

How to Support Opportunity Youth in Texas

Notes from the 2021 Texas Opportunity Youth Virtual Convening

ALLISON PENNINGTON
Greater Texas Foundation
July 2021



GREATER TEXAS
FOUNDATION



T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION
EST. 1962
BUILDING A THRIVING DEEP EAST TEXAS



TRELLIS[™]
FOUNDATION

There has never been a better time to invest in the opportunity youth of Texas.

In our economy, the path to a satisfying, sustainable career increasingly requires education and credentials beyond a high school diploma. But the postsecondary landscape is treacherous. Navigating it successfully means knowing what you want to do professionally, finding a program that will get you there, figuring out how to pay for coursework while keeping the lights on, and mastering challenging content in an unfamiliar environment. All this while tending to the responsibilities that don't go on hold while you go to school: your family, your job, and your health.

That's a lot for anyone to handle. It's even harder for young people without a strong network of supporters who can offer advice, make connections, help in emergencies, or simply share a word of encouragement.

It's not surprising, then, that some youth exit the pathway to opportunity somewhere along the line. They might drop out of middle or high school, graduate with a diploma but no plan, start a postsecondary program without finishing, or enter the labor market but struggle to stay employed. Regardless of the point at which they exit, they become part of a population known as opportunity youth: young people aged 16-24 who are not in school and not working.



What is surprising is how many opportunity youth there are. In 2018, an estimated 462,300 Texans aged 16 - 24 were disconnected from school and work.¹ That's 1 out of every 8 young people in the state. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, that number peaked at more than 900,000, or nearly 1 in 4.² Although the vaccine rollout and reopening of the economy have eased disconnection rates back down, the pandemic severely disrupted many young people's educational trajectories and financial stability, with consequences we have yet to fully understand.

1 out of every 8 Texas youth are disconnected from school and work.

Disconnection at this scale signals a systems-level failure. It's easy to point to an individual and find a personal mistake or shortcoming to explain why they are struggling. It's much harder to point to hundreds of thousands of young people and do the same. With so many young people missing out on opportunity—and our economy missing out on their talent—the time to act is now.

The good news is Texas is primed and ready to reconnect with opportunity youth. The state has prioritized educational attainment and employment through policies such as the HB 3 College, Career, and Military Readiness bonus, the 60x30TX strategic plan for higher education, and the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative. A growing number of communities have

built collaborative networks to support local opportunity youth, yielding a wealth of knowledge about how to serve this population well. Businesses are looking to expand their workforces as the pandemic lifts. A massive influx of federal funding is headed our way via the American Rescue Plan Act. With so many resources available to build better pathways through education into the workforce, the time to act is now.

In 2021, Greater Texas Foundation, T.L.L. Temple Foundation, and Trellis Foundation brought together more than 80 people to answer the question, *What would it take to reconnect opportunity youth to education and work equitably and at scale across Texas?* This report documents what we learned. Our hope is that regardless of your role and sector, you will see the connections between your work and the work of youth re-engagement. More than that, we hope you will recognize opportunities to deploy your resources—whether funding, decision-making power, or influence within your networks—in support of our state's opportunity youth.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarizes feedback shared during the **Texas Opportunity Youth Virtual Convening**, which was held virtually via Zoom on April 16, 2021. The convening was informed by the increasing number of place-based opportunity youth collaboratives across the state supported through initiatives of the Aspen Opportunity Youth Forum, Educate Texas, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, JFF, and National League of Cities. Participants included representatives of state and national philanthropic, governmental, and policy organizations, as well as cross-sector teams representing nine Texas communities: Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Jasper, the Rio Grande Valley, San Antonio, and San Augustine.

Data sources for the report include community ecosystem maps drawn by participants in advance of the event, notes and interactive whiteboards capturing each discussion during the event, and a post-event survey. Interviews were also conducted following the event to include additional perspectives from select invitees who were not able to attend.

We believe the best way to understand how best to support someone is to ask them—so **we invited young adults** who had direct experience with disconnection to participate in the convening, and we will feature their voices throughout the report.

