



ADVANCING EDUCATION
INCOME AND HEALTH

SOLVING THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CRISIS: IDENTIFYING AND USING SCHOOL FEEDER PATTERNS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE
EVERYONE GRADUATES CENTER AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
CIVIC ENTERPRISES



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FOREWORD

As a nation we can take stock of the recent progress that has been made improving high school graduation rates across the country and a corresponding drop in the number of students attending high schools that graduate fewer than 60 percent of their students on time. But even as we reflect on this progress, we need to remain vigilant and steadfast in ratcheting up our collective efforts to close persistent gaps and ensuring that even greater numbers of students graduate high school on time, prepared for college or for some form of post-secondary training. There are few jobs for young adults in the 21st century workplace that can provide family-sustaining employment without some post-secondary education or training. Despite recent progress, far too many students, in particular low-income and students of color, fail to finish their high school education, thereby limiting their future education and employment options. Moreover, since the nation's high school dropouts are concentrated in a sub-set of communities and neighborhoods, these localities are in danger of being continually engulfed in a cycle of poverty, low educational outcomes, poor health, and lack of employment.

It does not have to be this way. We know why students drop out, which students – absent of successful interventions – will likely dropout, and the high schools these students attend. We also know that effective interventions exist. As a result, we are left with a giant engineering challenge of getting the right support, to the right student, at the right time, and at the scale and intensity required in our communities. Key to making this happen is providing students, particularly those in high poverty communities, with a continuum of supports in, through, and around their schooling.

We know that the early warning signs that a student is falling off the track to high school graduation can emerge as early as the elementary years, and then accelerate during the middle grades. We also know that these key indicators – attendance, behavior, and course performance – are also the very mechanisms through which poverty undercuts educational achievement. The effects of poverty can make it harder for students to attend school on a regular basis, to focus in school, to display the appropriate behaviors, and to complete their schoolwork. We have learned that the most effective means of helping students succeed in school is to combine effective, school-based reforms with ongoing supports from a second shift of adults who can help address the barriers that often get in the way of student success.

United Ways have an essential role to play in ending the dropout crisis. United Way has set a national education goal of cutting the dropout rate in half and increasing the number of students that graduate high school prepared for college, post-secondary training, and career. Making significant progress toward this goal requires a collective and sustained effort, and United Ways are well positioned in their communities to:

- Bring diverse stakeholders to the table to develop a common vision and shared goals for all students, develop or deepen strategies to alleviate barriers, and create mechanisms of shared accountability for results.
- Engage community residents, especially families and youth, to understand aspirations, needs, and challenges, to help strengthen school and family connections, and to advocate for necessary changes in education.

- Use and share community and school-level data to identify existing opportunities and challenges, and drive data-based decision-making.
- Align and broker a vast array of appropriate supports, interventions, and opportunities, in-school and out-of-school to promote academic success and on-time high school graduation.
- Leverage existing relationships – including volunteers and business partners, to create a “second-shift” of adults ready to provide students identified at risk of dropping out with customized supports.
- Mobilize community-based financial resources to invest in systemic improvements, like early warning systems.

However, United Ways, like their communities, need to know where to focus their efforts. One key to this is identifying which middle and elementary schools have the greatest number and/or concentration of students who are falling off track to graduation. It is in these schools, the high schools they feed into which produce the greatest number of dropouts, and the neighborhoods that surround them that we need to focus and concentrate our efforts. Identifying these schools is a critical and necessary first step to providing customized, just-in-time supports to individual students before they fall off track.

This guide aims to provide the information needed to enable local United Ways and their community partners to play a key role in identifying the schools where additional adult and community support is most needed. Assembling the right supports, at the right scale, continuity, and intensity will help to ensure that more students stay on the pathway to high school graduation, post-secondary education or training, and, ultimately, lifelong success.

Sincerely,



Robert Balfanz
Co-Director, Everyone Graduates Center,
Johns Hopkins University



Stacey D. Stewart
U.S. President
United Way Worldwide

THE CHALLENGE

Recent improvements in the high school graduation rate are cause to reflect on our nation's progress. Over the past ten years, the graduation rate has increased from 71.7 percent to 78.2 percent, with the greatest gains occurring since 2006.ⁱ Students of color have largely helped to power these gains – African American graduation rates have increased by 6.9 percent and Hispanic graduation rates rose 10.9 percentage points. In addition, the number of high schools graduating fewer than 60 percent of its incoming freshman class three years earlier declined from 1,634 schools in 2009 to 1,424 in 2011.ⁱⁱ

Yet increasing graduation rates to meet the workforce demands of the 21st century remains a daunting challenge across the United States, and significant disparities persist within and across communities.

- Across states there remain significant disparities in graduation rates. In 20 states, high school graduation rates for African American students are 66 percent or less; for Hispanics the same is true in 16 states. In contrast, there is no state in the U.S. where the graduation rate for white students is 66 percent or lower, and in a majority of states graduation rates for white students hover in the 80s and 90s.
- Students of color are still more likely to attend schools where on-time graduation is not the norm; the remaining 1,424 schools where the graduation crisis is concentrated produces roughly half of the African American and Hispanic dropouts.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Although the graduation rate has risen to 78.2 percent, rates for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students still lag significantly behind at 66.1 and 71.4 percent respectively.
- Of those students who do graduate on time, only about one-third leave high school prepared for the academic rigors of college without needing remedial coursework.
- Far greater numbers of African American, Hispanic, and low-income students arrive at college requiring remediation.^{iv}

Students who fail to finish high school are more likely to be unemployed, receive welfare, contribute to high healthcare

costs, perpetrate crimes, and be incarcerated.^v One study estimates that U.S. taxpayers would save \$45 billion annually if the number of high school dropouts were cut in half.^{vi} In fact, according to a recent analysis, if the nation's 50 largest cities and surrounding metropolitan areas cut their dropout numbers *in half*, each year individuals in those communities would:^{vii}

- Increase homes sales by \$10.5 billion.
- Support 30,000 additional jobs, an increase of \$5.3 billion in gross regional product.
- Boost earnings by \$4.1 billion.
- Spend an additional \$2.8 billion and invest another \$1.1 billion.
- Increase tax revenue by \$536 million each year.
- Spend an extra \$340 million purchasing cars, trucks, and other vehicles.

The economic benefits of a high school diploma can be felt at the individual level as well. Individuals with a high school diploma, including those who go on to higher education, will earn an average of \$550,000 more over a lifetime than high school dropouts.^{viii} High school graduates are also more likely to be employed than dropouts. As of January 2013, 12 percent of high school dropouts were unemployed, compared with 8 percent of high school graduates.^{ix} For those with a bachelor's degree or higher, the unemployment rate is 3.7 percent, a number that many consider full employment.

These statistics are particularly troublesome in light of the fact that there still remain 1,424 schools, across all 50 states, in which 12th grade enrollment is 60 percent or less of 9th grade enrollment.^x

Increasing the number of students who graduate from high school on time is essential to ensuring a more prosperous future for individuals, the communities they live in, and our nation overall. This will require ratcheting up efforts within and across communities to identify and support students who are struggling and who are the least likely to succeed without additional help. It will also require acting earlier, and

not waiting to intervene until students are already on their way to dropping out. Finally, it will require systemic, rather than piecemeal, approaches that help us to scale change more effectively; this includes working across the birth-to-21 education pipeline.

