between the District’s youth-serving agencies, the city still lacks a seamless system of workforce development. In order to better integrate programs and services, the District should undertake a process of cross-agency planning using a career pathways framework. Career pathways incorporate three essential features⁸:

- 1) Well-connected education, training, and support services within sector-specific occupations;
- 2) Multiple entry points, so that youth can begin their career path at the most appropriate skill level; and
- 3) Multiple exit points, so that youth can easily pursue further educational opportunities, either between jobs or while working.

Functionally, this means programs must work with one another to establish common definitions and outcomes where appropriate, collect data, establish a network of resources, and share successful program models..

Focus on quality and outcomes:

Programs that are able to move youth into a productive adulthood are built on quality standards that include an articulated mission and goals, a defined target population, clearly defined outcomes, and a system for data management and evaluation. The District must ensure that its investments in youth workforce programming have these elements of success, and provide programs with capacity-building support around data, performance measurement, and performance management.⁹

8) CLASP, “Shared Vision, Strong Systems: The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework Version 1.0” (2014).

9) Ross, M. and Thakur, M. (2014) Improving Youth Programs and Outcomes in Washington, D.C. Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program.