The report is organized around **three questions**, starting with the youth perspective, focusing next on communities working to improve outcomes for opportunity youth, and concluding with implications for the field:

- **What do opportunity youth need to secure meaningful education and employment?**
- **What would it take for our communities and state to meet those needs?**
- **What now?**

An overview of opportunity youth initiatives in the state is provided in the Appendix.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to our colleagues who contributed their expertise to the development of this convening:

- **Lili Allen**, JFF
- **Hannah Gourgey**, Texas Opportunity Youth Network
- **Monique Miles**, Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
- **Andrew Moore**, National League of Cities
- **Steve Patrick**, Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

We are also grateful to the following individuals for supporting the convening as facilitators:

- **Jamiel Alexander**, Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
- **Natalie Applegate**, Educate Texas
- **Molly Hubbert Doyle**, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
- **Antonia Rangel Caril**, National League of Cities
- **Molly Young**, Young & Co.



What do opportunity youth need to secure meaningful education and employment?

If we want to serve opportunity youth well, we need to see the world through their eyes. The following priorities were emphasized by young adult participants, as well as staff and leadership of organizations providing direct services to opportunity youth.

A CLEAR & ENERGIZING VISION OF THE FUTURE CODESIGNED AND LED BY YOUTH

Pursuing education takes time, effort, and money; it's a leap of faith a person will take only if they're confident the sacrifices required of them will be worthwhile. That's why it's so important for opportunity youth to be able to picture where their education can take them and to believe it's possible to get there.

“We want to get them excited about their futures, help them envision life behind high school, and develop the skills they need to get there.”

— K-12 REPRESENTATIVE



For many young people, the future is hard to see because even the first few steps are unclear. Participants emphasized the importance of building accessible “on-ramps”—opportunities for youth to re-enter school and work if the traditional pathway is no longer available to them. **High-quality advising about postsecondary options is also critical for this population.** Participants noted young people need to know not only where they can go to pursue a credential, but explicitly how the application and matriculation process works. They also agreed that the options presented should not be artificially limited, whether to four-year universities or to short-term programs focused on high-wage, high-demand jobs. Young people deserve to know the full range of possibilities available to them and to have the power to choose the path that is right for them.

Opportunity youth need more than just advising, though; as one participant said, “Information sharing is not aspiration building.” Exposure to a robust range of professional role models and work environments through job shadowing, networking, mentoring, and internship allows young people to envision themselves in a career that is exciting and meaningful to them.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE TEXAS POLICY LANDSCAPE FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH, SEE [Texas Policies for Reconnecting Opportunity Youth in Back on Track Pathways.](#)

“I didn’t reach out, because I was afraid. I didn’t go to services, I went to an older friend. We need more caring adults willing to meet kids where they’re at.”

— YOUTH & WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Most importantly, **young people need peers and role models** who can alert them to opportunities and encourage them to pursue them. Participants shared that opportunity youth have hit so many roadblocks in their lives, it becomes difficult for them to look beyond those barriers to the path ahead. Family, friends, and other trusted influencers can motivate them to give education another try.



OPPORTUNITIES TO EARN AND LEARN

The traditional “learn, then earn” model does not work for most opportunity youth. Foregoing a reliable paycheck to pursue education simply is not feasible financially for this population. Providing opportunities to earn while learning and learn while earning is a much more effective strategy. **Programs that offer stipends to students completing coursework, work-study positions, paid internships, and apprenticeships can provide young people with the financial stability they need** to focus on learning while allowing them to develop practical skills and knowledge that will serve them well throughout their careers.

Convening participants consistently cited “earn and learn” opportunities as a critical need. In rural Texas, the challenge is often limited availability of living-wage jobs in the community at large, and thus limited opportunities to connect opportunity youth with meaningful paid employment. In urban areas, the challenge is coordination—there are many employers, but it is difficult to align available positions with available credentialing opportunities and to create work-based learning experiences relevant to the goals of participating youth. Participants also said they found it challenging to cultivate employer partners who are willing to invest time and resources in opportunity youth.

“We have people on the left and employers on the right, and we’re not doing a good job of connecting them.”

— LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE



COACHING AND SEAMLESS WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

The path to a credential and a career is much easier to travel when you're walking with a friend. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of coaching and support for opportunity youth.

Although programs serving opportunity youth have long employed case managers to track each participant's progress and connect them with resources, some are beginning to reframe the position as a "coach" to capture the holistic and highly personal nature of the relationship these support personnel have with their clients. Effective coaches care deeply about their clients, are patient and proactive in their outreach, and are "cheerleaders" as much as they are sources of information. They also get to know each client individually and tailor their services accordingly, understanding that one-size-fits-all approaches aren't appropriate for a population as diverse in identity and experience as opportunity youth.

