

# Memo on Reconnecting Our Youth

From a Coalition of Voices from the Field

## Update on Efforts to Move the Recommendations

**Background:** In December, 2004 a memo was sent to the White House containing a series of recommendations for reconnecting youth. Crafted with substantial input from most of the national youth policy organizations, it is significant in that it represented a consensus on a set of recommendations that could be supported by the constituencies of the various organizations and had the potential to be successfully advanced. Building on the Administrations focus on high school reform, this is an opportunity to elevate the situation related to drop-outs and disconnected youth and to advance a set of recommendations. The intent was also to develop some consistent messages and get those messages to resonate at all levels – federal, state and local. Through the communications work of Connect for Kids and the networks of the advocacy organizations involved in the effort, the memo has been signed on to by nearly 250 organizations.

The memo effort, coordinated by the Campaign for Youth, brought together the considerable policy, advocacy and communications expertise of the national organizations that have coalesced around the effort – Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), National Youth Employment Coalition(NYEC), National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC), Connect for Kids, National Network for Youth, Alliance for Excellent Education, Youth Law Center, Forum for Youth Investment, National Collaboration for Youth, CWLA, Youthbuild USA, and Fight Crime Invest in Kids. The work of this coalition is ongoing to advance the recommendations and the work group has met with much success in presenting the drop out issue and the recommendations in various arenas.

Activities to date include:

1. The Memo was sent to the White House, the Office of the First Lady, and all governors and a press release on the memo and recommendations was issued at the time of the NGA meeting in May. We have engaged in dialogue with NGA staff regarding possible linkages.
2. A roundtable was held with representatives of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to discuss their heightened interest in engaging disadvantaged youth in service and in serving disadvantaged youth. CNCS invited follow up in response to questions identified in the discussion and we anticipate ongoing communication.
3. A roundtable was held for federal program staff responsible for developing, implementing and coordinating programs serving youth at risk. We had a good response across several agencies, including: the Departments of Labor, Education, Justice, HHS, Transportation and Safety, NASA, the Pentagon, Institute for Museum and Library Services, CNCS and HUD. A panel presented the major recommendations and a rich discussion ensued among the agencies. The agencies were very interested and suggested venues for future meetings and presentations.
4. Representatives from CFY were invited to participate in discussions at the Federal Interagency Council on Education and an ongoing connection has been established.
5. American Youth Policy Forum hosted a forum on the graduation rate crisis with Paul Barton (ETS) presenting his research on the rising drop out rates and representatives from the Campaign for Youth (Sally Prouty, NASCC and Linda Harris, CLASP) made presentations. One hundred and forty participants from national policy organizations, federal agencies, legislative staff, and foundations attended.



*The Memo on Reconnecting Our Youth advanced a set of recommendations that was endorsed by over 200 organizations from across the country. These organizations represent youth practitioners, policy makers, educators, advocates, community and faith-based institutions, and others who are concerned about the future for the millions of young people who have fallen outside of the education and labor market mainstream with little opportunity to reconnect. A coordinated effort continues to advance these recommendations with the Administration, Congress, Governors, and federal agencies. Together, we can Reach Out and Reconnect Our Youth!*

6. Representatives from CFY met with Dr. Susan Sclafani, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational and Alternative Education at the U.S. Department of Education and her top staff. Dr. Sclafani was receptive of the effort and offered ways to connect the work of the Campaign for Youth with the federal interagency work around coordination of service to this youth population. We will continue working with OVAE staff.
7. A roundtable hosted by the USA Freedom Corps included representatives of the Office of the First Lady and the Domestic Policy Council. An excellent discussion of the issues presented in the Memo was followed by a presentation regarding the administrations heightened focus on youth and the summit being planned by Mrs. Bush. An ongoing exchange is anticipated.
8. A meeting was held with Mason Bishop, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Employment and Training Administration and Gay Gilbert, Administrator of WIA Programs at the Department of Labor. Discussion centered on the new Youth Vision and the multi-agency work occurring in response to the report of the White House Disadvantaged Youth Task Force. Follow up communication was invited.
9. CFY members participated in a forum sponsored by the National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practice on how states can best address the education and workforce needs of out-of-school youth.
10. Briefs were developed on each of the recommendations with connecting links to relevant research, policy documents, and background information. The memo has been converted into an interactive document with links to the background information and advocacy tool and is accessible via the CFY, CLASP, NYEC, and NASCC websites.

#### Next Steps:

It has been approximately one year since the beginning of this effort. It has gained tremendous momentum and the messages have resonated with all audiences that we have approached. During the next year, we hope to attract funding to provide dedicated staff support to this effort. We want to heighten the "drum beat" around the 32% that are being left behind. We want to inspire or facilitate action around the recommendations and we hope to see evidence of progress at all levels – federal, state, and local. Toward that end, our activities will include:

1. Continued dissemination of the "Memo" documents and advocacy tools widely via the 250 who signed the memo, the advocacy networks of coalition organizations, and the participants in the various forums. We will be requesting that they work within their respective circles to advance at least one of the recommendations.
2. Extending our dialogue and message to the State level to elevate the recommendations related to graduation rate accountability, flexibility for alternative programming, and keeping a focus on drop out recovery in the high school reform discussions. We hope to see heightened attention at future conferences. Continued conversations with NGA, Council of Chief State School Officers, and other state education audiences will be explored.
3. Working with the Federal agencies that have expressed support to connect the work of those agencies with the practitioners in the field, and vice versa, to bring relevant experience from the field to the attention of the federal agencies.
4. Continuing to ask the question "What About the Other 32%" until it is a resonating question with focused attention on the answer.



Campaign  
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