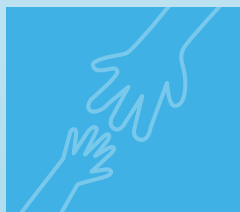
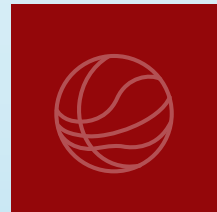
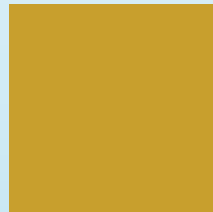
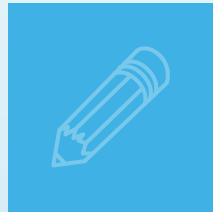


# Building a Brighter Future

AN ESSENTIAL AGENDA  
FOR AMERICA'S YOUNG PEOPLE



# NATIONAL COLLABORATION FOR YOUTH

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A World Fit for Kids!  
Afterschool Alliance  
After-School All-Stars  
Alliance for Children & Families  
American Camp Association  
American Humanics  
America's Promise Alliance  
Association of Jewish Family  
& Children's Agencies  
Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc.  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America  
Boy Scouts of America  
Boys & Girls Clubs of America  
Camp Fire USA  
Child Trends  
Child Welfare League of America  
Coalition for Juvenile Justice  
Communities In Schools  
CORE: Coalition for Residential Education  
Council on Accreditation  
Dibble Institute  
Forum for Youth Investment  
Gay Lesbian and Straight Education  
Network (GLSEN)  
Generations United  
Girl Scouts of the USA  
Girls Inc.  
Goodwill Industries International  
Hostelling International—USA  
Leadership and Renewal Outfitters  
Lutheran Services in America  
MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership  
National 4-H Council  
National Alliance for Hispanic Health  
National Center for Missing  
and Exploited Children  
National FFA Organization  
National Foster Care Coalition  
National Campaign to Stop Violence  
National Network for Youth  
National Urban League  
National Parent Teacher Association  
National Summer Learning Association  
National Youth Employment Coalition  
Salvation Army  
Save the Children  
Search Institute  
The Corps Network  
United Neighborhood Centers of America  
United Way Worldwide  
Voices for America's Children  
Volunteers of America  
YMCA of the USA  
Youth Advocate Programs  
YOUTHBUILD USA  
YWCA USA

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## INTRODUCTION

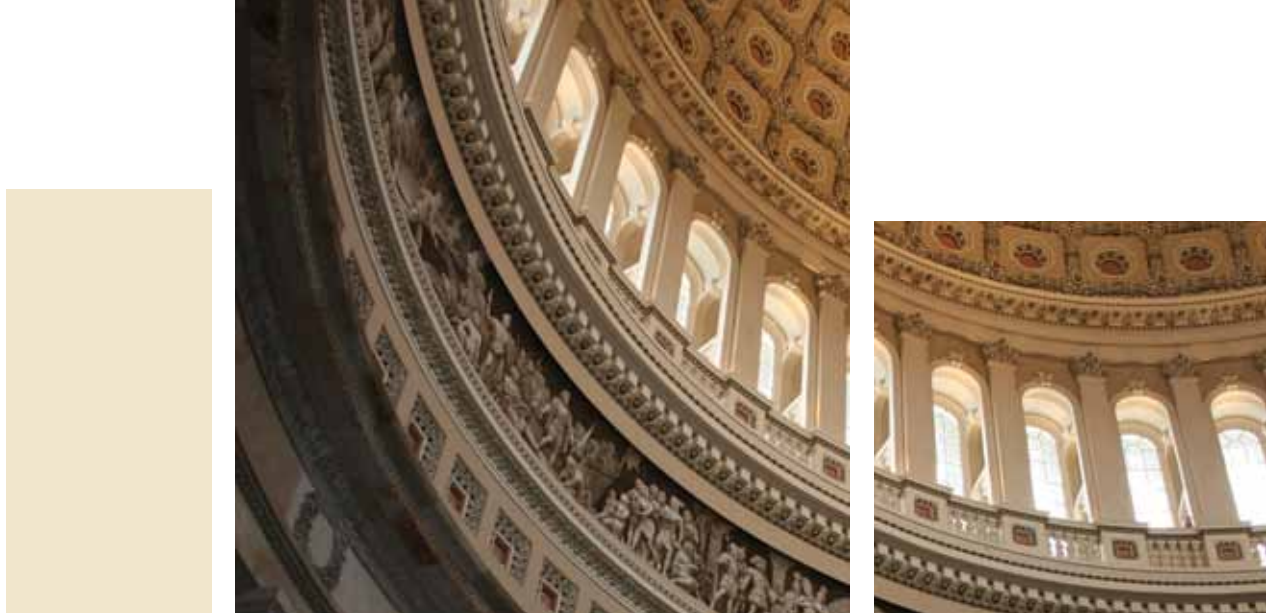
We may claim that “children are our greatest asset,” but, as a nation, we do not treat them that way. Dropping out of school and declining academic achievement have received much publicity lately but they are the tip of the iceberg. Childhood poverty and homelessness are on the rise. Teenage parenthood, drug use and crime wax and wane but they persist at unacceptable rates. Millions of children are in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems for reasons often not of their own making. Yes, children are an asset, each and every one, and like any asset, they need to be invested in and developed.