THE DROPOUT CRISIS STARTS EARLY

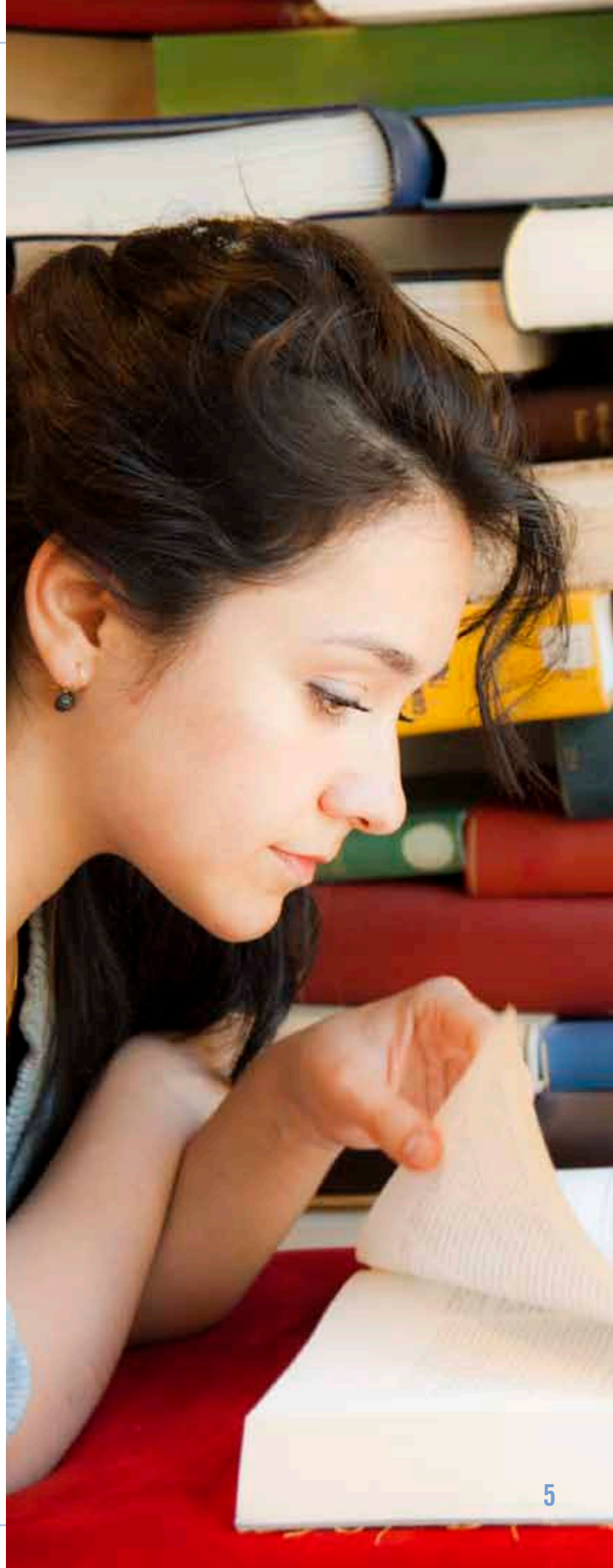
The dropout crisis has its origins in disparities that are evident even before children enter the formal educational system. Research makes it clear that the human brain develops more rapidly in the first five years of life than in any other subsequent period. As such, early learning environments (formal and informal) play a critical role in child development. Unfortunately, huge disparities and children's early development and experiences differ significantly in terms of the quality of their home environments, access to high-quality early childhood programs, access to affordable healthcare, and safe and supportive communities.

As a result, for some children, the arc of failure starts early. A child who starts behind falls even farther behind long before the start of school. Disparities in child outcomes are evident by 9 months.^{xi} Children who enter school without the fundamental knowledge, attributes, and skills necessary for success – including gross and fine motor skills, social and emotional development, language development (including early literacy awareness), and basic content (e.g., letter, number, and shape recognition) – are more likely to struggle throughout their education if appropriate interventions are not put in place along the way.

These gaps often persist and widen as students progress through school. For every 50 children who don't learn to read in kindergarten, 44 of them will still have trouble reading in the third grade.^{xii} Children who are not reading on grade level by third grade are less likely to graduate without interventions and assistance. Poor grades and high absenteeism rates by third grade are predictors of high school dropout.^{xiii}

THE MIDDLE GRADES MATTER

The middle grades are a crucial developmental period for young people, marked by rapid physical growth and social, emotional, and cognitive development. Social and emotional development in early adolescence (ages 11-13) is characterized by a growing desire for independence, increased conflict with parents, including the testing of boundaries and rules,



growing awkwardness about and interest in the opposite sex, rapid mood changes, and a struggle to define one's unique identity. Cognitive changes include an increased understanding of right and wrong, expanded interests, and greater capacity for abstract thought and reasoning. It is during this time that youth leave their childhood behind and transition to early adolescence and increased independence.

Simultaneously, for many youth, it is also a time of significant change in their school environment – from self-contained elementary school classrooms, a relatively stable peer group, and a generally more structured, nurturing environment – to middle school, where students encounter multiple teachers, a fluid schedule, peers from multiple feeder schools, and increased expectations related to their academic performance, time management and study skills, and behavior.

Although students physically drop out in high school, many initially disengage in the middle grades. This is evidenced by a combination of a declining attendance and academic performance, increasingly negative attitudes toward school, and, in some instances, behavioral issues. The middle grades are also marked by a general decline in student academic performance. This trend is readily apparent in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data. Although middle grade students have made gradual gains over time, these improvements are significantly less than that of elementary school students. Elementary school students increased their performance on the NAEP reading assessment by 28 points between 1990 and 2011; middle grade students, in contrast, increased their scores by 21 points. Similarly, in reading, elementary school students showed gains of 27 points, while middle grade students' scores increased by 20 points. While the decline in middle grades performance cut across communities and demographics, it is most problematic for students attending high-poverty, low-performing middle schools. If students do not experience success in the middle grades, they are much less likely to experience success in high school. Middle grades students who are held back are seven times more likely to eventually drop out, and 80 percent of students who repeat a class more than once are likely to drop out as well.^{xiv}

In fact, student attendance, grades, and behavior in the middle grades are actually predictive of high school graduation, and students who get “off-track” in the middle grades are more likely to eventually drop out in high school.



THE “9TH GRADE BULGE AND 10TH GRADE DIP”

A successful transition into 9th grade is especially important to high school success. While declines in academic achievement are typical during this transition, students with the greatest amount of decline are the most likely to drop out.^{xvi}

In terms of persisting to obtain a high school diploma, 9th grade may actually be the most critical year:

- Research indicates that poor attendance in the first 30 days of 9th grade is a more powerful predictor of dropout than any other indicator, including test scores, academic achievement, and age.
- The greatest proportion of students drop out of school between 9th and 10th grade, often after “recycling” several times in the 9th grade.^{xvii}
- In some states, dropout rates between these grades can be as high as 20 percent.^{xviii}
- Racial disparities also exist – while 7 percent of white students drop out between 9th and 10th grade, 17 percent of Hispanic students and 20 percent of African American students do so.^{xix}
- In addition, dropout rates are most pronounced in high-poverty districts where 40 percent of students leave after 9th grade, compared to 27 percent in low-poverty districts.
- Ninth grade is the largest class size in any high school because of student retention rates; more students are held back after 9th grade than any other time in their high school career. The resulting 9th grade “bulge” is followed by falling class sizes in 10th grade, also referred to as the 10th grade “dip”.



THE RATIONALE – USING FEEDER PATTERNS TO IDENTIFY STUDENTS MOST AT RISK OF ACADEMIC FAILURE (OR DROPOUT)

Over the past few years it has become easier for communities to identify the high schools that are experiencing the highest rates of students failing academically or dropping out. However, it is increasingly clear how important it is to reach these students *before* they enter high school. This can be a challenge since students matriculate to high schools from multiple middle grade schools and even more elementary schools, which can make it difficult to identify struggling students.

As United Ways work with their communities to develop and implement community strategies to increase the numbers of students that graduate high school on time, it is necessary to consider where the highest concentration of at-risk students are located in the community. Knowing which elementary and middle schools feed into the lowest-performing high schools is critical information to ensure that appropriate school and community-based interventions are matched to specific students, early enough to make a difference.

In addition, this information allows the community to appropriately focus resources and supports on children and youth who are at greatest risk of not graduating from high school and succeeding in college, work, and life. Instead of a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach to improving education outcomes, communities can target their efforts and tailor in-school and out-of-school strategies based on the specific characteristics of the schools and neighborhoods identified. For example, early warning and response systems (discussed later in this guide) can be placed in these feeder schools to help identify students who are veering off the path to graduation based on their attendance, course grades, and behavior.

United Ways can play key roles in collecting and using the feeder school data. Whether it is initiating discussion about the benefits to mapping feeder patterns, working with the school systems and community leadership to identify schools feeding into the lowest-performing high schools, and/or building coalitions to align and coordinate supports in identified schools, United Way can be a critical backbone in this effort.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to map out a process for identifying feeder patterns and helping you and your community begin a discussion about how to use the information.

There are two possible approaches when mapping feeder patterns:

1. Community stakeholders can start by painting a full picture of the community and schools by mapping all schools from their high school to their middle schools to their elementary schools.
2. Community stakeholders can first identify the lowest-performing schools in the community and identify the middle and elementary schools that feed into those high schools. Over time, the process can be repeated until the group has a comprehensive picture of the community feeder patterns.

This guide takes the second approach for two reasons. One, if you are already working with the lowest-performing high schools or struggling middle or elementary schools, it will serve as a logical next step to follow those children up or down their feeder patterns. Two, your school system feeder patterns may be complex due to student choice, charter school options, etc. Starting small, with a tangible number of feeder schools, will make this a less daunting process and will help you and your partners first target the students at greatest risk for academic failure or dropout.

The guide is sub-divided into the following parts:

PART I UNDERSTANDING YOUR EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

This section will help you to identify the key stakeholders that your United Way will need to partner with as part of establishing strong school-community relationships; map existing coalitions and/or efforts to improve educational outcomes in your community; and access and understand key education data (e.g., high school graduation rates) to get a better sense of the federal/national, state, and local education contexts.

PART II IDENTIFYING FEEDER PATTERNS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

This section will help you to determine if the timing is right to identify feeder patterns, and to subsequently identify the best approach to use (and related steps) based on your specific community context, existing relationships, and school district organization.

PART III USING FEEDER PATTERNS FOR GREATER IMPACT

After you have mapped school feeder patterns, this section will help your United Ways and community partners consider specific actions, using this new information, to make meaningful change. This includes considering the development and use of early warning systems, organizing wrap-around supports for struggling students, and strengthening family engagement strategies.