In addition to the guidance and emotional support coaches provide, opportunity youth often need non-academic "wrap-around" supports as they pursue post-secondary credentials, including affordable childcare, transportation, food, housing, and healthcare. **Among the highest-need supports named by participants was mental health care, as opportunity youth often are coping with heavy levels of stress and trauma.** In fact, some proposed that a central goal of organizations serving opportunity youth should be healing, not



just credentials and employment. Another support in high demand: financial literacy training. Young people want to be in control of their finances and feel confident that they can manage their resources well.

Whether these wrap-around supports are provided under one roof in a "one-stop-shop" model or delivered through a network of partners, care should be taken to ensure the experience of the person receiving the services is streamlined and they consistently receive respect and high-quality service wherever they go.

“Having someone that’s there behind you at every step would be helpful ... someone that’s gonna be walking along the side with you during this journey and motivating you to keep going.”

— YOUTH & COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVE

OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVISE, CELEBRATE, & LEAD

Although we've focused in this section on the supports opportunity youth need to be successful in education and work, it's important to know that **young people have resources and knowledge of their own to share, and they are looking for ways to give back.** The strongest initiatives serving opportunity youth center young people in a variety of roles, from peer support to advisory and leadership, and are strongly informed by the perspectives and experiences of these young people.

During the convening, youth participants expressed their readiness to advise those working on reconnection strategies about the barriers youth encounter and to help design solutions to overcome them. They also spoke about the importance of “serving in a celebratory role” to recognize peers’ milestones, “including small accomplishments and bigger ones.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND VOICE, SEE

[Including All Voices: Achieving Opportunity Youth Collaboration Success Through Youth and Adult Engagement.](#)

“Each young person has to have a sense of agency, so they also have a role to play in their reconnection to the system.”

— STATE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE



“Students are the experts of their own experiences. Listen to them.”

— K-12 REPRESENTATIVE

What would it take for our communities to meet these needs?

The elements critical to success for opportunity youth—a clear vision of the future, opportunities to earn and learn, coaching paired with wraparound supports, and opportunities to lead—are already in place in pockets across Texas. But it is not yet the norm for disconnected young people in our state to experience these supports. In this section, we share feedback from convening participants about what is needed in our communities for youth to access critical reconnection resources.

A DEEP COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

The individuals, organizations, and collaboratives making the most powerful impact on opportunity youth are those fundamentally focused on pursuing equity, defined by the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions as “just and fair inclusion in a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”

“[Supporting opportunity youth] is not a hand-out. That’s an investment!”

— COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVE



These leaders in the field recognize that **although our education and employment workforce systems work beautifully for many members of our society, they continue to systematically produce worse outcomes for some groups of people**—and they believe that, as part of that system, they share responsibility for correcting the imbalance. They are not content simply to avoid discriminatory practices, but to proactively concentrate resources where they are needed most, using disaggregated community data to guide their decisions. They have taken the time to build relationships with the people they serve and to ensure they have a strong seat at the leadership table. They know that at times, individuals may place barriers to success in their own path, but they don't use that as a reason to block the road themselves. Above all, they believe opportunity youth to be capable, talented, and driven—and treat them accordingly.

“One thing I want to change is the saying that once you have a kid at a young age, your life completely stops. Your life doesn't stop—it's a reason to keep going and moving.”

— YOUTH & COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVE



UNDERSTANDING OF THE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH POPULATION

A community is unlikely to serve their opportunity youth well without knowing who they are. Access to timely, localized, granular data is essential so community partners can see how many opportunity youth are in their area, how they are distributed geographically and demographically, and how the population is changing over time. It's especially important for the community to understand the extent to which barriers to opportunity are concentrated for young people by race/ethnicity, gender, age, educational attainment, location, and other factors.

But studying quantitative data isn't enough. It is just as **critical for communities to understand what opportunity youth have experienced and what they want for themselves**. This means proactively seeking out qualitative data through a strong youth voice and leadership practice. Some of the questions convening participants wrestled

with most—how to find opportunity youth in the community and how to convince them to participate in reconnection programs—can only be answered through conversations with young people themselves and through inclusion of opportunity youth on staff, in advisory roles, and in leadership positions.

“I thought it was hugely important to involve youth and hear from them. We must always LISTEN and not just hear them. We must design the systems with their needs and wants in mind, not what we think they need and want.”

— WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTATIVE

FULL PARTICIPATION FROM EVERY PLAYER IN THE ECOSYSTEM

No single organization can provide everything a young person experiencing disconnection might need, so collaboration is essential for communities seeking to reconnect youth to education and work. And, since nearly every stakeholder group has a vested interest in young people and some power over what happens in their lives—including K-12 and higher education,

workforce boards, employers, law enforcement and criminal justice, healthcare, government, philanthropy and nonprofits, communities of faith, and more—coordinating efforts, sharing information, and pooling resources is a sensible move.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BUILDING ROBUST OPPORTUNITY YOUTH COLLABORATIVES, SEE

[*Reengaging Opportunity Youth Across Texas*](#)

[*Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Reengagement Centers*](#)

“Sometimes the overlapping circles of where opportunity youth are means they fall through—it may feel like this is ‘someone else’s’ responsibility.”

— POLICY & ADVOCACY REPRESENTATIVE

One of the most critical needs cited by convening participants was a more robust network of partners. Most place-based opportunity youth initiatives are led by a strong champion in one sector, such as a local school district or a community-based organization, with committed partners from some other sectors—but it is difficult to build and maintain a fully comprehensive collaborative. Community representatives reported it was **especially challenging to find**

or develop “champions” on the employer side who are willing to offer work-based-learning and employment opportunities for opportunity youth and support them in those roles.

Across the board, these collaboratives are working to identify and cultivate more partners who understand and value the opportunity youth population, see a role for their organization to play in re-engagement efforts, are ready to welcome opportunity youth and meet them where they are, and are willing to devote resources to these young people.

“The employers are a big piece of the puzzle.”

— HIGHER EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVE



CONSISTENT LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT & ROBUST, RELIABLE FUNDING

Our conversations throughout the convening made it clear there is a great deal of collective wisdom in the state and beyond about how to serve opportunity youth well through place-based collaboratives; the challenge is generating the resources to do it sustainably. This work is not easy, quick, or inexpensive. It requires skilled leaders with a deep commitment to this population, well-trained staff and volunteers to support young people in a variety of ways, and funding to cover the costs of education and living expenses, whether through scholarships and grants or paid employment. A strong, well-resourced, consistent “backbone” entity to coordinate the community-wide network of support and advocate for opportunity youth is essential, as well.

“[The pandemic made us realize] we’ve been focused on numbers ... If we [had] an innovative approach to measuring success for this population, we could disrupt how we’ve done things in the past.”

— WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
REPRESENTATIVE

Convening participants expressed frustration that funding sources for their work are often sporadic, short-lived, and overly restrictive. Some said the combination of short, 1-2-year grant cycles and the fluctuating priorities of funders has made it difficult for them to keep their organizations financially stable. Others said they can easily find donors willing to provide scholarships, but interest in contributing to critical wrap-around supports like coaching is minimal. These comments suggest a need not only for long-term commitments from private funders and donors, but for effective use of established public funding streams and allocation of additional public resources toward opportunity youth.

Participants also reported that many funders, both private and public, expect them to be able to demonstrate significant increases in credential completion and employment rates over a short period of time, even though it may take individuals a few years, including some stops and starts along the way, to get on track and reach their goals. Meanwhile, achievements that are incredibly significant to youth and young adults themselves—accessing affordable child care or obtaining a driver’s license, for example—are not often captured in funders’ or policy-makers’ measures of success.

What now?

So far we've shared what our convening guests told us opportunity youth need to achieve their goals, and what the organizations and communities serving them need to support them. Now we return to our central question: ***What would it take to reconnect opportunity youth to education and work equitably and at scale across Texas?***



“You need to be in it for the long haul to make progress.”

— COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVE

As discussed throughout this report, there are a number of cross-sector initiatives already in place in our state that are locating opportunity youth, offering them a path back in to education and work, and supporting them all the way through completion of their goals. **If you're interested in joining an existing collaborative, starting one in your own community, or strengthening your organization's current programming for opportunity youth, we invite you to explore the Appendix.**

Here, we will offer recommendations for those positioned to support this powerful work by virtue of their access to funding, decision-making power, or influence with critical networks—including private philanthropy, leaders of public institutions, employers, researchers, and advocates.

DON'T WAIT TO GET INVOLVED.

A common realization shared by a number of convening participants was that although our organizations may not have named opportunity youth reconnection as a

specific strategic priority, success for this population would represent significant progress toward achieving our respective missions. Whether we are working to reduce poverty, increase educational attainment, improve health outcomes, or provide products, services, and jobs for our communities, increasing the number of young Texans who are stably employed on rewarding career paths will help us achieve our organizational goals and contribute to a more equitable, sustainable future for our state.