Children and youth, and their families and communities, are key to the economic and social wellbeing of the country. As such, the federal government should direct policies and resources to meeting children’s needs today and, as importantly, developing children and youth to become the best future workers, leaders, parents, tax-payers, and voters this nation has ever known.

Making the changes proposed in this document moves us toward achieving that ideal even as it reduces unnecessary spending (e.g. developing rather than incarcerating youth), improves health, strengthens families, produces a more educated workforce, and lays a foundation for an America that will thrive.

From their experience with tens of millions of children in virtually every community in America, the members of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) are in a unique position to know the challenges young people face. They are the household names of child and youth development in America. Generations of youth have grown up with these nonprofit community-based agencies—and still do. These organizations bring their collective expertise to bear in the recommendations that follow.

Children are a part of families; they have parents, siblings, grandparents and others who make up their households and communities. The investments and policy changes called for in this document must be implemented in concert with investments in families and communities as well. We envision a brighter future for all children and youth and ultimately for the nation.



# Federal Policy Recommendations

This country lacks a truly comprehensive, unifying strategy for how the federal government addresses issues facing children and youth. This strategy must include three core elements: a focus on the whole child; a fundamental premise that all young people should be treated with dignity and equality; and an approach that builds not from the deficits in young people's lives, but from assets. A shared vision and strategy, comprehensive and integrated support, and a tested framework—together these elements will change the odds for young people.

To move towards a unifying national strategy for young people, Congress and the President should:

- Reauthorize the **Federal Youth Coordination Act**, which would create a White House Office on Children and Youth to facilitate interagency collaboration, coordinate federal research, and identify and replicate effective programs.
- Allow child and youth serving organizations to gain access to federal criminal background checks on employees and volunteers by enacting the **Child Protection Improvements Act**. This act would allow organizations access to nationwide fingerprint-based criminal records checks of the FBI database in a timely and affordable manner. In a federal government pilot program of the PROTECT Act where over 87,000 background checks of potential youth-serving volunteers were conducted using FBI data, 6% of potential volunteers had criminal records of concern. These included very serious offenses such as rape, murder, and child sexual abuse.
- Support a follow up study of the National Academies landmark 2002 report, **Community Programs to Promote Youth Development**. The report would: review and synthesize available data on community interventions and programs to promote positive outcomes for youth; assess the strengths and limitations of methodologies and approaches used to evaluate these activities; and identify gaps and central questions for the design of a unified national research agenda and goals to promote the healthy development of youth.
- Support the **Nonprofit Sector and Community Solutions Act**, or similar legislation which would strengthen America's communities by making the federal government a more productive partner with nonprofit organizations by establishing better communication with the federal government and improved coordination within government.