PART IV IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Creating education change at scale in communities and within schools requires supportive policies that incentivize change and remove potential barriers. This section provides an overview of the broader federal and state policy context, as well as examples of the kinds of policies that can help accelerate local-level efforts to strengthen supports for students.

PART V CONCLUSION

The final section of the guide considers the kinds of questions you should ask and the decisions you and your community partners will need to make to help sustain your progress.



PART I

UNDERSTANDING YOUR EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

For your United Way and community partners to successfully map feeder patterns and then do something with the information there is foundational knowledge and relationships that must first be in place. Before going any farther, you should first spend some time getting to know your community and educational landscape.

IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

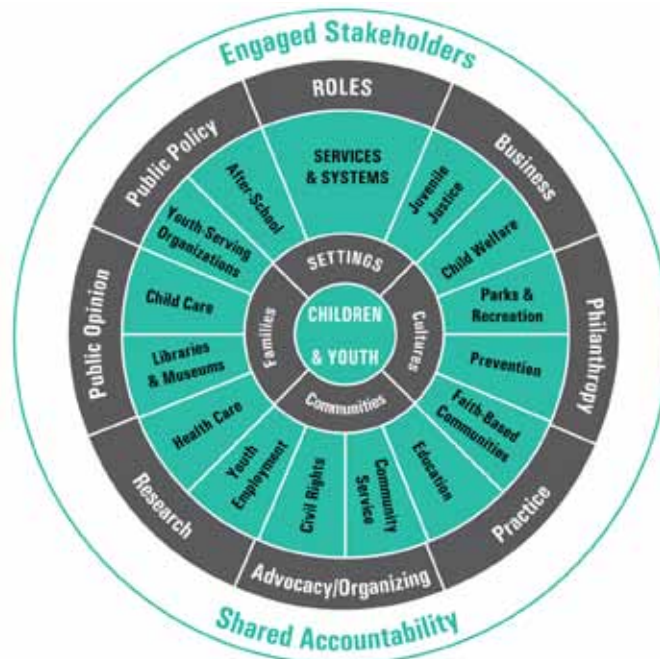
One of the first steps your community should take is to identify the different groups, organizations, and institutions in your community that engage with the school system, supply interventions to students and/or parents, or are able to influence policy or community behavior for systematic change. You will need to partner with these entities as part of a collective effort to build strong relationships with the school system, collect the necessary data to make informed decisions, and put the right strategies in place based on what the data tells you.

Of course, it will be more important to engage some partners at the very beginning, compared to others who might be engaged subsequently as part of an ongoing outreach process. It might be helpful to create a priority list of the partners you'd like to engage. Focus on building one to three key partnerships, then reassess as necessary. If you find you are not gaining access to the stakeholders and information that is needed to work on this effort, then engage other stakeholders to ensure you have the right representation among your community allies.

In many local communities **key stakeholders and organizations playing a role** in this work include, but are not limited to:

1. Local School Boards of Education
2. Chief State School Officers or their offices
3. Local Superintendent's office
4. Area superintendents
5. Individual school principals

Figure 1 – Stakeholder Wheel, Forum for Youth Investment



One helpful tool for effectively determining who is already engaged and who else needs to be is the Stakeholder Wheel (see Figure 1) developed by the Forum for Youth Investment. This tool can be modified to suit your specific needs and used to initially identify which sectors/stakeholders in your community are engaged in education efforts.

You should find out:

- What type of community and education initiatives are these groups currently a part of?
- Are we connected to these initiatives? Should we be?
- Are these organizations aware of United Way's commitment to education?
- How should we communicate with them?
- What expertise do/can these organizations bring to the table? (e.g., advocacy and policy development, direct services, management expertise, data collection and analysis, research, public relations, marketing and communications, budget development and sustainability planning, etc.)

KNOWING AND UNDERSTANDING EXISTING EDUCATION EFFORTS AND COALITIONS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

It is likely that education efforts and coalitions already exist in your community. To be respectful of current good work and to prevent duplication of efforts, it will be important to uncover who is working with whom, on what, and where. One of these groups may have already mapped and/or is currently tracking feeder patterns, which would save you and your partners a great deal of time.

Having one-on-one meetings with the district superintendent(s) and school principals will be one way of discovering the collaborative groups that are working with the school system. You and others might also want to reach out to any education, afterschool, and parent groups/organizations to ask them which groups they work with.

Once you begin identifying other coalitions or efforts, you can use The Forum for Youth Investment's "Mapping Moving Trains" tool to inventory the networks, organizations, or initiatives with the capacity, motivation, and resources to create change. You can then identify ways you and your partners could link to these networks, organizations, and initiatives. (See the Mapping Coalitions and Networks tool in APPENDIX C).

KEY EDUCATION DATA AND WHERE TO ACCESS IT

Numerous federal/national, state, and local websites exist to help you understand the national education landscape. These websites contain specific information and data related to the school districts and schools that are located in your community. Use the sites listed below as a starting point for developing a deeper understanding of your school districts' and/or schools' demographics and performance.

NATIONAL AND FEDERAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- **Alliance for Excellent Education** maintains a database that gives users the ability to locate schools (by state, Congressional district, and zip code) and calculate their promotion power. Promotion power refers to the number of 12th graders in a school compared to the number of ninth graders three years earlier and is used as a metric to help determine how well a school is faring in getting students to their senior year. Accessible online at: <http://www.all4ed.org/promotingpower>.
- The most immediately useful of federal sources is the **Common Core of Data (CCD)** maintained by the **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)** of

the U.S. Department of Education (accessible online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>). Go to the district or school locator tab, and then to the district or school of interest. Data contained in the CCD is reported by the states, districts, and, through them, the schools, according to protocols stated by the CCD.¹ Types of data available for each district include: type of school system (e.g., large urban, small rural); number of schools, number of students, and average teacher/student ratios. Information available by school includes: student demographic and enrollment data, Title I status, grades served, and student/teacher ratios.

- In addition, the **National Center for Education Statistics** website contains other data and numerous reports. The most useful resources include:
 - School District Demographic System (SDSDS), accessible online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/index.aspx>, allows users to view maps (states, school districts, Congressional districts, etc.) and to overlay education (student demographics) and social economic data (Census).
 - The Digest of Education Statistics, published annually, provides aggregate data that helps to provide a national picture of key education indicators of interest, including student enrollment, number of teachers, post-secondary attainment, school finances, federal funding for education, etc.
 - The Condition of Education, published annually, is also useful. It summarizes key national developments and trends in education using the most current data available. The report includes data on 49 indicators across three main categories: (1) participation in education, (2) elementary and secondary education, and (3) post-secondary education.

STATE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

State departments of education (also called departments of public instruction in some states) websites provide data that is usually more current than federal data, especially in terms of student enrollment and demographics. The majority of states provide data with, at most, a one-year lag. States are also

¹ In general, unless otherwise noted, federally reported data for districts and schools is based on data collection on or around October 1st of every year. There are two caveats: 1) because federal data is at the top of the chain, reported from schools to districts to states, and because each level is verified to the extent possible, there is a lag time of one to two years and sometimes more before federal sources publish data; and 2) although certain protocols are proposed, states also collect data in accord with their own protocols, and data is not always reported similarly by all states in all categories.

required by the No Child Left Behind act of 2002 to post state, district, and individual school report cards – including school improvement status.² Your state’s education agency website will also include scores for required state assessments in mathematics, English language arts, grades 3 through 8, as required by federal legislation (No Child Left Behind Act of 2002), and scores on high school assessments, as required by NCLB and state policy. It is important to take into consideration variations across states in how graduation and dropout rates are reported (see APPENDIX A). Be sure to check how the rate you find here was calculated and what year the state adopted the Average Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR).

SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA

Most school district websites provide district-wide enrollment and demographic information, data on the number and type of schools in the district (elementary, middle, high), school descriptions, links to school websites, and individual school report cards. Usually they are the most up-to-date of the websites, with data for the current school year. School district websites are a good place to look for information regarding the specific demographic characteristics of each school, including race, ethnic group, gender, and free and/or reduced price lunch (a proxy measure of poverty).

SCHOOL LEVEL DATA

School websites vary tremendously in term of the general information and specific data they provide. They are most useful for getting background information about individual schools, administrative and staff contact information, and an overview of the types of programs offered.

² It is important to note that *No Child Left Behind* authorizing legislation was not renewed in 2012. Many states, through the federal “waiver” process, developed alternative measures of school performance and accountability that will be going into effect for 2013 and beyond. Therefore, your state’s education agency website will be the best source of information related to how your state is measuring district and school performance.