Beyond that, by focusing on our most underserved youth, we discover insights and solutions that can benefit the entire population. If we can build a system that is informed by and responsive to the experiences of opportunity youth, that system will work better for everyone else, too. **If you've been wondering whether opportunity youth reconnection is relevant to your work—it is.**



The need to re-engage our youth has never been greater, with hundreds of thousands of young Texans disconnected from opportunity. At the same time, the potential for our state to come together has never been greater, with an array of community collaboratives hard at work, a growing body of knowledge from and about opportunity youth, and new resources and energy centered on “building back better” as the COVID-19 pandemic lifts. **If you've been wondering whether this is the right time is to get involved with opportunity youth—it is.**

LOOK AT YOUR WORK THROUGH AN OPPORTUNITY YOUTH LENS.

If you're ready to bring your organizational resources to the table, you don't need to rewrite your strategic plan; a good place to start is simply to apply an opportunity youth lens to your existing work:

- If you work in private philanthropy or oversee a public funding stream, explore whether there are ways to include opportunity youth in existing programming or target resources toward them. Seek opportunities to support organizations aligned with your mission that serve opportunity youth.
- If you serve in a leadership position at a public institution, including a school or school district, college or university, city government, state agency, or organization associated with the criminal justice system,

examine your institutional policies and consider whether they create barriers that can be removed to smooth the pathway to reconnection for opportunity youth.

- If you own a business or oversee hiring for a company, take a look at your organizational structure and consider whether there are opportunities to provide jobs or work-based learning experiences for local opportunity youth.
- If you conduct research, look for ways to include opportunity youth in your scope of work, whether by incorporating their voices or looking for them in your data.
- If you engage in advocacy, develop relationships with organizations serving opportunity youth and explore whether there are insights, messages, or priorities emerging from their work that you can elevate through your channels of communication.



MAXIMIZE THE IMPACT OF YOUR INVESTMENTS IN OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.

If you're already investing in opportunity youth work, consider these **recommendations from our participants about how to ensure your organization's dollars make the greatest impact:**

- Support programs that connect students to “earn and learn” opportunities, including paid internships and apprenticeships.
- Fund opportunity youth initiatives for multiple consecutive years and offer general operating support for grantees providing essential services to this population.
- In grants to organizations or collaboratives serving opportunity youth, include robust support for wrap-around supports and administrative costs—particularly for organizations serving as the backbone for their community collaborative.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PURSUING EQUITY THROUGH OPPORTUNITY YOUTH REENGAGEMENT, SEE

[Putting Equity at the Center: The Opportunity Youth Forum.](#)

- Connect grantees with technical assistance. For example, many convening participants were looking for help with building and maintaining partnerships, especially with employers; access to and ability to use data; and advice for developing their youth voice practice.
- Consider investing in research to fill gaps in knowledge. For example, some questions raised during the convening were:
 - What are the experiences and outcomes of young people participating in education programs within the juvenile justice system in Texas?
 - In what ways can existing public funding streams be used to serve opportunity youth? To what extent is each source being fully utilized?
 - What are best practices for evaluating the impact of opportunity youth initiatives? How can these practices be incorporated into the accountability structures associated with public and private funding programs?

Being young isn't easy. The path to a stable, fulfilling adulthood is long and full of unexpected twists and turns. When our own children are young, we demonstrate care for them, work to understand them, and generously support them until they find their place in the world. Within our communities and across Texas, let's do the same for our opportunity youth. There has never been a better time.

WHAT CAN WE DO TODAY?

Moving the needle for opportunity youth in Texas is a massive undertaking that requires years of concerted effort. But there are simple things you can do as an individual today to help. Here are some ideas:

- **VOLUNTEER WITH A PROGRAM** that provides mentoring services to opportunity youth or, if you don't have time, recruit others in your circle.
- **REACH OUT TO A RELEVANT ORGANIZATION** you don't yet partner with and schedule an introductory conversation about how you can serve opportunity youth together.
- **SHARE THIS REPORT** or any of the resources included here your networks to further drive learning and action on behalf of Texas opportunity youth.



ABOUT GREATER TEXAS FOUNDATION

Greater Texas Foundation supports efforts to ensure all Texas students are prepared for, have access to, persist in, and complete a postsecondary education. Since its 2001 inception, the foundation has approved more than \$100 million in grants to support Texas students. For more information, visit greatertexasfoundation.org.