# Early Child Care & Education

All children need access to consistent, high quality, and affordable early learning opportunities, including Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K. Research reveals that preschool years are critical for brain development and child development overall. The foundation laid in these early years will affect children and the quality of their contributions to society for the rest of their lives.



## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Provide incentives to states to link early childhood program data to K-12 data in an effort to create comprehensive state longitudinal data systems that trigger intervention and supports for children and families.

Reauthorize and expand the **Child Care and Development Block Grant** so additional children and families can benefit from subsidies. Require reasonable market reimbursement rates in all states so that parents are not forced to choose less-expensive—and often lower quality, overcrowded and unsafe—care.

Provide incentives for states to develop comprehensive and integrated early learning systems for children from birth to age five, including the establishment of an **Early Learning Challenge Fund**.

With the rapid growth of the **English Language Learner** (ELL) population, a significant achievement gap continues to grow between ELL students and non-ELL students. Provide a greater investment in professional development opportunities for teachers of English Learners and appropriate resources to meet the needs of ELL students at the early childhood level.





## Education for All

All young people, including those with disabilities, deserve access to a public education that meets their needs. As education is not just about academics, federal policy should take a holistic approach and provide children and youth with a comprehensive learning environment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS > PUBLIC EDUCATION

Reauthorize the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act** (ESEA) with these critical child and youth development considerations:

- **Outcomes:** Social, emotional, physical and civic outcomes should be considered along with academic outcomes.
- **Target population:** While efforts should be framed to help all young people, funding should target those in disadvantaged populations.
- **Delivery systems:** While school buildings and personnel are central to education, they can be supported and expanded by including alternative learning environments — and the participation of others such as community-based and faith-based organizations, parents and families, and other public agency organizations.
- **Coordination:** Efforts to support young people must be aligned among a wide array of stakeholders—from afterschool and summer programs and youth development organizations to parents themselves—should be recognized as part of a seamless pipeline of providers who educate and develop the whole student.
- **Types of services, supports and opportunities:** Inculcate a year-round whole student approach to educational success, one that emphasizes important applied skills like professionalism, teamwork, communication and critical thinking to complement mastery of important academic proficiencies.

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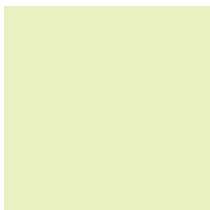


# Education for All *(continued)*

Enact the **Safe Schools Improvement Act**, or other comprehensive legislation, which would require schools to develop and implement anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies that would prohibit bullying and harassment based on the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of students and allow Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to utilize ESEA funds to implement anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, collaborate with community-based organizations, and train students and educators on how to address and prevent bullying and harassment within their schools.

Expand Title I funds to include physical education and health education instructional programs and require State Education Agencies (SEAs) to include data on student learning in physical education and health education as measures for school effectiveness.

Promote school stability for homeless youth by improving the McKinney-Vento Act's **Education for Homeless Children and Youth** program, as well as the Title I, Part A of ESEA, to strengthen the "best interest" school selection process, increase the authorized funding level to help assist with the costs of transportation to the school of origin, and make transportation to the school of origin an eligible use of Title I Part A set aside funds.





### Engaging Parents & Community Partners

Support place-based initiatives that comprehensively and effectively address the needs of children, families, and communities such as the **Promise Neighborhoods** Initiative, which seeks better outcomes for children, families, and communities by integrating previously siloed programs (e.g. early childhood and afterschool programs, K-12 education, college preparation, job training, parental education, health care, and neighborhood revitalization). Continue to build on public-private partnerships between nonprofits, government, health care organizations, local businesses, and schools that seek to integrate diverse yet important supports and resources for children.