PART II

IDENTIFYING FEEDER SCHOOL PATTERNS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

After you've validated the need to identify feeder patterns... It is time to answer the question, "What are the feeder middle and elementary schools to the identified low-performing high schools – and which of these schools send the most students who may be the most ill-prepared or otherwise challenged for success?" For some communities this will be an easy question to answer and for others it will be very difficult.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE BIG PICTURE – LEARNING ABOUT FEEDER PATTERNS

As noted in the identification of schools and communities section of this brief, if you have established relationships with your districts and schools, simply ask about the schools that feed into your targeted high schools. If you are in a small district, have decided to serve a smaller part of the community, or if "choice" is not prevalent in your district or state, locating the feeder elementary and middle schools will be relatively easy. In many cases, feeder patterns are posted on the web. If they aren't, you may have to do some additional research.

There will be greater challenges in determining feeder patterns to struggling high schools if your community of concern includes school districts in which students are not "zoned" to the schools in which they feed and/or if there are:

- Multiple high schools.
- Middle schools whose student population is sent to different high schools based on boundaries that are determined by the local school board and district administration.
- Elementary schools whose student population is sent to different middle schools based on boundaries that are determined by the local school board and district administration.
- "Choice of schools" (including charter schools) for students, at one or many grade levels, independent of where students live. In some districts, students in regular public schools may choose, or enter lotteries, to attend any school of their choice.

In Washington, D.C., for instance, more than 41 percent of public school children attend non-traditional

IS YOUR UNITED WAY READY TO IDENTIFY SCHOOL FEEDER PATTERNS?

GO/NO-GO QUESTIONS TO ASK:

The **very first** question your United Way should answer is whether any organization in the community has already collaborated with the school district to identify and share feeder patterns as part of an existing effort. If the answer is NO, then you have established the need and should consider the following additional questions before proceeding:

- ✓ Has your United Way identified and mapped existing education efforts and initiatives in your community?
- ✓ Has your United Way engaged a minimum of 1-3 key community-based organizations that you will partner with in your efforts?
- ✓ Does your United Way and/or community partners have established relationships, based on trust, with the superintendent's office (including senior leaders and staff)?
- ✓ Does your United Way and/or community partners have established relationships with the local school board?
- ✓ Does your United Way and community partners have a solid understanding of district, school, and student performance based on available data?
- ✓ Does your United Way and/or community partners have a credible history of working closely with school principals and staff focused on supporting student success?
- ✓ Have you identified resources (human, fiscal) within your United Way or community partners that can be devoted to mapping feeder pattern data so this work does not pose an additional burden to the school district?
- ✓ Has your United Way and/or community partners identified the lowest-performing high schools where you want to initially target your efforts?
- ✓ Can you effectively articulate and communicate to the school district(s) and other stakeholders why you need this information and how you will use it to benefit students and schools?

If you answered "YES" to all of these questions, then you are well-positioned to undertake this work. If you answered "NO", then you probably have more groundwork to do before approaching the school district.

public charter schools (made up of 57 charter schools on 102 campuses). Adding to the challenge of mapping feeder patterns in the District of Columbia is school closures and consolidations – 27 charter schools have closed since the district began allowing charter schools, and traditional public schools have been shutting doors as well, with an additional 15 schools to close or consolidate in the 2013-2014 school year.

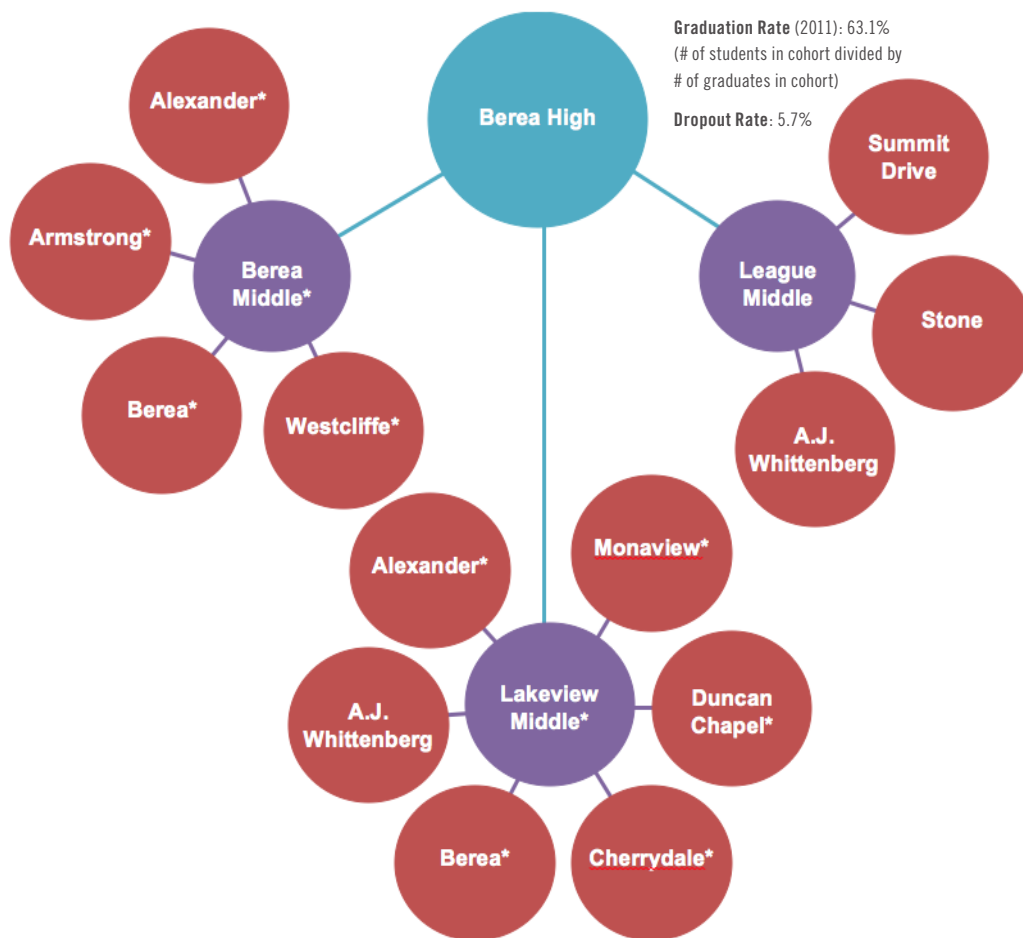
- Multiple types of high schools – for instance, regular comprehensive and vocational high schools, alternative high schools (some disciplinary, which are not a “choice” but are administratively determined, and some offering distinctive educational settings and pedagogy), virtual high schools, early and middle college high schools, and “opportunity pathway” or “multiple option” schools (especially for students aged 16 or 17 to 21, overage, and under-credited), etc.

If your community of concern includes schools that are not strictly zoned to higher grade schools or other schools – as increasingly, all districts do – you have a challenge. As mentioned before, the best way to address this challenge is to establish trusting and respectful communication channels with the pertinent school and/or district administrators and to follow the steps outlined in this brief.

SOME ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:

- Narrow down the community and the high schools whose incoming students you will serve. This is especially true in large and complicated communities in which school districts may cross county or other political boundaries, and in which students are not zoned to particular schools.
- Get a general idea of which are the struggling feeder schools using combined test score and poverty data to arrive at a preliminary estimation. If attendance

Figure 2 – Example of one feeder pattern from Greenville County Public Schools (South Carolina)



NOTES:

* Denotes Title I school (school with a high percentage of students living at or below the poverty line – calculated using the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch).

Every school that feeds into Carolina High is a Title I school

Cohort: Students in the same academic year who move through the school system as a unit (by grade)

Source: United Way of Greenville County (South Carolina)



data is available in terms of number of students who have missed 10, 15, and 20 or more days of school, incorporate that as well.

- Meet with district and school administrators, and look in further detail into the school data, using the web resources identified above and local resources. If your United Way, its partners, and the school district(s) will benefit from additional help:
 - Engage data analysts from the community to work as partners with you and the district(s) to understand the flow of struggling students from elementary to high schools. Bankers, accountants, insurance specialists, and economic development personnel are just a few of the types of people who are accustomed to understanding, analyzing, and communicating complicated numerical patterns and progressions.
 - Engage university or other non-profit researchers to work with United Way, the community, and district partners in assisting in the analysis.

Perhaps the most important step is to use a common sense approach.

- For this initiative, you will want to understand the general patterns. In the initial stages, when you are trying to establish targets for interventions rather than measure outcomes, the data does not need to be of research quality and precision. You want to know which middle schools supply 10, 30, 50, and 70 percent or more of struggling students to which high schools. And, in turn, which elementary schools supply 10, 30, 50, and 70 percent or more of struggling students to which middle schools. In each case, you want to know how many students are involved.
- If the struggling students are being diverted – or diverting themselves – out of the “comprehensive” school pathway into alternative schools, virtual schools, special schools, vocational schools, special programs, and middle and early college high schools, and public charters, you will want to know this, too. Some of these diversion pathways recover struggling students at high rates and are superb; others are the opposite. It is important to learn whether and how these programs of choice contribute to solving or magnifying the dropout challenge.

IDENTIFY THE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES MOST IN NEED

States organize their schooling in different ways, and it is often different by communities and districts as well, so many of the specifics of data collection surrounding low-performing schools will vary by locality.

