

SUPPORTING YOUTH TRANSITIONS



YMCA

WDRL

A research brief about how youth can be supported to make a smooth transition from high school and into the workforce or college.

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Summary of Key Findings



01 Social Capital

Youth can foster social capital skills and build important social connections and relationships.

02 Cultural Capital

Youth can enhance their knowledge and access opportunities, resources, supports, that exist in the workplace or higher education

03 Critical Consciousness

Youth can develop an awareness of the existing social hierarchies, power structures, privileges, and systems of oppression.

04 Strategies

Youth can enhance their social capital, cultural capital, and critical consciousness by engaging in strategies with trusted adults and youth programming.

Research Issue



Overview

Recent literature has discussed that youth whose family is at or below the federal poverty line and are from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds could benefit from extra support to successfully transition from high school into higher education or the workforce. Specifically, three recurring themes arose on how to support this population of youth which include social capital, cultural capital, and critical consciousness. There are a variety of strategies that can be used to support this population of youth. Specific strategies include mentoring, career orientation mentorships, work-based learning, dual enrollment, and summer transition programs. Additionally, the literature also stated that the success of youth and youth programming is not necessarily linked to a specific intervention method or mode. Youth and youth programming is found to be successful when youth perceive their environment as safe and fair and develop meaningful relationships with adults.



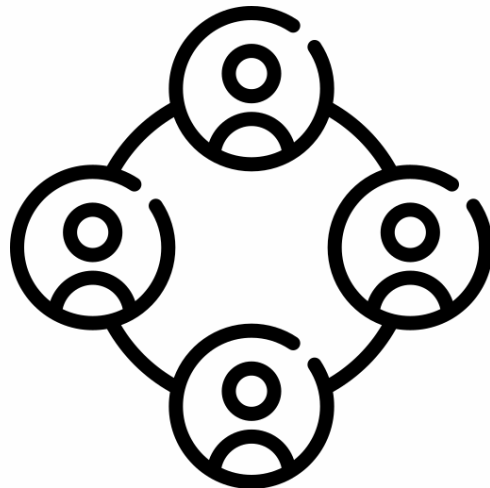
Social Capital

The first major theme for youth to make a successful transition from high school and into the workforce or college is to foster their social capital. Youth who can foster social capital skills will build important social connections and relationships. Social connections and relationships are critical because they can provide the necessary emotional support, access to information and opportunities, peer feedback, a sense of belonging, and reinforcement of their identity to make a successful transition. Additionally, students report that their peer networks are important sources of social support and knowledge sharing. When youth build their social capital, their critical consciousness and cultural capital will also improve.



Cultural Capital

The second major theme to ensure youth make a successful transition from high school and into the workforce or college is to develop their cultural capital. Cultural capital is when youth enhance their knowledge and access to pre-existing opportunities, resources, supports, and expectations that exist in the workplace or higher education. Critical to the development of cultural capital are positive relationships with adults. Forming positive relationships with adults can empower youth to ask for help from adults when they need it to maximize the opportunities that exist to support them. Additionally, forming these positive relationships with adults can enhance youth's understanding of the unwritten rules of a new environment, such as a new workplace or higher education. New environments can be challenging to navigate however when youth have meaningful relationships with adults, decoding these new environments could be easier for youth to navigate and advocate for themselves more effectively.



Critical Consciousness

The third major theme to foster a successful transition from high school to the workforce or college is to develop a good sense of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is when youth have an awareness of the existing social hierarchies, power structures, privileges, and systems of oppression. Mentors and other trusted adults who currently work in these systems or are aware of their nuances can inform youth about the benefits and challenges that come along with participation in these systems. When youth develop a good sense of critical consciousness, they can be empowered to decode the college or workforce environment and navigate situations of discrimination. Critical consciousness can also empower mentors, advisors, and youth programs to recognize and advocate against structural inequalities. Critical consciousness can help students reflect on their own identities and fit within an organization to advocate for their needs and sustain their involvement in their new job or institution of higher education.



Summary of Strategies



01 Mentoring

Near-peer mentors can provide emotional support and serve as cultural guides for high school students more effectively than adults who have been out of college for some time

02 Career Orientation

Career orientation strategies can foster critical consciousness and help youth think more critically about educational and work opportunities, vocational interests, financial needs, life-style, and workplace contexts.

03 Dual Enrollment

Research shows that dual enrollment programs have a positive impact on school-to-college transition for students, particularly when combined with mentoring and counseling services.

04 Work-Based Learning

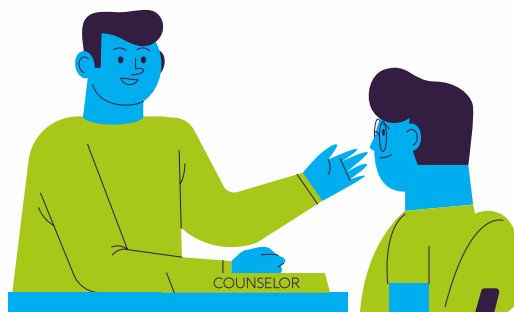
Research shows that WBL supports students with minority identities to develop skills in self-regulation, perseverance, self-reflection, and other skills that are important for career decision-making and employability.

05 Summer Transition Programs

Summer transition programs offer newly admitted college students social emotional support as well as support with practical and financial barriers. During summer transition programs, mentors and peers can support one another to prepare for the transition into college.

