

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been prepared as part of a contract awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to conduct an Evaluation of the School-to-Work Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Demonstration and Job Corps Model Centers. The demonstration programs and Model Centers are alike in attempting to incorporate and adapt school-to-work principles in their services to out-of-school youth. This summary reflects the findings reported in the Final Report for the component of the study focused on the OSY Demonstration; as such, it presents a discussion of the design and implementation of the demonstration projects, including their objectives and strategies. A companion report addresses similar issues with respect to the Job Corps Model Centers.

BACKGROUND

School-to-work (STW) represents a potentially important improvement in the nation's efforts to fully prepare its young people for successful and productive careers. By teaching academic skills in a career context using active learning methods, youth may become more meaningfully engaged in the process of learning, develop a broader array of SCANS skills and competencies, and see how the skills they are acquiring can be applied. Moreover, including work-based activities makes it possible for them to learn skills in authentic, real-world settings, while familiarizing them with the demands and rigors of the work world. Based on this promise, STW partnerships around the nation have been responding to the challenges and opportunities afforded by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act by revamping curricula and pedagogy.

Typically, the focal point for these efforts has been the secondary school. As a consequence, too often high school dropouts and recent graduates with weak skills, who are disconnected from the traditional academic environment, are left out of these emerging systems. This omission means that our most vulnerable young adults, who might most benefit from the learning principles embedded in school-to-work, lack access to the opportunities the Act has created. The OSY STW Demonstration funded by the Department of Labor represents an effort to identify effective practices in reaching this population.

DOL'S CRITERIA FOR AWARDING DEMONSTRATION GRANT FUNDS

In the summer of 1997, DOL issued a grant announcement encouraging applications for competitive grants for the OSY Demonstration Projects. In total,

eleven grants were awarded, ranging in amounts from \$100,000 to \$140,000. The grants were to commence in October of 1997, and the period of performance was expected to last for 15 months; the expected completion of the grant period was thus to be the end of calendar year 1998. However, most grantees requested extensions, which pushed the period during which they received funding to the middle of 1999.

Because these were to be demonstration projects, DOL emphasized that it was encouraging applications from a variety of programs representing diverse approaches to serving the out-of-school youth population. However, the grant announcement also made clear that applications would only be considered from established employment and education providers and ones that had already incorporated in their existing programs at least some design elements that were consistent with school-to-work. To this degree, the grant funds were expected to be used to enable the selected providers to build on and enhance existing design elements within a school-to-work framework. Moreover, the grantees were expected to demonstrate a clear connection with existing federally-funded school-to-work systems.

To clarify its expectations, DOL spelled out in the grant announcement a number of “threshold criteria,” which it took as constituting key features of well-developed school-to-work systems. These criteria related to the formation of partnerships, the design of programmatic components, and the measurement and self-assessment of progress. Bidders were expected to demonstrate conformance to a majority of these principles at the time they submitted their grant request and explain in their proposals how they would use their grant funds to advance these criteria still further. Among these criteria are stipulations that programs should:

- Exhibit strong community-wide partnership committed to school-to-work.
- Forge collaborative agreements among a variety of institutions serving out-of-school youth.
- Involve employers in planning and governance and in providing a range of services for youth.
- Have in place effective strategies for recruiting, retaining, and serving out-of-school youth.
- Include a system of integrated school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities.
- Organize learning around an appropriate system of career pathways that provides students with exposure to all aspects of an industry.

- Offer work-based learning activities that provide a variety of high quality work experiences and include adult work site mentors.
- Offer school-based learning activities that show a commitment to high academic standards and teach workplace basics in an applied context integrated with academic learning.
- Include professional development for worksite and classroom-based staff.
- Specify goals and objectives and expected outcomes for their programs, as well as a system to implement continuous improvement.

These threshold criteria focused the evaluation effort and served as a yardstick against which the success of the demonstration programs was judged.

DATA COLLECTION AS PART OF THE DEMONSTRATION EVALUATION

The evaluation consisted of a process study designed to identify challenges and strategies in adapting the principles and objectives of school-to-work to programs serving out-of-school youth. As part of the data collection associated with the study, research team members visited each grantee twice, with a two-day site visit each time. The first wave of these visits occurred through the summer and fall of 1998, and the return site visits occurred during the spring of 1999. During these site visits, field researchers conducted discussions with key grantee administrators and planners, case managers, classroom instructors, and worksite supervisors. They also conducted a focus group with participants, observed class-based and work-based instructional activities, and reviewed lesson plans, course outlines, and progress reports. Additional data collection conducted as part of this study included regular telephone reconnaissance with key respondents at the demonstration sites, to learn about the projects' evolution during the interval between site visits.