If your United Way and partners are committed to mapping elementary and middle schools that feed low-performing high schools, the first thing you will need to know is self-evident – which high schools are at the apex of the community of students you wish to serve? (For an example of one of United Way's approaches to mapping feeder schools within a specific neighborhood, see the textbox on page 16).

THE SIMPLEST CASE:

The simplest case is one in which your United Way and/or specific partners have previously established two items:

- a) the schools and neighborhoods you are committed to working with, and
- b) trusting relationships with the encompassing district(s).

If this is the situation, the most efficient way to collect the data is by reaching out to your existing contacts to help initiate the process of feeder pattern determination. Follow your contact's guidance as to how to go about this; however, the standard procedure would be to:

- Write a one-pager with bullet points that explains what you need and why, and a letter of conveyance that explains the context.
- Discuss your request with the relevant principals in the receiving high schools, presuming you have a trusting relationship with them. They will informally or formally be able to tell you much of the information you are seeking.
- Secure the approval from top levels of the central school district office (just who this will be depends on the size of the district), resulting in an "OK" for the department of research, evaluation, and assessment (or their equivalent in a small district) to share the data with you.
- Establish the conditions for use of the data, and put these conditions in writing between the district and the lead partner in the United Way/partnership effort.

Also, it is important to remember that this effort to secure data resides within the context of a much longer term, larger effort to affect student graduation rates. If you have not already done so, this would be a good time to establish an advisory council that includes the highest-ranking person possible in the district, or their designee (the superintendent would be the most desirable person). Depending on the size of the district, workgroups may be advisable in addition to the advisory council.

THE SECOND SIMPLEST CASE:

In this scenario, your United Way and partners are relatively certain about which neighborhoods you would like to work with and have a good idea of the schools within them that may be targets for action. However, your United Way and community partners do not have strong, current contacts with the districts or schools. The topmost need in this case is to establish trusting relationships between the district and the United Way and/or its partners.

To get started:

- Convene representatives from your United Way and community partners, and from this group determine who knows the district and schools best, even though no current contacts are established. Ask this individual(s) to open communications with the district. If the district is small, approach the superintendent or associate/assistant superintendent directly; if the district is larger, consider approaching these individuals or beginning with the communications director or information officer, asking them to identify the best person to open conversations. If you are working in a very large district, you may first need to contact an area superintendent, an instructional improvement officer, or other supervisory administrative personnel rather than the superintendent.

In the long run, the best approach is to eventually secure a meeting with the superintendent(s), explain the initiative as presently designed, using the previously-developed one-pager for talking points while also bringing collateral background material. Follow their guidance as to which other personnel you will need to meet with, inform and respond to questions, and then secure agreement as to who is most likely to have the data regarding feeder patterns.

- In parallel, an individual or small committee should meet with the school principals; after trust is built they also may be willing to share what they know at the school level regarding feeder patterns.

If your community of concern encompasses multiple districts, repeat the above process in each district.

- The overall goal is to secure buy-in and support for your efforts so that data collection is simplified and the students are best served. When agreement is forthcoming from all the appropriate personnel, request that a point of contact be designated, and with them establish the communications process and procedure your group should employ to obtain feeder school data. Set up a reasonable timeframe for response, working with the district.
- Establish all other advisory councils, workgroups, and partnership protocols and agreements as needed, beginning with those outlined in “the simplest case” and rounding them out as you move to full partnership and trusting relationships.
- Be prepared for the process of building trusting relationships to take some time; the district will need to reach an understanding with you that your group means no harm nor poor publicity for the district, schools, teachers, and students. Schools and school districts have often been badly buffeted by the public. However, once trusting relationships have been established, you will have successfully set up a strong foundation to accomplish the work ahead.

There are many other different scenarios in which additional steps may need to be taken before the trusting relationships can be established or in which they are relevant. For instance, your United Way and partners may not know which neighborhoods nor high schools you wish to ultimately affect, which are most feasible in terms of your organizational strengths and their deployment, and what is feasible in terms of how education systems and your community are organized.

UNITED WAY OF GREATER ATLANTA — MAPPING FEEDER PATTERNS IN ATLANTA’S PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD

Stemming from an initial Promise Neighborhood planning grant, United Way of Greater Atlanta and Morehouse School of Medicine are partners in a unique, place-based partnership to ratchet up the educational achievement and healthy development of children and youth within a 1.7 mile radius in Southwest Atlanta.

In the spring of 2011, Atlanta Public Schools mapped feeder patterns throughout their school district as part of a rezoning process. Feeder patterns were identified for the entire school district and at every school level, from Pre-K to high school. As part of their Atlanta Promise Neighborhood initiative, the United Way of Greater Atlanta assisted Atlanta Public Schools in identifying which pre-kindergarten programs “fed” into local elementary schools. Having the elementary, middle, and high schools mapped in the Atlanta Promise Neighborhood is giving United Way and their community partners the opportunity to better focus and prioritize their efforts, including:

- Using specific student performance and demographic data for the eight schools that are part of the Atlanta Promise Neighborhood feeder pattern to identify specific issues (suspension rates), student needs (e.g., mentoring and tutoring), and related resources/supports within the community.
- Strategically focusing on the success of middle grades students and school level transitions (as part of United Way Worldwide’s Middle Grades Success and Transitions Challenge) by building on existing efforts to knit together a coalition focused on creating a sense of urgency and awareness; brokering greater collaboration amongst stakeholders/providers that serve students within this cluster of schools; and engaging students within this feeder pattern to better understand how they view their own futures (e.g., Gallop Student Poll on Hope, Engagement, and Well-Being).

PART III

USING FEEDER PATTERNS FOR GREATER IMPACT

The goal of identifying feeder patterns is to get the right resources to the right students at the right times. Once your United Way has feeder patterns and schools identified, there are many critical interventions you can take to use your resources in more targeted and high-impact ways.

One important core strategy for promoting academic success and improving graduation rates is organizing a smart system of wraparound supports for students, especially struggling students. However, the most effective support systems are those that are grounded in actionable data. United Ways that have strong relationships with schools (as discussed above) can partner with these schools to facilitate or fund the development of early warning systems. Early warning systems triangulate three primary indicators – student grades, attendance, and behavior – to help identify students who are “off-track” to graduate high school on time. These early warning indicators can help the school and community partners, including United Ways, identify specific struggling students, which is critical to targeting the right school, family, and community-based supports.

According to the 2012 Building a Grad Nation report, “We know that a small number of schools are responsible for about half of the dropouts, enabling a targeted response. Through early warning systems, we are able to identify which students are most likely to dropout, absent intervention. We also know that evidence-based solutions exist to keep students on track to graduate from high school, ready for college and work. Thus, we are left with the challenge of getting the right supports to the right students at the scale and intensity required.”

Once early warning systems are in place (or if they have already been established), your United Way may also be well-positioned to establish structures to broker, coordinate, and align school-based and out-of-school time supports so that these services complement and leverage one another, while targeting students most in need. This includes connecting feeder schools to community-based organizations, businesses, and individuals that can provide supports to students, and ensuring a comprehensive range of aligned supports that holistically address the specific needs of students – including

afterschool and summer programs that provide academic enrichment and transition supports, mentoring, tutoring, coaching, and college planning, and/or career explorations. One particular best practice is supporting liaisons who are based in schools and whose role is explicitly focused on leveraging community- and school-based supports, working in close collaboration with the school day administration and staff. This helps to alleviate the time-consuming burden that coordinating services and supports often presents to school administrative staff. Finally, your United Way can leverage your affinity groups, corporate partners, volunteers, and staff to create a cadre of caring adults that can be matched with feeder schools and/or individual students to provide the kinds of supports described above.

United Ways can also add value by collaborating with schools and other community-based organizations to establish, strengthen, and/or expand family and parent engagement strategies at feeder schools focused on supporting student success and empowering parents as advocates. This might include:

- Helping to facilitate increased communications with parents so that they have important and relevant information related to school policies and procedures, their individual child’s progress, and requirements for on-time grade level promotion and graduation.
- Working with schools and community partners to plan and convene focus groups and/or community conversations that directly engage parents and youth, so that their needs, challenges, and ideas for improvement are included in school improvement efforts.
- Establishing parent liaisons in schools that can provide peer-focused supports and serve as sources of information for other parents.

For additional information related to core community strategies and approaches to improve high school graduation rates, please refer to United Way Worldwide’s *Charting the Course* document available online at <http://online.unitedway.org/chartingacourse>.

The next section provides an in-depth look at one approach to using early warning data to develop school-based intervention and response systems, based on work being undertaken by *Diplomas Now*, a collaboration between Johns Hopkins Talent Development, City Year, and Communities in Schools.

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEVEL INTERVENTIONS - A CLOSER LOOK AT DIPLOMAS NOW

Diplomas Now uses feeder school information to target certain schools to establish early warning indicators. These early warning indicators can help the school and community partners identify struggling students in the grade levels at which your United Way and partners (usually in the *Diplomas Now* model it is Communities in Schools, City Year, and Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth) are best-resourced to augment school and district efforts, and to most effectively work with students.