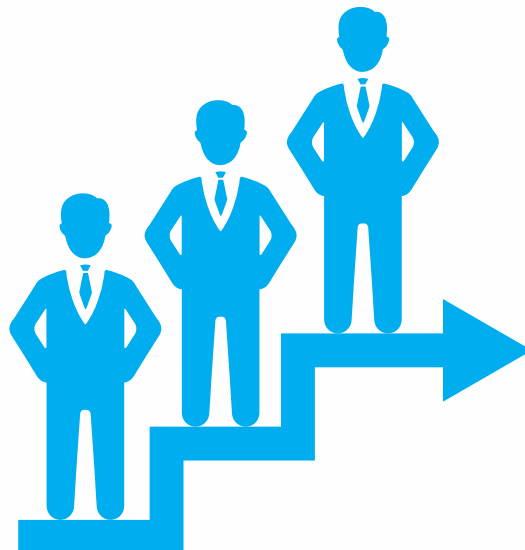
Mentoring

Mentoring promotes socioemotional and cognitive development to shape youth's identity. Adults can successfully mentor youth by modeling, sharing knowledge, and building meaningful and supportive relationships to promote positive help-seeking experiences and cultivate self-worth. The two types of mentoring that youth can engage in are natural mentoring and near-peer mentoring. Natural mentoring refers to the organic connections that youth make within their existing social networks. Research shows that mentors who have a higher level of education and are school based (i.e., teachers, counselors, etc.), positively impact educational expectations and attainment, particularly for low-income and underrepresented youth groups. Near-peer mentoring refers to the active advising from new college students with similar backgrounds. Near-peer mentors can provide emotional support and serve as cultural guides for high school students more effectively than adults who have been out of college for some time. Near-peer mentors could promote college and career exploration, incentivize students to join dual-enrollment programs and work-based learning opportunities, provide support during the college application process, provide financial literacy, increase engagement during the summer to mitigate summer melt, promote peer networking, and offer support during the first year after the transition from high school.



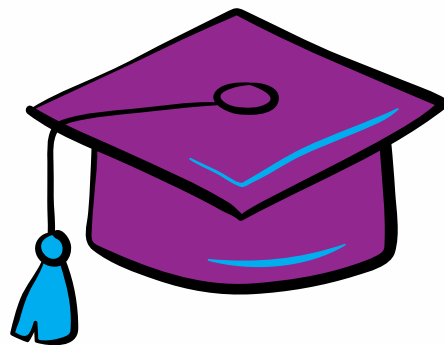
Career Orientation

Students who have experienced adversities in high school may not consider college and certain career paths as an option. Therefore, it is important to encourage students to envision diverse post-secondary education and career opportunities. For example, the development of a "college-bounded" identity and social or cultural supports are critical for students that want to transition to college. The construction of a "college-bounded" identity happens through social interactions, relationships, and group membership affiliation. Therefore, career orientation intervention can help youth to explore experiential opportunities, including dual enrollment and work-based learning experiences. Career orientation strategies can foster critical consciousness and help youth think more critically about educational and work opportunities, vocational interests, financial needs, life-style, and workplace contexts. Research shows these approaches may help students access decent and meaningful work (i.e., work that satisfies survival, self-determination and social connection needs).



Dual Enrollment

For students who choose to attend college after high school, dual enrollment programs allow high school students to enroll in courses that provide college credits. Research shows that these programs have a positive impact on high school-to-college transition for students, particularly when combined with mentoring and counseling services. Dual enrollment programs can help high school students make the transition and more closely identify with the college-student identity. Additionally, dual enrollment experiences that include adults who can provide guidance and serve as role models can help youth to develop their social and cultural capital. Additionally, when students engage in dual enrollment courses at colleges when they are in high school, the transition from high school into college rate increases because it enables students to understand college structure and expectations before the full transition. Nevertheless, barriers exist for students who experience adversities in high school when it comes to accessing dual enrollment programs (i.e., eligibility criteria, lack of information, not feeling able to succeed). To mitigate these barriers, community organizations and schools could partner with secondary education institutions to design alternative access for students experiencing adversities and develop a plan to provide long-term support through mentoring and counseling.



Work - Based Learning

For students who choose to enter the workforce after high school, work-based learning (WBL) programs offer the opportunity for students to complete meaningful job tasks while in high school to facilitate the transition into the workforce while improving their social mobility. Research shows that WBL supports students with minority identities to develop skills in self-regulation, perseverance, self-reflection, and other skills that are important for career decision-making and employability. In one study, a student who participated in a WBL program described the "real-world learning experiences in the workplace, the presence of caring adults at school and work (as well as in their families), and a space in the school curriculum to reflect on and give meaning to their work experiences contributed to their perceived non-cognitive strengths and preparation for the future" (Kenny et al., 2016, p.9). Community organizations could partner with businesses to design programs that support students to enter and advance in a field, develop skills, acquire knowledge, reward students for their hard work, encourage students to pursue higher education, and simultaneously support their long-term goals.



Summer Transition Programs

For students who plan to attend college after high school, summer transition programs offer newly admitted college students social emotional support as well as support with practical and financial barriers (i.e., admission process, federal student loans, etc.). During summer transition programs, mentors and peers can support one another to prepare for the transition into college. Additionally, summer transition programs can also be useful to combat the “summer melt” phenomenon, which is when students start to lose the skills and motivation they had in between the end of high school and their first year of college during their summer vacation. Youth who receive consistent mentoring from adult mentoring and near-peer mentoring year-round have shown to be more engaged and motivated about their transition plans into college.



Conclusion

It is critical youth successfully transition from high school and into the workforce or college

In this report are key findings and strategies on how to support youth successfully transition from high school and into the workforce or higher education. This report should be used by practitioners, families, students, youth mentors, policy makers, and anyone else who cares about youth to make informed decisions regarding the future of our youth and programs that support them.



For a complete list of references that informed this brief, scan this QR code

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