GRANTEES FUNDED UNDER THE STW/OSY DEMONSTRATION

The eleven grantees selected for funding by DOL varied enormously with respect to their existing designs and planned program improvements. For example, they began the demonstration from very different starting points—operating in different contexts with different organizational features, with different partnerships already in place, having different service emphases, etc. Some grantees were operating discrete, small-scale programs serving small numbers of participants (a dozen or two) each year; others were operating programs as part of huge organizations serving hundreds or thousands of young people. They also tried to accomplish very different things during the grant period, with some trying to enhance a school-based curriculum, others adding a work-

based learning component or mentorships, others providing for staff development, and so on. Not surprisingly, therefore, their experiences during the grant period unfolded very differently. Nonetheless, their experiences reveal important lessons about the difficulties of implementing systemic reform for programs serving out-of-school youth and suggest promising approaches and practices.

THE IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE

The grantees funded under the OSY Demonstration were a mixed bag from the outset. Some were adult or alternative high schools, with a clear focus on helping young people achieve their high school diploma or GED in a classroom setting. Other grantees were based on the YouthBuild model, which alternates periods of time in classroom academic, vocational, and work readiness skills training, with time in work-based learning at a construction site, where youth learn an array of skills while building or refurbishing housing for low-income individuals. A third group of grantees had their genesis as workforce development programs, often with a strong connection to JTPA and a focus on employability development.

Although this categorization clearly demarcates important differences, the groups were themselves internally heterogeneous in a way that makes generalizations about them difficult. Nonetheless, at the risk of glossing over important nuances of individual programs, the very different starting points defined by the groups generally positioned the programs very differently with respect to the threshold criteria and gave rise to unique implementation challenges. Thus, the nature of the lead agency that secured the demonstration grant made an important difference in defining pre-existing strengths and weaknesses and consequent action strategies for change. For example, the alternative and adult high schools typically had broad experience in providing academic instruction to young people in a classroom setting on an ongoing basis. Most were large institutions serving large numbers of participants, and they typically adhered to a regular school semester as the schedule for learning. However, in a concession to the greater flexibility that out-of-school youth require, enrollees could typically vary their course load or opt for morning or afternoon sessions to meet their other obligations.

In keeping with their status as alternative high schools, grantees in this group had prior experience in using classroom teaching methods that departed from the traditional high school in important ways (e.g., more flexible scheduling, more individualized attention, etc.), but not always in conformance with school-to-work. For example, some showed prior experience with using project-based learning and integrated

curricula, but others did not. Similarly, although most do make vocational course offerings available, some have little experience with organizing academic classroom learning around career pathways. With one exception, they also had little prior experience with using work-based learning. In fact, all grantees in this category identified the development or expansion of work-based opportunities as among their goals for the grant period. As well, they mentioned in their grant applications wanting to build stronger partnerships, expand the use of career pathways, and revamp their class curriculum to make better use of contextual learning.

In contrast to them, the two grantees based on the YouthBuild model had always used work-based learning as a fundamental part of their teaching strategy. Moreover, the close connection with a single career cluster makes the integration of all learning around a career pathway very feasible for them. However, precisely because of this close connection, students have limited options with respect to choosing a career pathway to guide their learning and even have limited exposure to different career options, facts that both grantees in this category were attempting to address with their grant funding.

The final group of grantees displayed a clear emphasis on developing youths' work readiness skills, and thus made career counseling, life skills training, pre-employment work maturity, and the like, a prominent feature of their service offerings. They also displayed a strong case management culture and tended to have extensive linkages in place with community service organizations to handle youths' needs for supportive services. Given their relative lack of special expertise in teaching academic skills, they typically used off-the-shelf instructional packages to prepare youth for passing the GED test. Three of the four grantees in this group made little use of work-based learning. The fourth, by contrast, arranged for all youth to undertake paid employment while enrolled, but it was typically not well integrated with classroom activities and was viewed more as a vehicle for giving youth an introduction to the work world rather than as a means for imparting a range of skills. Grantees in this group expressed a range of goals as part of their grant plans, including expanding work-based learning opportunities and revamping classroom curricula to make more systematic use of integrated skills instruction.

Partnerships and Partnership Formation

Grantees in all three of these categories typically had strong community-wide partnerships in place on which they were trying to build. These partners included

secondary schools and school districts, postsecondary institutions, local governments, community service agencies, and employers or employer groups. Members of the partnerships contributed substantial in-kind or financial resources that enabled grantees to greatly expand the range of services they could offer, or they provided specific services to support the grantees' efforts.

Although these contributions were always important, partners did not always share a common understanding of school-to-work principles, nor did they always grasp the role they were expected to play as part of a broader system. Where these elements were present, a much stronger partnership developed in support of school-to-work system development. For example, work-based learning opportunities were more likely to be learning rich and integrated with classroom activities when employers fully understood the grantees' learning objectives and participated from the outset in the design of the school-to-work service strategy.

Noticeably absent as strong partners were existing STW systems, which most grantees found paid little attention to meeting the needs of out-of-school youth and lacked a good sense of how to go about doing so. Thus, grantees typically served as a resource and lent their expertise to existing STW systems, rather than the other way around. Their general inability to merge their efforts into local STW partnerships is troubling, because it suggests that emerging local systems are paying little attention to the problems of serving out-of-school youth.