ABOUT T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION

The T.L.L. Temple Foundation works alongside rural communities to build a thriving East Texas and to alleviate poverty, creating access and opportunities for all. For more information, visit tlltemple.foundation.

ABOUT TRELIS FOUNDATION

Trellis Foundation advances equitable educational opportunities in Texas by supporting postsecondary programs, practices and systems that reduce disparities and lead to success for low-income students and students of color. More information is available at trellisfoundation.org.

Appendix: Opportunity Youth Initiatives in Texas

This is not an exhaustive list of every program or partnership benefiting opportunity youth in Texas. We offer these examples here as a starting point for those interested in learning from or partnering with existing initiatives focused on connecting opportunity youth to education and employment.

TEXAS OPPORTUNITY YOUTH NETWORK

An initiative of the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions to implement a state-wide strategy in Texas to dramatically improve postsecondary and employment outcomes for opportunity youth. Key components of this youth- and equity-centered effort will include a youth leaders council, a community of practice for place-based collaboratives, an innovation fund, and a cross-sector statewide leadership council.

For more information, contact Hannah Gourgey at hgourgey@gmail.com.

BACK ON TRACK IN TEXAS

[Back on Track in Texas](#), an initiative of JFF, has supported ten dropout recovery sites across the state in assessing and improving upon their strategies to prepare students for a successful transition to postsecondary education, training, and good jobs. Participating sites include:

- American YouthWorks, Goodwill Excel Center, and Goodwill Excel Center-Lockhart Correctional Facility in Austin
- Restore Education and Region 20 Education Service Center in San Antonio
- CAN Academy-Westcreek and CAN Academy-Lancaster in Fort Worth
- La Joya ISD College and Career Center and PSJA College Career & Technology Academy in the Rio Grande Valley
- 8 Million Stories in Houston

For more information, contact Lili Allen at lallen@jff.org.

PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES

Austin

The [Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#) (AOYC), led by Workforce Solutions Capital Area, is a consortium focused on connecting opportunity youth with education and employment training opportunities that lead to jobs. AOYC is a member of the [Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Forum](#) and a participant in Aspen's [Scaling Pathways for Opportunity Youth](#) initiative.

Beaumont

Region 5 Education Service Center offers the [Jobs for America's Graduates \(JAG\)](#) program, which supports opportunity youth in obtaining GEDs and job-ready certifications.

Dallas

The [Dallas Hire Opportunity](#) initiative, led by Workforce Solutions Dallas, provides employment preparation and training services to opportunity youth through partnerships with local employers.

Houston

The Greater Houston Opportunity Youth Collaborative, led by Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries, focuses on reconnecting opportunity youth across the Gulf Coast region who have recently exited high school. The collaborative is a member of the [Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Forum](#) and a participant in Aspen's [Scaling Pathways for Opportunity Youth](#) initiative.

The Bridge to College and Career Success program stimulated the formation of cross-sector partnerships between community colleges, community organizations, and local employers to re-engage opportunity youth. Participants included Capital IDEA, Project GRAD Houston, SERJobs, Houston Community College, and Baylor College of Medicine.

Jasper

The [Deep East Texas College & Career Alliance](#), led by Jasper ISD, is a collaboration of public school districts and institutions of higher education in the deep East Texas region that aims to increase college and career opportunities for young people, including opportunity youth. Jasper ISD is a member of the [Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Forum](#) as well as [Advance Together](#), an initiative of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.



San Antonio

The [NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center](#), an initiative of the City of San Antonio, connects opportunity youth with resources to meet their personal, educational, and career goals following the National League of Cities re-engagement center model. The City of San Antonio is a member of the [Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Forum](#) and a participant in [Aspen's Scaling Pathways for Opportunity Youth](#) initiative.

San Augustine

San Augustine ISD leads a multi-district career education and dropout recovery program and is a member of the [Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Forum](#).

Footnotes

- ¹ Lewis, Kristin. 2020. [A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus](#). Measure of America.
- ² Estimate based on analysis of Current Population Monthly Survey data from January 2020 through April 2021 accessed via data.census.gov/mdat/.

Allison Pennington, M.Ed., M.P.A., is Programs and Strategy Associate for Greater Texas Foundation.

Correspondence concerning this report should be addressed to allisonpennington@greatertexasfoundation.org