Enact the **DIPLOMA (Developing Innovative Partnerships and Learning Opportunities that Motivate Achievement) Act**. This legislation aims to meet the challenges influencing student achievement by promoting a shared, comprehensive approach to education. By creating innovative partnerships, a number of stakeholders are involved in addressing the comprehensive needs of children and youth, thus tackling learning barriers located inside and outside the school.

Enact provisions within ESEA that would better assist and include children being raised by relative caretakers. LEAs should include assurances that they will develop and implement strategies to address the unique obstacles related to education of children and youth in the primary care of a grandparent or other relatives including those related to enrollment delays.

Safeguard and strengthen the **Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC)** program to provide high-quality capacity-building, training, and technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs to implement best practices for engaging families.

Establish local family engagement centers through which local, community-based organizations provide direct services to families and remove barriers to family engagement in education.





# Afterschool & Summer Programs

American families need quality afterschool and summer programs more than ever. In most families, both parents or the sole parent is in the workforce. Just 8.4 million children are in afterschool programs; and during the summer, only about 25 percent of children are enrolled in summer learning programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Protect and seek to improve funding streams for **before school, afterschool, and summer learning programs** that promote adherence to standards of high quality and support:

- safe, enriching settings; effective partnerships between schools and community-based organizations that enhance learning taking place during the school day;
- areas of particular need including rural communities, programs for older youth, STEM content, and student wellness;
- well-trained and well-compensated staff with appropriate skills and competencies who convey care and concern for each child;
- activities appropriate to each child's stage of growth, unique personality and interest; and appropriate screening, professional development, and benefits for program staff.



Enhance **21st Century Community Learning Centers** (21st CCLC):

- Ensure continued support of before school, afterschool and summer learning programs in all 50 states and the territories.
- Improve sustainability of well-performing 21st CCLC programs by making grants renewable based on merit.
- Increase training and technical assistance resources to strengthen program quality.
- Build on current success by further establishing afterschool and summer programs as a platform for preventive health and physical activity for children and youth; and science, technology, engineering and math activities.
- Ensure that summer learning is integral to all expanded learning approaches. Incentives should be provided for strong school-community partnerships to support innovative summer learning initiatives.
- Assure adoption and implementation of food and physical activity standards by 21st CCLC funded after school programs.

Ensure that any efforts to adjust the school schedule or calendar **build on the best of afterschool** and summer programs by requiring strong school-community partnerships; provide for hands-on, experiential learning; include a balance of enrichment and academics, and focus on the individual student. Any federal funding or program to adjust the school schedule or calendar should not come at the expense of afterschool and summer programs.

Ensure that all students have access to high-quality **summer learning opportunities** by creating a dedicated program and funding stream that would focus exclusively on the summer months as a strategy to close the achievement gap. Summer programming should nurture the development of the whole student by focusing on enhancing areas where students exhibit talent, promise, and interest.

### Mentoring

Enact the **Mentoring America's Children Act**. This bill would strengthen and reauthorize the U.S. Department of Education's Mentoring Programs grants, which enables local mentoring organizations to provide evidence based, high quality, school-based mentoring programs for children with the greatest need residing in rural areas, high-crime areas, or troubled-home environments, or who attend schools with violence problems.

Reauthorize the **Mentoring Children of Prisoners** program within the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children, Youth and Families which has successfully targeted children with a parent in prison or under state or federal supervision.



**15.1 million**

(The number of children in communities today who **take care of themselves** after the school day ends.)

—Afterschool Alliance [2009].  
America After 3 PM, Washington, DC:  
Afterschool Alliance, <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM.cfm>



# National & Community Service

Research shows the critical developmental value of providing opportunities for youth to learn by contributing to their community. Through service, young people develop a sense of connection and commitment to community that will last throughout their lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Advance public policies that provide opportunities for **intergenerational service** activities to leverage the talent, skills, and abilities of older adults in meeting critical community needs. Intergenerational and civic engagement programs benefit children and youth in schools where older adults tutor students, resulting in improved grades, increased personal and social development, and decreased absences.