Recruitment and Counseling

Drawing on referrals from schools or from other sources, most grantees could count on a steady stream of applicants; this was especially true for alternative or adult high schools, which had stronger referral linkages with existing school systems. Given a pool of applicants from which to draw, many grantees established a screening mechanism to ensure that those enrolled met at least minimal levels of basic skills and expressed a modicum of motivation and commitment. But, despite whatever screening did occur, participants could surely be considered to be hard-to-serve, with most showing evidence of multiple barriers to success, including problems with substance abuse, low self-esteem, very poor academic skills, and a lack of understanding of the demands of the work world, all of which gave rise to myriad and complex service needs.

If there was one common strength across OSY demonstration grantees, it was their appreciation and understanding of these needs. Thus, all grantees had strong case management systems in place and developed supportive and nurturing relationships between adults and the young people being served. Indeed, participants identified these caring relationships as among the features of the programs that they valued the most. All programs also made provisions to meet youths' needs for an array of supportive services, including counseling, transportation assistance, health screenings, and the like. In these respects, the programs we studied demonstrated conformance to sound youth development principles.

School-Based Learning

With respect to school-based learning, all programs but one provided basic skills instruction and were geared towards preparing youth for the high school diploma or GED, and all offered training in workplace basics; eight offered training in vocational skills, either by referral or directly, in some cases as an optional activity.

Programs found that there was a tension between developing innovative, integrated instructional strategies while still gearing students for meeting the requirements of the GED or, to a lesser extent, the high school diploma. For example, to prepare youth for passing the GED in as short a time as possible, preparation courses were often focused on developing competency in the discrete reading, math, and science skills covered by the test. The emphasis on this "quick credential" does not encourage the modification of existing instructional strategies and creates a very real challenge to providing opportunities for students to think critically, problem-solve, and apply learning in context. At least, program administrators deemed it too risky to depart very far from traditional GED instructional approaches, in the absence of knowing about sound, well-tested alternatives. As a consequence, many programs found themselves falling back on off-the-shelf instructional packages, including computer-aided instruction. Similarly, for attaining the high school diploma, each out-of-school youth needed a unique set of course credits required for graduation; i.e., the number and types of courses that each student needed typically varied. This diversity created a very real challenge in designing innovative course materials that integrated learning across multiple subject areas. Finally, for both GED and high school diploma programs, the open-entry/open-exit nature of instruction, which many of them adopted, meant that different youth were participating in training for potentially greatly varying

lengths of time, which further made it difficult to plan coherent and cohesive programs of study.

As a consequence of these constraints, we found that some programs struggled with developing new ways of teaching academics that were in closer conformance to school-to-work principles. In these cases, the use of integrated curricula and alternative teaching strategies (such as project-based learning, team teaching, etc.) were typically limited.

Perhaps because of the structured way that teaching academics was approached, the teaching of workplace basics was usually viewed as a discrete, modular classroom activity. Thus, most programs taught life skills, work maturity skills, job search techniques, etc., in separate class periods with these personal development themes as a central focus. Although alternative teaching strategies were more likely to be used for this content area (e.g., role playing, group discussion), the integration with academic skills development was typically very limited.

These observations notwithstanding, about one-third of the demonstration grantees were quite innovative in their approach to school-based learning and demonstrated consistent and high conformance to DOL's threshold criteria for teaching academics and workplace basics. Thus, these grantees routinely relied on team-teaching, deliberately designed curricula to organize the teaching of academic skills and workplace basics around a career pathway, and made extensive use of project-based learning for skills development. For example, one grantee developed multi-disciplinary thematic courses that could earn students academic credit in multiple subjects simultaneously.

High-quality design principles were more consistently in evidence in the teaching of vocational skills, which was provided either directly or by referral for some or all students by eight of the eleven demonstration grantees. There seem to be natural opportunities that occur in vocational training courses to integrate academic skills (at least the skill set that applies to that vocation) and workplace basics, as well as opportunities for hands-on, active learning. These opportunities were generally used to full advantage.

The focus of the vocational training varied greatly across grantees, however. In some cases, it was geared towards preparing youth for entry into specific occupations (i.e., resembled traditional vocational education). In other cases, the goals were

broader, youth were more likely to be exposed to all aspects of an industry, and the vocational learning became a vehicle for teaching an array of skills. The latter was more likely to be the focus when the vocational training was provided in-house, rather than by referral, because in these instances grantees had direct control over instructional strategies and thus could modify them to advance broader program goals.

Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning activities were also to be provided by demonstration programs and, in order to follow high-quality design principles identified by DOL, should provide for a variety of work experiences integrated with school-based activities, be organized around a career theme, offer worksite mentors, and give youth the opportunity to earn academic credit and/or skill certificates. As with school-based learning, about one-third of the grantees consistently provided a range of high-quality work-based learning opportunities to all or most program participants being served. In these cases, the work experiences were closely tied with classroom activities and were used as a natural context for teaching an array of academic, vocational, and SCANS skills, as well as workplace basics.