Figure 3 – Goals for Interventions



Diplomas Now works with and in the school with its local partners to identify individual students who are struggling based on three indicators of eventual dropout (ABC's):

- (A) Attendance
- (B) Behavior
- (C) Course-passing and grades, grades 6 and higher, and reading at the proficient level, with comprehension, for 3rd graders.



Work at Johns Hopkins University and other leading educational and research institutions reveals that the most effective way to design and deliver interventions is through a team approach. In the *Diplomas Now* model:

- One team exists outside of the school district and schools and is composed of all the partners and agencies that can bring their support and resources to bear in the service of the school.

- The second team exists inside of the school and is composed of administrators, counselors, other student support staff, and teachers.
- The two teams work closely together to align interventions with struggling students, to make “tweaks,” and to monitor outcomes. Strategically placed liaisons can be key to the cross-sector team efforts.

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Attendance	Missing 5–10 days, 3 to 5 percent in progress, e.g., cumulatively	Missing 11–18 days, or 6 to 9 percent in progress e.g., cumulatively	Missing 19 or more days, or more than 10 percent in progress, e.g., cumulatively
Behavior	Poor behavior marks in teachers’ grade books	Poor behavior marks in teachers’ grade books; one or more suspension	Poor behavior marks in teachers’ grade books; two or more suspensions
Course-passing: 3rd grade literacy	Being unable to read with proficiency at the 3rd grade level by the end of 3rd grade		
Course passing	C- in math and/or English	Failing an English course or failing a math course; one or more Ds in other courses	Failing an English course, or failing a math course; one or more failures in other courses

TIERED INTERVENTIONS:

Typically, **Tier 1 interventions** are school-wide efforts to improve school climate and expectations. Chief among these efforts are creating group spirit, incentivizing participation, promoting engaging and relevant instruction, and integrating middle grades and higher students’ goals for their future as young adolescents and adults. College and career goal setting and exposure, with repeated follow-up, are a must. For a good discussion of Tier 1 interventions see *Overcoming the Poverty Challenge to Enable College and Career Readiness for All: The Crucial Role of Student Supports*, available online at: http://new.every1graduatesorg/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/StudentSupports_forScreenViewing.pdf.

Tier 2 interventions are typically required for 10 to 25 percent of the students. Tier 2 interventions take the form of supplementary classes in mathematics and English, which increase

the amount of time students are exposed to the subject, as well as the variety of instructional strategies and materials attuned to students’ learning needs. Tutoring and mentoring are common for students in the Tier 2 category during the school day and in scheduled out-of-school time. Summer bridge programs, providing both acceleration and orientation, are especially useful in transitional years. Lastly, success mentoring has proven particularly effective; in this approach, a second shift of adults continually monitors students’ success and intervenes quickly when students fall off the path to graduation.

Tier 3 interventions are typically required for 5 to 15 percent of students. These are the students who, upon further assessment, may have serious medical, mental, physical, and life-situation stresses in addition to the academic challenges they are experiencing. Such students will require case-management and agency interventions that can be effectively

VALLEY OF THE SUN UNITED WAY – PILOTING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS IN PHOENIX

Given the complexity of the education landscape in Phoenix (35 school districts in the city), Valley of the Sun United Way took a different approach to utilizing feeder patterns to deepen their work in education. Rather than try to map feeder patterns for all of the school districts that serve students in Phoenix, they used school boundary data publicized by the city to identify the K-8 “feeder” schools for each of the high schools in a single district – Phoenix Union High School District (PUHSD). Valley of the Sun United Way then examined performance and demographic data for each of these high schools and their feeder schools. Viewed collectively, knowledge of the feeder patterns and school level data helped VSUW to forge partnerships with specific school districts and focus efforts on specific schools in a feeder pattern (PUHSD) based on a variety of academic and non-academic factors, including performance, socioeconomic indicators, and school enrollment information.

Valley of the Sun United Way partnered with school leaders in the Phoenix Union High School District, Phoenix Union Elementary School district (which “feeds” into these high schools), and Communities in Schools to implement Destination Graduation – a focused initiative to remove systemic and student-level barriers to high school graduation. Destination Graduation Coalition members meet regularly and have implemented a “two-pronged” approach to improving graduation rates: using early warning systems data (i.e., attendance, grades, and behavior) to identify and track the progress of students at greatest risk of dropout, and focusing supports on these students – including academic interventions, resiliency skills-building, and individual case management.

Early successes include:

- Increased communication and data sharing between school districts
- The development and implementation of an early warning system for the PUHSD and PESD school districts
- Plans for expanding Destination Graduation from 2 to 4 schools
- A stronger partnership between Valley of the Sun United Way and Communities in Schools
- Increased visibility of Valley of the Sun United Way as a key stakeholder in education reform efforts

Valley of the Sun United Way is also building on these early wins by deepening their focus on middle grades, as part of United Way Worldwide’s Middle Grades Success and Transitions Challenge. As part of this effort – they plan to:

- Increase community engagement and awareness
- Expand the coalition engaged in Destination Graduation to include additional school leaders
- Strengthen the management and evaluation of integrated supports for students at Destination Graduation sites
- Implement lateral teacher teams between high schools and their feeder schools to facilitate the sharing of student data, ongoing communication, and alignment

mediated by United Way and its partners while working in close collaboration with school and district personnel for the assignment of interventions, constant monitoring and feedback of outcomes on a frequent basis, and one-on-one support on an almost daily basis. Social worker-led clubs and support groups for students with similar challenges have proven effective for both Tier 2 and Tier 3 students, in slightly different formats, supporting role-modeling and forums for solution strategy-oriented conversations.

Early evaluation of the *Diplomas Now* model indicates that identifying students that are falling “off-track” based on the ABC’s (attendance, grades, and behavior), coupled with the creation of tiered interventions and supports, as described above, results in improved student academic performance

PART IV

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

In addition to the school-based and wraparound supports discussed above, there are policy-level implications for this work at the school, community, state, and federal levels. Supportive policies can help to incentivize change, as well to create consistent and systemic approaches within districts and communities that go beyond individual schools. Conversely, removing policy barriers and/or increasing flexibility (e.g., No Child Left Behind waivers) for how states, schools, and districts achieve shared goals related to student progress, while still holding the line on accountability, can be equally powerful catalysts for local-level change.

To help you get a better idea of how your United Way and partners could help inform policy development, we first provide additional policy context and examples of the types of policies that could accelerate your work. Then, we provide tools to guide this work so that you can identify which policies your United Way might want to work to advance.

UNDERSTANDING THE BROADER POLICY CONTEXT

In the past few years the data available and its use to inform intervention have dramatically improved. Now, more than ever, the adults in children's lives can use data to identify which students in which schools need which interventions. Schools, districts, and states have access to a growing amount of research outlining the indicators that a student is likely to drop out of high school. However, significant challenges and gaps remain in data availability, accuracy, and usage. For example, much of the groundwork has been laid that link Pre-K through college data systems, but only 14 states have actually linked these systems. Though a majority of states (47) report that superintendents, state policymakers, state education agency staff, and other stakeholders have access to aggregate-level longitudinal data, only seven report having state policy that ensures teachers and parents have access to their students' individual longitudinal data. Your United Way and partners' work to identify feeder patterns in your community is a critical part of this larger data puzzle.

From the local to the national level, policies can be put in place to strengthen what we know about students' educational

experiences and, more importantly, how we can respond to provide supports in a timely way. Federal policy should incentivize school districts to use feeder pattern data to identify low-performing middle and elementary schools and support students in need of critical interventions.

On the federal level, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was last reauthorized more than 10 years ago. At the time NCLB was signed into law, lawmakers and other stakeholders came together to improve educational outcomes for all children. Today, states and schools need the flexibility to adopt school improvement systems specific to their communities while also maintaining accountability measures to ensure all students succeed. In the absence of reauthorization, more than half of the states have received waivers to NCLB, providing flexibility – and increased influence – to state policy makers.

Because of this context, and the work in your communities, your United Way is likely well positioned to advocate for policy change at the local and state level. However, the amount and focus of advocacy and policy work that are appropriate will vary based on the specific state and local education context, as well as your United Way's capacity, previous experience, relationships, and credibility both locally and within your state.

SPECIFIC POLICY EXAMPLES

United Ways can serve as a backbone to a coalition of partners who agree to identify feeder patterns and set specific goals to ensure effective student supports. United Ways can also work to leverage feeder patterns and other data to track effective targeting of resources and galvanize other sectors of the community (e.g., the business sector) to be more involved in providing targeted academic and wraparound supports to students in need. Your United Way can partner with existing coalitions (or form a coalition that includes your state association and United Ways across your state) to advocate for state policies that improve data sharing and the development of data infrastructure, ratchet up resources to support struggling students, and incorporate holistic and individual student interventions into state accountability frameworks:

DATA-SHARING AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Help to facilitate increased data-sharing between school districts, schools, and community-based organizations, while ensuring student rights of privacy.
- Create user-friendly platforms (e.g., Kentucky) that give students and families greater access to data and give students the ability to input information as part of individualized learning plans (e.g., résumés, accomplishments, activities, career goals and aspirations, etc.).
- Facilitate the development and use of early warning data statewide.
- Provide struggling districts with resources (or expand the flexible use of existing funding streams) to support the development of district-wide early warning and response systems.

SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

- Bolster state resources to support holistic approaches to school improvement. This might include implementing expanding learning time initiatives that lengthen the school day focused on increasing the time that students spend engaged in learning and academic enrichment.
- Expand and increase the flexible use of existing state and federal funding streams to provide student-focused supports and interventions – with a particular emphasis on summer transition supports, mentoring, tutoring, and college and career coaching.

- Bolster and/or expand options for students who will not accumulate sufficient course credit to graduate from high school on time – this includes expanding the use of online/distance learning and piloting initiatives that give students the ability to earn course credit for qualified out-of-school time activities.
- Use increased state flexibility in Title I to increase allocations for parent engagement activities, and require that schools in need of improvement status incorporate meaningful, actionable parent and family engagement activities into their school improvement plans.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY

- Include in-state accountability framework measures that require school and districts to document how they are providing student supports and engaging families in ways that are specifically tied to areas of needed growth and improvement.
- Include accountability measures that allow districts and schools to document progress in putting in place systemic improvements focused on improving student success – e.g., data platforms, data-sharing agreements, holistic and tiered student intervention systems, collaboration with community-based partners, etc.

CONCLUSION

SUSTAINING YOUR PROGRESS

Identifying and keeping track of your school feeder patterns is an ongoing activity as new schools are built, new district lines drawn, and other school options (such as charter schools) become available in your community. You and your partners will need to determine how often to update the feeder pattern information and work with the school system to establish and ensure an ongoing relationship and continuous communication.

It is also important that one partner, whether it be the United Way or someone else, agrees to hold this information on behalf of the group and update it as necessary. Have a discussion with the school leadership (the district superintendent, for instance) about where this information should be housed, who should have access to it, and what should be shared

with the general public. Also, because feeder patterns change frequently, assess whether there is value to having this information available publicly. It may serve its purpose just as well by being accessed on a need-to-know basis.

Knowing which children are feeding into which schools will continue to be helpful information as your partnerships build upon existing initiatives and establish new ones. Keep relationships with the school system strong, the feeder and school/student characteristic data current, and apply appropriate and school-supported interventions and preventions where they will be valued the most.

APPENDIX A

UNDERSTANDING AND CALCULATING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

YOUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

It should be simple to determine the graduation rate from a high school. Students enter in 9th grade typically, sometimes in 10th, and they do or do not leave at the end of 12th grade with a diploma in hand. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Graduation rate calculations have been inaccurate for many years because the following situations are found in almost all but the highest-performing schools:

- A 9th or 10th grade is often composed of first-time 9th or 10th graders, as well as first- or second-time repeaters.
- A 12th grade may include students who have repeated multiple times.
- Diploma recipients may include those who took four years to finish high school with good grades in required courses and received the state's regular diploma. Diploma recipients will also include those who did the same after summer school; those who may or may not have had to fulfill the same required course expectations, and/or received non-regular diplomas, of which some states have had many forms; and those students who took five, six, and seven years to complete whatever it is that they completed.
- In some states, graduation rates were traditionally calculated by taking the number of 12th graders present at the beginning of 12th grade and dividing by the number of those who received a diploma at the end of the year. In such states, quite evidently, all the students who began in 9th grade and never made it to 12th grade – in some schools as many as 30, 40, and 50 percent – were simply ignored.

The net result is that graduation rates reported by some states (and therefore repeated in their district and school report cards and on associated websites) gave misleading results which were often too high. Graduation rates and proxy graduation rates calculated by the federal government (i.e., the averaged freshman graduation rate [AFGR]) and by other experts in the field (for instance, the promoting power measure used as an interim measure at Johns Hopkins University, the cumulative promotion index used by Editorial Projects in Education, and the Urban Institute's methodology) were, in fact, estimates. And rates were often reported in odd ways that didn't really equal dropout rates. For further discussion of dropout rates, see below.

However, these rough estimates and proxy rates are being eliminated and replaced with a much better method and more accurate graduation rate called the four-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). What is important to know is that in the year your state begins to adopt and publish the ACGR, there most likely will be a break in the trend line of past graduation rates and the start of a new one due to the new way of calculating the rate.

SOUND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

As of November 30, 2012, 46 states and the District of Columbia had released state-level high school graduation rates, using the Average Cohort Graduation Rate for 2010-11. One state, North Carolina, has released it for 2012. Thirty of these states will have two years of trend data since they also used this method in 2010, and a few already have ACGR graduation trend data that goes back as far as six or seven years.

Use of the ACGR is a landmark change in the Education landscape, as it is the first time ever that states, districts, and schools are being required to consistently report on graduation rates using a formula that takes into account progress over time.

CALCULATING THE AVERAGE COHORT GRADUATION RATE:

Using the current school year as an example, the following equation is an example of how the ACGR graduation rate would be calculated:

Number of cohort members who earned a high school diploma by
the end of 2012-2013 school year

Number of first-time 9th graders starting in fall 2009 (original
cohort)

+

student transfers in/- student who leave the school (transfer, emigrate, die, etc.) in the preceding school years (2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13)

HOW IT WORKS

- Each student in a state receives an individual student identifier.
- With individual student identifiers and ACGR, it is possible to examine precisely not only how many but which students enter high school at a certain time, how many and which students are promoted each year, and how many and which graduate on time, with a regular state diploma.
- Individual student identifiers and much more precise documentation and reporting requirements enable determination of who and how many students transfer in and out of schools over time, where they go (if in-state), and if they do not obtain a regular high school diploma but instead a non-equivalent degree.

LOCATING GRADUATION RATES CALCULATED USING ACGR

In March 2013, the U.S. Department of Education released high school graduation rates for individual schools using the ACGR formula for the 2010-11 academic year. In addition, school district high school graduation rates can now be accessed online.

- To view state-level high school graduation rates, check your state department of education's website first. Another source of state-level high school graduation rates is the U.S. Department of Education's website, ED Data Express: <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/>. In addition to graduation rates, each state snapshot includes state-level student demographic data and information on participation in federal programs, including Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, ESEA Flexibility Waivers, and Title I.
- To view school district graduation rates, go to <http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/>. This interactive mapping tool, developed by Education Week's Editorial Projects in Education, uses raw data from the Common Core of Data maintained by the U.S. Department of Education to calculate school district graduation rates. The mapping tool is searchable by county name, zip code, or school district name. It also contains state high school graduation rates.
- To view individual school graduation rates, go to <https://explore.data.gov/Education/Adjusted-Cohort-Graduation-Rates-at-the-school-lev/m5pw-2ea9>. This large database, maintained by the federal government, is designed to access key datasets. The database is also searchable by individual school name.
- If you are in a state in which school-level ACGR is not yet released, contact your state department of education and see if they can assist you. State directors of information/communication/media can frequently direct outsiders to appropriate people within the state. Some districts may also be able to help.

LOCATING SCHOOL-LEVEL GRADUATION RATES OTHER THAN ACGR

If yours is a state in which school-by-school ACGR has not yet been released for 2011, and if the state department of education cannot yet direct you to school-level data, you will have to use other strategies to locate a graduation rate. Be mindful that the rate may not be consistent with those touted in other states, nor will it necessarily be comparable across districts within the same state, and that it may count students other than four-year on-time graduates.

UNDERSTANDING DROPOUT RATES

Dropout rates are calculated and publicly communicated in two ways: the event dropout rate and the status dropout rate. Understanding the differences between these two definitions and how they are derived is important to your efforts to gauge the scope of the crisis in your community, as well as to communicate about and effectively address the challenge.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES):

- The **event dropout rate** is an estimate of the percentage of students that left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the subsequent year without earning a high school diploma or GED. The event dropout rate is best used to calculate dropout within a given time period, typically a particular school year.
- The **status dropout rate** is an estimate of the percentage of individuals within a specific age range who are not currently in high school and have not earned a high school diploma or GED. The status dropout rate is the best statistic to use to estimate the total number of people in the U.S. lacking a high school credential (diploma or GED) within a given age range. However, the status dropout rate can't be used to make any statement about the condition of education/schools in the U.S. because it includes individuals not born and educated in the U.S. It also leaves out those institutionalized or incarcerated.

For additional information on calculating and using dropout data, please see National Center for Education Statistics. 2011. *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2009*. Available online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012006.pdf>.