Support **AmeriCorps** programs in order to strengthen the capacity of nonprofit organizations that serve to diminish poverty in low-income communities. Focus on increasing the proportion of diverse and low-income youth who serve.



# Healthy Children & Youth

Childhood obesity is a critical health issue in the United States. Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese. We cannot expect to positively impact the healthy and productive development of the nation's children and youth without investing in programs that specifically address these issues.

## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Support a broad range of approaches to nutrition education and physical activity in afterschool and out-of-school settings including consumer education (shopping), gardening and cooking as well as basic nutrition science.

Enact the **Healthy Media for Youth Act** as a critical step towards ensuring youth benefit from seeing healthier and more positive messages about girls and women. This legislation supports media literacy programs, promotes research on the effects of media images, and encourages the adoption of voluntary guidelines to promote healthier media images for young people.

Support passage of the **Healthy CHOICES Act**. It includes initiatives to prevent and control childhood obesity, including efforts to assist families, communities, schools and afterschool sites to increase access to healthy foods and physical activity.

Enact the **No Child Left Inside Act** (NCLI) which would provide funding to train teachers to deliver high quality environmental education and utilize the local environment as an extension of the classroom. NCLI would provide incentives for states to develop State Environmental Literacy Plans to insure that every student is prepared to understand the environmental challenges of the future.



# Child Welfare

Foster care is necessary for children when their caregivers are unwilling or unable to provide well-being and safety. However, foster care is just one option in a spectrum of services that are essential to prevent and remedy situations that lead to child abuse and neglect. A range of supports is critical to meet the unique needs of families as particular concerns present themselves. An engaged and committed society, reliable and flexible funding, and a quality and supported workforce will result in a strong and sustained continuum of care for vulnerable children and families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Reform **financing of the child welfare system** to fully and flexibly fund a full continuum of services, including prevention and post-permanency services, with attention to best practices and families at the center. Address issues of equal tribal access, workforce supports, data and accountability improvements, and the disproportionate representation of minority children in care.

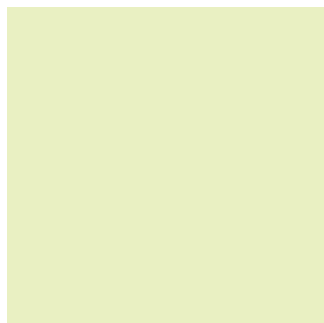
Invest in the **child welfare workforce** through a national strategy that will ensure the recruitment, hiring, training, and retention of qualified, culturally diverse, culturally competent, effective and dedicated professionals essential to ensuring high-quality casework, in accordance with national child welfare standards. Encourage recruitment through partnerships with higher education, funding of loan forgiveness, and partnership with the National Academy of Sciences to study and report on the state and needs of the workforce.



Fully implement the **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act**. This historic act extended federal support to kinship care, recognized the need to extend care to age 21, allowed greater access to federal funds for tribal governments, created health and education protections for children in care and expanded training for the child welfare workforce. Work to continue to ensure that states take advantage of the optional provisions, to enable agencies to implement new mandates, and to reinforce this federal commitment through complementary legislation in collaborating service systems.



Support systemic supports for families as essential investments in **maltreatment prevention**. These include discretionary programs like the Social Services Block Grant, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start, McKinney-Vento as well as targeted child welfare streams including the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act.



# 38%

percent of the 772,000 children substantiated as victims of abuse and/or neglect in 2008 **received no follow-up services.**

—Child Maltreatment, 2008





# Juvenile Justice

Effective delinquency prevention and juvenile justice begins with front-end youth-centered and family-focused supports, and ends with developmentally-appropriate interventions and transitional supports that make the most of youth, family, and community strengths.

## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Reauthorize and strengthen the **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act** to:

- keep juveniles out of adult jails, lock-ups and other forms of inappropriate detention;
- keep children and youth who have committed no crime, such as youth who run away from home or who are chronically absent from school, out of secure detention and correctional facilities;
- stop the abuse of children and youth in the juvenile justice facilities; and
- ensure fairness for children and youth of all races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations or gender identities in the juvenile justice system.