Another third of the grantees utilized paid work experience as part of their service offerings, but these were not focused on a clearly defined training plan that went beyond fairly standard employability skills. Many work experience slots were thus designed to provide an initial exposure to the world of work rather than exposure to a particular career path in which the student was interested or as a training opportunity for specific skill development.

A final third of the grantees restricted their work-based service offerings primarily to job shadowing or guest speakers from local businesses, and thus could not offer the range of work-based learning opportunities that would have been desirable.

Part of the problem that grantees experienced in developing high-quality work-based learning was the challenge they encountered in recruiting employers who were willing to invest the time and resources to develop quality training opportunities for young people. Grantees utilized two primary strategies to recruit employers, neither of which worked well for grantees without strong employer partnerships to begin with. One strategy involved linking with intermediary organizations whose principal responsibility was to establish and maintain effective employer relationships; neither of the two grantees that used this approach was entirely satisfied with the results. The

other strategy took the form of hiring an individual to broker work-based experiences or assigning this responsibility to one or more existing staff. This approach demonstrated potential as an effective strategy, but it was very much dependent on the skills and contacts the staff persons brought with them.

In explaining their reluctance to participate, employers cited their lack of staff resources to devote to training, their need to focus on “the bottom line,” and their reluctance to take responsibility for what they perceived to be troubled youth. In overcoming these objections, programs found, first, that a high degree of customization was necessary. Thus, different employers needed to be approached in different ways, and their concerns needed to be addressed individually. Second, and related to this, partnerships with employers needed to be viewed as reciprocal; that is, these relationships failed when they were formed on the basis of how employer partners could contribute to the demonstration program without also attending to how employers could benefit. By contrast, successful programs found it very important to appeal to employers in a way that would resonate with them. Third, it also proved important to involve employers in the initiative at the outset (for example, in helping design the program services), rather than asking them to provide work-based learning slots when the program design was already established. Finally, grantees were much more successful if they could build on strong pre-existing employer relationships; those grantees starting from scratch at the beginning of the grant period almost invariably ended up being disappointed if they planned on major employer involvement by the end of the period.

Another challenge in developing high quality work-based learning included the characteristics of the youth that made employers reluctant to work with them, including problems with substance abuse, limited basic skills, undeveloped workplace skills, and what employers perceived to be the students’ lack of motivation and commitment. Also, many youth served by the programs were already working in jobs that often paid more (even if career and training options were limited) than the temporary internships or work experiences that programs could arrange.

Because of this array of challenges, only one grantee that did not have a strong work-based learning component to begin with was able to make substantial strides in this direction during the grant period, despite the fact that most grantees tried to do so. Overall, then, sites appeared to underestimate the time and level of effort required to develop and maintain high quality work-based learning experiences. Clearly, employer

involvement will demand a high level of effort to develop and nurture relationships, often requiring staff who have a specific set of skills and knowledge and who are dedicated wholly to this function.

Connecting Activities

A third key component of well-developed school-to-work systems include connecting activities, including efforts at building staff capacity and linking students to employment and postsecondary training options in the post-program period. With respect to capacity building, about half of the grantees resorted to single-day orientation sessions for staff at the beginning of a program cycle and/or took advantage of the occasional relevant training conference that was offered in the community. Most programs also made provisions for periodic staff meetings, but often these were focused on specific problems or issues or served as a forum to discuss specific concerns about individual students.

The remaining half were more deliberate in encouraging or requiring classroom instructors to undertake periodic intensive professional development. For example, one alternative high school had all teachers meet at the beginning of the school year for a “student-free” week devoted to professional development; it also required all staff to attend a minimum of four days of professional development activities per year, and supports teachers in their continuing education (e.g., for those pursuing ESL or special education certification).

Although staff at all of the demonstration grantees clearly were dedicated and hard working, and generally had long experience in working with out-of-school youth, concerted efforts at capacity building seemed to pay off in terms of a program’s demonstrating greater conformance to DOL’s threshold criteria. Thus, the fact that more grantees did not concentrate much attention on intensive and deliberate capacity building was unfortunate. Especially noteworthy was the fact that only a few grantees accessed the Technical Assistance set-aside funds available to the programs through the School-to-Work TA Providers’ Network. The reluctance of others to do so seemed to stem from several factors. To begin with, most programs began the grant period with some sense of what they wanted to accomplish and, at least in their own minds, an appropriate strategy for how to achieve their objectives; by the time they realized that their efforts were not yielding the results that they expected, the grant period was drawing to a close. Other factors that explain the reluctance to use TA funds include

the grantees' lack of awareness of what assistance was available and how it could help them and an inability to perceive their own weaknesses.