APPENDIX B

ADJUSTED COHORT GRADUATION RATE (ACGR) AVAILABILITY, BY STATE, DISTRICT, AND SCHOOL (2010-2011)

State	Earliest ACGR	2010 ACGR (State-Level)	2011 ACGR (State-Level)	2010 ACGR (District-Level)	2011 ACGR (District-Level)	2010 ACGR (School-Level)	2011 ACGR (School-Level)
Alabama	2009	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Alaska	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes±	No	Yes±
Arizona	2003	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Arkansas	2009	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±
California	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes±	Yes	Yes
Colorado	2007	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Connecticut	2009	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Delaware	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±
District of Columbia	2011	No	Yes	No	N/A	No	Yes
Florida	2003	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Georgia ⁱ	2009	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Hawaii	2010	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes±	Yes±
Idaho ⁱⁱ	N/A	No	No	No	No	No	No
Illinois	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes±	No	Yes±
Indiana	2009	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iowa	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kansas	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±
Kentucky ⁱⁱⁱ	N/A	No	No	No	No	No	No
Louisiana	2006	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maine	2009	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maryland	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Massachusetts	2006	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michigan	2007	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minnesota	2003	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mississippi	2003	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Missouri	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Montana	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Nebraska	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
New Hampshire	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
New Mexico	2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

State	Earliest ACGR	2010 ACGR (State-Level)	2011 ACGR (State-Level)	2010 ACGR (District-Level)	2011 ACGR (District-Level)	2010 ACGR (School-Level)	2011 ACGR (School-Level)
New York	2006	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Carolina	2006	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	2006	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes	No	Yes
Ohio	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes	Yes±	Yes
Oklahoma ^{iv}	N/A	No	No	No	No	No	No
Oregon	2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania	2010	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Rhode Island	2007	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	2011	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±	Yes±
South Dakota	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes±	No	Yes±
Tennessee	2011	No	Yes	No	Yes±	No	Yes±
Texas	2003	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Utah	2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vermont	2006	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes±	Yes	Yes
Virginia	2011	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Washington ^v	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes±	Yes	Yes±	Yes
West Virginia	2009	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wisconsin	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wyoming	2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

± Data is only available in district/school report cards. It is not readily accessible in one combined file.

ⁱ Georgia's 2009 and 2010 rates are estimates. They did not make available 2009 or 2010 district or school level data.

ⁱⁱ Idaho received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education that excuses them from reporting ACGR. They expect to report ACGR beginning with the 2013-14 school year.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kentucky received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education that excuses them from reporting ACGR. They expect to report ACGR beginning with the 2012-13 school year.

^{iv} Oklahoma requested a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education that would excuse them from reporting ACGR. They expect to report ACGR beginning with the 2012-13 school year.

^v Washington reported its 2010 state-level ACGR for informational purposes only. They did not make available 2010 district or school-level data.

Source: Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic. Annual Update: February 2013. (Note: ACGR data is also available on every state department of education's website and on websites included above in Appendix A.)

APPENDIX C

MAPPING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

To better align your community's work, it is useful to look for the “moving trains” that have already taken on an issue, such as early childhood education, AIDS education, literacy, child abuse, or even economic development or community safety. Moving trains are individuals, organizations, or initiatives with the capacity, motivation, and resources to create change. The charts in this Appendix can also be used to map existing structures, such as coalitions, networks, intermediaries, or leadership groups.

DIRECTIONS:

Think of two or three major moving trains in your community. Write them in the numbered boxes across the top of the chart below (starting with one you are actively engaged in). Quickly check off what you know about their focus on this page. On the next page, check off what you know about their primary stakeholders and strategies. This tool will help you create a database of the initiatives in your community and help you identify strategic ways to link them.

MAPPING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

DESCRIPTORS		MOVING TRAINS		
		1.	2.	3.
Age Groups	Early Childhood			
	Elementary School			
	Middle School			
	High School			
	Young Adults			
Supports	Caring Adults			
	Safe Places			
	Healthy Starts & Supports			
	Effective Education			
	Opportunities to Help Others			
Settings	Families			
	Youth Organizations			
	Schools/Colleges			
	Workplaces			
	Faith-Based Organizations			
	Community Places			
	Deep End Systems (e.g., Juvenile Justice)			

MAPPING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

DESCRIPTORS		MOVING TRAINS		
		1.	2.	3.
Goals	Protection/Problem-Reduction			
	Prevention			
	Preparation/Development			
	Participation/Leadership			
Outcomes	Learning			
	Working			
	Thriving			
	Connecting			
	Contributing/Leading			
Times	During School			
	Weekends			
	Before/After School			
	Summers			
	Evenings			
	Holidays			
Professional Roles	Public Policy Makers			
	Media/Communications/ Public Opinion			
	Researchers			
	Advocates/Organizers			
	Practitioners			
	Philanthropists/Funders			
	Labor			
	Business			
Community	Children & Youth			
	Families			
	Communities			
	Cultural Groups			

MAPPING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

DESCRIPTORS		MOVING TRAINS		
		1.	2.	3.
Services & Systems	Early Care & Development			
	After-School			
	Youth-Serving Organizations			
	Libraries & Museums			
	Health Care			
	Youth Employment			
	Civil Rights			
	Community Service			
	K-12 Education			
	Higher Education			
	Faith-Based Communities			
	Prevention Programs			
	Parks & Recreation			
	Child Welfare			
	Juvenile Justice			
Other (write in your own)				
Improving Systems	Program/Services Coordination			
	Workforce Strengthening			
	Capacity Building & Technical Assistance			
	Improving Quality			
	Performance Measurement/ Evaluation			

MAPPING COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

DESCRIPTORS		MOVING TRAINS		
		1.	2.	3.
Aligning Policies & Resources	Needs/Assets Inventories			
	Coordinating Policies & Practices			
	Establishing Funding Priorities			
	Exploring Funding Alternatives			
	Assessing, Changing & Creating Policies			
Increasing Demand	Constituency Building			
	Public Awareness/Education			
	Opinion Polling			
	Collecting, Using & Sharing Data			
	Public Outreach			
	Advocacy & Organizing			
Engaging Youth & Families	Family Involvement			
	Skill/Leadership Development			
	Volunteer Service			
	Governance/Organizing/Advocacy			
	Philanthropy			
	Entrepreneurism			



COMMUNITY MAPPING TOOL
DEVELOPED BY THE FORUM FOR
YOUTH INVESTMENT

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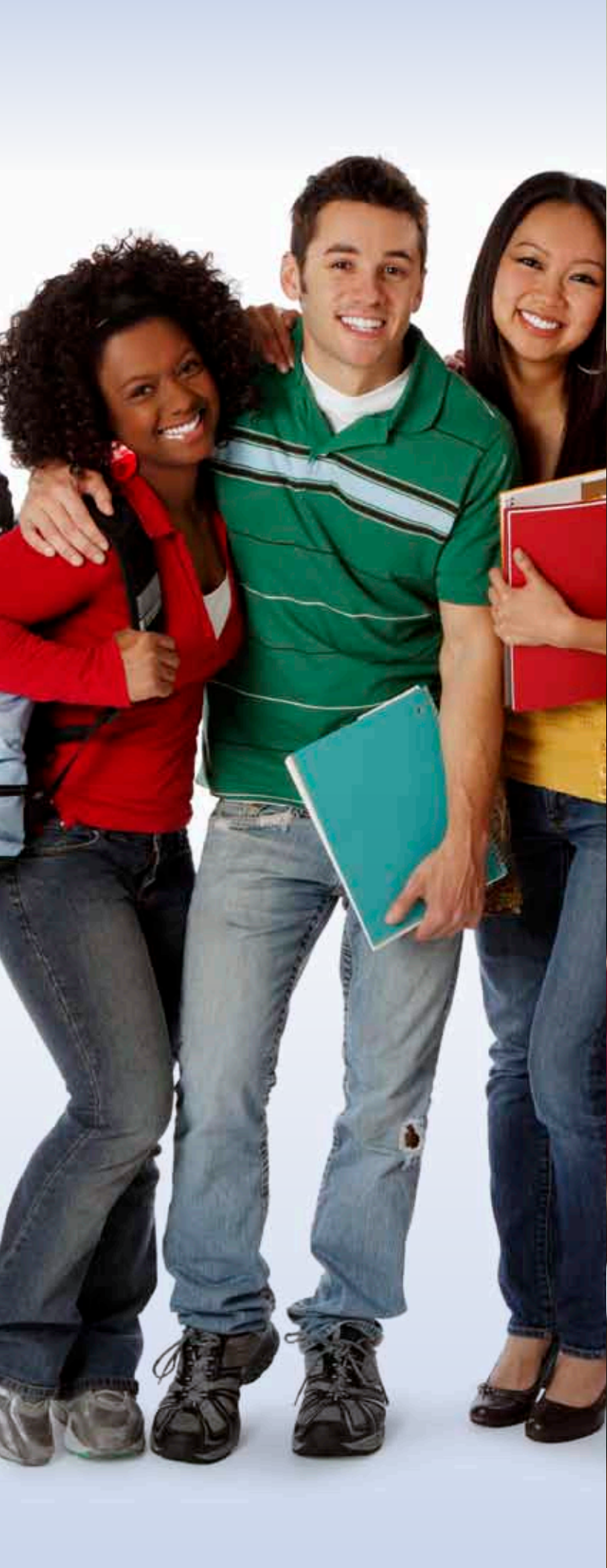


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