Developing strategies to link classroom and work-based activities is another important connecting activity. Four grantees did indeed foster close coordination between these two learning components. In doing so, they arranged to have classroom instructors meet with worksite supervisors on a regular basis to discuss ways of integrating learning and work on the development of joint lesson plans. In other programs, by contrast, although classroom instructors might have met periodically with work supervisors, it was usually to discuss the progress of individual students or address problems that were occurring at the work sites.

Finally with respect to connecting activities, all grantees developed some strategies to link students with postsecondary training options. Usually these operated on an individual referral basis. Thus, students who expressed an interest might have been counseled about how to apply to college, request student aid, etc. Guest speakers and tours of college campuses were also common. More formal linkages with postsecondary institutions were infrequent, as only three grantees had formal articulation agreements with community colleges. The fact that more programs did not do so might be attributed to the preference that most youth expressed for immediate employment.

Developing a System of Continuous Improvement

Tracking youths' progress and developing a system of continuous improvement represents a final area in which DOL had developed threshold criteria. Clearly, based on the programs' designs, as described above, these grantees were focusing on imparting academic skills, work readiness and life skills, and, in some cases, vocational skills. By holding youths to high standards of conduct and achievement, programs were also endeavoring to favorably impact the participants' motivations and behaviors and boost their self-esteem. Grantees were able to track these attainments to some degree, especially those that were more quantifiable, through periodic performance appraisals. Similarly, youths' post-program outcomes and program retention rates were also monitored to some extent. On the latter score, it appears that in many programs from one-third to one-half of those enrolled had exited before completing their program objectives (e.g., attaining a high school diploma or GED), attesting to the difficulties inherent in serving this population. Partly because these data collection and tracking systems were rudimentary, systems of continuous improvement were quite informal,

with program administrators learning from instructors, case managers, and partners what program improvements might be desirable.

Challenges in Adapting the STW Model to Out-of-School Youth

Sound STW principles are sound in any context. Thus, we are struck by how comprehensive DOL's threshold criteria are for the OSY Demonstration and how appropriate they would be for STW system development for in-school as well as out-of-school youth. At the same time, serving out-of-school youth in a school-to-work context gives rise to unique issues and challenges that are daunting in their complexity.

To begin with, engaging out-of-school youth in a training program of any sort can itself be very difficult. These youth, unlike their in-school counterparts, are typically disconnected from institutions for learning and disaffected with structured learning environments. This lack of connection can make it difficult for training programs to identify and enroll prospective participants. Strategies adopted by the OSY grantees included using strong referrals from partners, especially school systems and neighborhood organizations, along with the innovative service design features that held out the promise to youth that this program represented something different.

Enrollment and retention are challenges too because out-of-school youth often need to earn an immediate income, due to family responsibilities or for other causes. For this reason, it is difficult for many of them to undergo training if it means forgoing the opportunity to accept a paid job. Similarly, they have other responsibilities that make regular attendance in a training program difficult, and have substantial barriers to successful participation—including problems with substance abuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, low self-esteem, uncertain motivation, family problems, etc.

School-to-work in and of itself offers the prospect of addressing some of these obstacles. To the extent that programs adopted active learning methods and used contextual instruction in a way that made learning seem relevant, out-of-school youth became engaged in a way that they had not experienced before. Beyond this, the demonstration programs that we studied adopted additional strategies, including using flexible scheduling to accommodate youths' other obligations and providing strong case management and supportive services to address an array of their other needs. It also proved important for programs to be clear about their expectations for young people at the outset, so that youth would have an accurate idea of what it was that they were

committing to. Other programs found it important to provide stipends for classroom learning and move youth into paid work-based learning as quickly as possible, to provide them with a steady source of income. Finally, although it was not demonstrated commonly among the programs we studied, involving participants in planning and governance gave them a sense of ownership that increased their motivation for learning and their engagement with the program's objectives.

Adapting school-to-work for out-of-school youth also presents problems and issues in program design. The structure of most in-school school-to-work efforts provides for many elements to be addressed throughout a young person's school participation. In well-developed school-to-work initiatives, schools have developed curricula to incorporate career exploration, establish career pathways, link school and work, etc., as a sequence of activities and services that spans the K – 12 years. At the minimum, school-to-work activities are emphasized during the last several years of secondary school.

By contrast, programs for out-of-school youth rarely plan on more than a single year of participation, and are often even much shorter than this. This fact gives rise to a struggle to telescope within a shorter length of participation the overall mix and sequence of services that would be desirable from a school-to-work standpoint. Aggravating the problem, most program participants will lack the basic skills and work readiness skills required for competence in the labor market and thus will need extensive remediation before being made ready for the demands of the high-performance work world.

Again, STW principles intrinsically offered a way of addressing these challenges. By integrating the teaching of an array of skills, programs ensured that skill building could proceed on multiple fronts at once, and through both school-based and work-based components. Similarly, in an effort to help youth achieve educational credentials quickly, multi-disciplinary courses were developed that offered credit for multiple subject areas simultaneously.

CONCLUSIONS

All of the demonstration programs were making important progress in reaching an extremely hard-to-serve population of young people, who are typically disenchanting from traditional educational institutions, have very poor academic skills, and a host of barriers to success, including problems with drug use, criminal records, poor self-

esteem, and lack of a good understanding of what it takes to succeed. All programs we studied displayed a firm grasp of these realities that was reflected in their program designs. Thus, all demonstrated a foundation in sound youth development principles, including an attention to skill building, fostering self-confidence, promoting one-on-one relationships with caring adults, and the like.

Their conformance to school-to-work principles, on the other hand, was mixed. About half showed compliance with all or most of DOL's threshold criteria, and thus organized learning around career pathways, integrated academic and vocational skills instruction, linked work-based and school-based learning, promoted connecting activities, provided exposure to all aspects of an industry, and so on. By contrast, other grantees, however strong they were by some standards, failed to come to grips with school-to-work as an integrated system for learning. Thus, while many of the individual program components may have been in place (e.g., teaching academic skills, teaching workplace basics, providing opportunities for work experience, etc.), these were not well integrated into a cohesive whole.

It was also clear that the grantees' ability to implement meaningful system reform during the grant period varied. The ability to affect systemic change requires clear vision, strong leadership, and adequate resources. It also requires a clear sense of what needs to be accomplished, as well as a deliberate and well thought-out action plan. About half of the grantees participating in this demonstration did indeed demonstrate substantial systemic change during the grant period. In these cases, some key element of the grantees' service strategy was noticeably changed in a way that aligned its project design in closer conformance with DOL's threshold criteria. Moreover, these changes represented true systemic reform and showed every indication of being *sustained and built upon* once the OSY grant funding ended. Examples of the types of changes that were implemented included adding an additional career pathway for students to choose or enhancing classroom curricula to further integrate the teaching of an array of skills in context. In contrast to these, the remaining half of the grantees were not able to achieve their project goals in ways that led to sustainable program accomplishments. In these cases, the grantee's service design at the end of the grant period looked little different than it did at the outset.

Typically, grantees that were able to achieve sustainable goals already had well-developed school-to-work systems in place. To this degree, it could be said that grantees that made the most progress were those that were farthest along to begin with.

Typically, these grantees had a clear vision at the outset of what school-to-work should entail. They were thus able to think strategically about what they wanted to achieve during the grant period, and they used their grant funds accordingly, to focus on some specific system feature that they wanted to implement or enhance. At the same time, they were flexible and adaptable, and thus could reformulate objectives and strategies in response to external constraints that impeded their implementation efforts.

In contrast, grantees that were less successful lacked a clear vision of school-to-work and what it was that needed to be accomplished during the grant period to enhance their STW system. As a consequence, they tended to formulate vague and broadly defined goals, were too ambitious in what they hoped to accomplish, and specified action steps that lacked focus.

OBSERVATIONS ON EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

It is apparent that implementing and sustaining school-to-work partnerships and learning strategies for the out-of-school youth population created difficulties for many of the demonstration projects, while others were quite successful in building important new systems for learning. Nonetheless, the experience of all of them provided substantial information about the process of forming school-to-work partnerships, assembling necessary resources, developing appropriate career pathways for the out-of-school youth population, and sustaining these efforts. Lessons learned from these experiences suggest that some crucial design elements, contexts, and critical conditions need to be in place for programs to affect lasting change. Based on these experiences, we can draw attention to a number of practices or strategies that may help guide subsequent efforts. Some of these echo themes central to sound STW system development; to this degree, our findings with respect to innovative practices in the OSY demonstration grantees reinforce principles that were developed more generally. Other recommendations reflect adaptations that programs need to make for meeting the needs of out-of-school youth or how they can most effectively implement change.

- 1. Grantees attempting to implement systemic reform should focus narrowly on a small number of clearly defined goals, especially if they are small organizations with limited resources. Additionally, action strategies and financial and personnel resources must be adequately aligned with the organization's goals and objectives for change.* Implementing change takes time and concerted, focused effort. Organizations hoping to transform their service delivery structure to achieve greater conformance with school-to-work principles need to be strategic. They are better off focusing at any one time on a smaller number of clearly specified objectives,

rather than attempting to implement a wholesale transformation in a short period of time. Similarly, goals should be interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Thus, for example, programs attempting to establish a new career pathway might specify the adoption of this pathway as a goal, as well as goals pertaining to school-based and work-based learning that would support it. Grantees should also be sure that action steps are clearly laid out and are closely tied to their goals and objectives. By implication, organizations should resist the temptation to espouse broad and sweeping goal statements, with vague action plans, however sensible the end objective or laudable the intent.

2. *To be effective, all members of the partnership serving out-of-school youth must be clear about their individual responsibilities and must share a common understanding of school-to-work principles. Moreover, adequate resources must be devoted to coordinating their efforts.* Effective STW efforts for out-of-school youth will require contributions from a number of different actors and agencies, including secondary schools, employers, and community service agencies. However, to ensure that they work in concert and in support of the system goals, all partners must have a clear understanding of what they will be expected to contribute, and, just as importantly, must fully understand and embrace how their role contributes to school-to-work system development. Moreover, these partners can work in concert only if the lead organization devotes adequate resources to coordinating and overseeing the partners' efforts.
3. *Strong relationships with local school systems and neighborhood organizations will be especially important in recruiting out-of-school youth for program participation.* Grantees participating in the demonstration project that had strong linkages with the local school district(s) or neighborhood organizations were ensured of a ready source of referrals of out-of-school youth appropriate for program services. By contrast, grantees without such linkages often had difficulty achieving their recruitment objectives.
4. *Organizations serving out-of-school youth must be cognizant of how the needs of this population differ from those of in-school youth and they must be prepared to address those needs.* Out-of-school youth will be difficult to engage in a structured learning environment, will often need a steady income flow, and will have multiple barriers to successful program participation, including other responsibilities that make their participation difficult and personal or family problems. To address these issues, grantees should embrace innovative instructional methods that make clear the relevance of learning, offer flexible scheduling, offer strong case management, and provide opportunities for paid work experience. Strong linkages with community service organizations will also be important to ensure that youths' needs for supportive services can be met.
5. *Upfront assessment should be reciprocal, giving the grantee organization the chance to learn about the youths' needs and capabilities, but, just as important, providing the youth with a realistic picture of what will be expected of him or her and what opportunities are available.* Grantees must identify the youths' diverse service

needs early on in program participation, so that an appropriate training plan and service strategy can be developed. But, in focusing on what the grantee needs to learn about the youth, grantees sometimes ignore the fact that the youths in turn need to know about the grantee organization, including what services can be provided and what training choices are available. Grantees that provide this information will help ensure that enrollees have a clear and accurate sense of what is being expected of them and what they in turn can expect. Such an information exchange will also ensure that youth have an appropriate interest in whatever vocational training is provided or what career pathway the grantee will be using to structure learning, potentially helping the grantee minimize problems with high rates of participants' dropping out of the program prior to completion.

6. *Grantees serving out-of-school youth, especially smaller organizations that lack economies of scale, may find it advantageous to form networks with similar organizations, to broaden training choices.* Some grantees serving out-of-school youth as part of this demonstration project were quite small. Their size made it difficult for them to offer an array of career pathways from which enrollees could choose and similarly limited the options with respect to vocational training. Although none of the grantees that we studied adopted this strategy, one potential solution to broadening training choices for participants would be for similarly situated organizations to form loose networks that could foster cross-referrals.
7. *Grantees should involve students as important stakeholders and elicit their input regarding program design and services.* Out-of-school youth want a voice regarding what services will be provided to them, and how those services will be structured. Moreover, giving them input into important decision-making can be empowering, helping them overcome feelings of helplessness and lack of control over their lives, and giving them a sense of ownership of the program in which they are participating. Involvement can be at several levels, including program improvement and design, peer "discipline," student governance, and input into instructional approaches or learning goals. Thus, grantees should actively elicit the input of program participants with respect to major program features.
8. *Grantees should not allow the requirements of the GED (or high school diploma) to stifle the use of innovative classroom-based instructional methods that integrate the learning of academic and workplace skills. Information about promising alternative approaches should be widely disseminated.* Out-of-school youth participants will typically want to focus on achieving their training objectives, including attaining the GED or high school diploma, as quickly as possible. Given the rigidity of the GED (and, often, diploma requirements), grantees can thus be tempted to "teach to the test" to ensure that youth quickly get the academic credential they need. But the success of several of the demonstration grantees makes clear that GED or diploma requirements need not come at the expense of promoting innovative instructional strategies that are consistent with school-to-work principles. Peer exchanges or other forums should be used to disseminate information about promising

approaches, to help overcome grantees' understandable reluctance to depart from more traditional approaches.

9. *To the extent practical, vocational classroom instruction should go beyond preparing youth for narrow entry-level occupations but should instead promote learning in "all aspects of an industry."* Realistically, most out-of-school youth are interested in attaining full-time employment as quickly as possible. For this reason, some demonstration grantees focused on providing youth with concrete vocational skills that would get them a job upon program completion. However, attention also needs to be paid to providing youth with exposure to all aspects of an industry and developing transferable skills. One way to do so is to use occupational skills as the context for learning an array of SCANS and other skills, rather than focus on vocational skills instruction per se. In this way, the opportunities for employment or further training in a range of occupations spanning a skill hierarchy can be enhanced, rather than constrained.
10. *Apart from its effectiveness as a training strategy, paid internships will meet the need that many out-of-school youth will have for an immediate income and thus should be included as a integral program component. Stipends for classroom training also might be helpful in promoting retention.* Unlike their in-school counterparts, out-of-school youth, especially those who are older, will have family or other responsibilities that make their need for an immediate income urgent. Thus, programs have an additional reason for providing youth with paid internships as part of their program participation. Providing them with stipends for classroom training also should be considered for the same reason.
11. *At the same time, in their haste to provide paid employment opportunities, programs must be sure that out-of-school youth have the fundamental skills they need to perform satisfactorily at the worksite and that employers have expectations that are in keeping with their role as providers of training. Problems as they arise need to be addressed quickly.* Grantees who neglect to adequately prepare youth for their worksite experiences or convey appropriate expectations for both work supervisors and trainees risk having employers be frustrated or disappointed with the youths' performance, potentially undermining the relationship for the future. Thus, while there may be a need to move youth to worksite opportunities as quickly as possible, meeting this objective should not come at the expense of ensuring that employers' expectations of the students' job performance can be met. Staff must also be poised to "trouble-shoot," as a way of identifying problems as they arise and addressing them quickly.
12. *Explicit training goals should be developed for work experience or internships that are provided as part of work-based learning, and they should go beyond merely providing youth with work readiness skills.* Out-of-school youth are generally interested in obtaining employment as quickly as possible, while employers are sometimes reluctant to invest the effort to develop clear training objectives for their work-experience slots. Given these twin pressures, OSY demonstration grantees sometimes settled for internships that resembled traditional work experience rather

than work-based learning. But offering employment alone is not enough. Organizations should understand that work experiences provided as part of program participation are likely to be more rewarding, more motivating, and much better for the youths' skill development if explicit training plans are developed that go beyond merely providing youth with exposure to the work world or developing work readiness skills. Thus, work experience should be viewed as an integral part of the overall training plan.

13. *To ensure that employers' concerns are addressed promptly and that training plans associated with work-based learning are linked to classroom activities, programs should ensure that a staff member serves as a workplace liaison. Such an individual will need to customize the program's interactions with each participating employer to some degree.* Identifying problems that arise on the worksites quickly will often be key to keeping both the youth properly motivated and the employer satisfied that the program recognizes and is responsive to his or her needs. Thus, frequent contact between the grantee and employers who are providing work-based learning opportunities for students is essential. Having a staff member serve as a workplace liaison is one way of ensuring that this contact occurs. Because different employers will have unique concerns, needs, and interests in participating, a workplace liaison can "customize" the way in which the employer is approached. The liaison can also work to ensure that work-based learning and classroom-based learning are integrated to the fullest extent practical.
14. *Grantees should involve employers early on, in the program design stage, rather than wait until the design is established and then merely recruit employers for work-based learning slots.* Employers are more likely to feel ownership and responsibility for the success of the program if they are actively involved in its design at the outset. Fostering their early involvement will also ensure that they can have a hand in shaping the training plan, so that students who complete the program will have skills that employers value. By contrast, employers who are approached late in the game to provide work-based training slots will generally be less responsive and less likely to perceive their role within the context of the larger school-to-work system. Plainly put, learning-rich worksite training opportunities that are integrated with classroom learning are simply unlikely to develop, however persistent the grantee's coaxing, unless the employers are involved in planning out the outset, have the opportunity to ensure that their interests and needs are understood and addressed, and come to feel ownership of the program's objectives.
15. *Efforts to promote the capacity of staff on an ongoing basis should not be ignored.* Developing curricula that integrate the teaching of an array of workplace skills is not easy. Field researchers were uniformly impressed by the dedication and long experience of instructors, and their knowledge of the needs of out-of-school youth. However, staff cannot be expected to intuit innovative learning strategies or engage in curriculum development consistent with school-to-work on their own. For this reason, deliberate and ongoing efforts at capacity building are essential. It is important that these efforts go beyond periodic staff meetings to discuss students'

performance or problems as they arise. For the same reason, provisions should be made to provide training for work supervisors and mentors.

16. *Organizations attempting to implement systemic reform should develop a formal process for periodically reviewing project accomplishments, and modifying goals or action steps accordingly.* For a number of the OSY demonstration grantees, goals established at the outset were not realized for a variety of reasons, including external constraints, the failure of expected contributions from partners to materialize, or flaws in the initial implementation strategies. Grantees that were successful in overcoming these challenges typically had a more structured process of review to support efforts towards continuous improvement. This process enabled them to assess progress towards project accomplishments and make modifications to either goals/objectives or strategies, accordingly.
17. *Organizations attempting to develop new program components should include plans for sustaining the initiative at the outset.* A number of the grantees participating in the OSY Demonstration developed or provided important services during the grant period that they were unable to sustain once grant funding ended. If the focus is on sustainable change, how the initiative can be sustained should be thought through at the outset and made a part of the program plan.
18. *State and local STW partnerships must re-evaluate their charge to serve “all youth.”* Our evaluation has not entailed a study of STW partnerships throughout the nation, so we cannot say with certainty how typical the OSY demonstration grantees’ efforts at engaging local STW partnerships have been. However, based on their experience, it appears that existing STW partnerships are devoting little attention to the needs of out-of-school youth. Additional focus needs to be directed at how STW systems can embrace this population, who surely desperately need and potentially can benefit so much from, what STW has to offer.