Enact prevention/intervention focused policies and programs, e.g., the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act (Youth PROMISE Act), that:

- direct resources towards communities facing an increased risk of crime and gang activity in order to enable those communities to begin to address significant unmet needs and prevent crime from occurring;
- promote family focused, community based alternatives to incarceration;
- build upon evidence-based and promising prevention and intervention practices proven to reduce youth violence and delinquency rather than more costly and unnecessarily punitive alternatives.

Support the **Families Beyond Bars Act** which would support national and community-based programs that give children the opportunity to cope with the trauma associated with having an incarcerated parent, and help break the intergenerational cycle of violence and incarceration.

Reauthorize and strengthen the Second Chance Act and other similar legislative measures to support community-based **reentry programs** that build youth competencies, connect them to caring adults, housing, workforce, education, healthcare, and community service opportunities, and prepare them to achieve success in school, on the job, and as contributing citizens.

Support the **Family Justice Act** which would increase family engagement and support youth, families and other community members in developing better policies and practices to protect incarcerated youth, support their rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.



# Homelessness

The economic recession has forced record numbers of families and youth to lose their housing and experience the loss, instability, and trauma of homelessness. The needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families are often complex and require a range of services from a variety of organizations to help them re-form as a family unit.

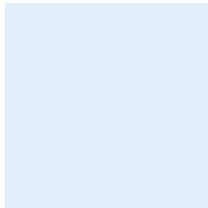
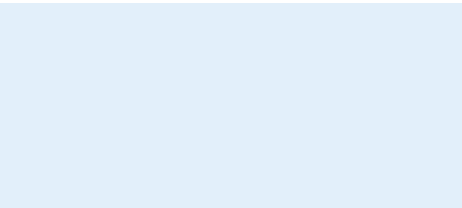
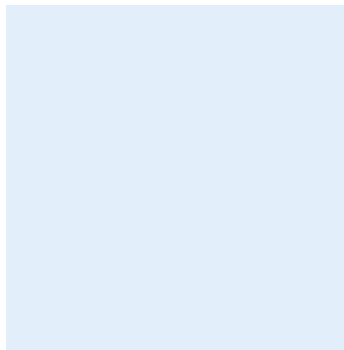
## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Support legislation to ensure the inclusion of children, youth, and families who are verified as homeless by federal program personnel (including school district liaisons, Head Start programs, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs) in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) **definition of homelessness**.

Build the capacity in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to effectively monitor state compliance of the **de-institutionalization of status offenders** and to launch an initiative for community based alternatives for youth with non-criminal behaviors such as runaways and truants.

Improve young family access to the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families** (TANF) program by removing statutory and programmatic barriers that interfere with homeless youths' access to this vital income security program. Further increase opportunities for TANF funds to support participation in quality school-age childcare and afterschool programs.

Enact policies and identify resources to increase young adult access to permanent housing assistance, including through the allocation of **housing choice vouchers** for youth receiving services or completing runaway and homeless youth act transitional living projects.



as many as  
**2.8 million**  
(Number of United States youth who experience a **runaway or homeless** episode annually.)





# Youth Employment

The economic health of the nation depends on investments we make in young people—especially investments we make in workforce development, education and training initiatives aimed at increasing their participation in a knowledge-based economy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS >

Reauthorize the **Workforce Investment Act (WIA)** Youth Activities. Enable WIA to enhance the ability of youth employment programs to serve youth:

- Streamline the eligibility determination process and expanding income and group eligibility requirements so that youth who already qualify for other federal programs may also qualify for WIA.
- Support a Performance Measurement System that takes into account the challenges associated with serving the hardest to serve populations and which allow for reporting of interim gains of both in-school and out-of-school Youth Activities participants.
- Retain local flexibility and promote cross-sector collaboration between workforce investment boards, businesses, youth service providers, school districts, and state institutions.
- Allow youth ages 14–24 to be eligible for WIA youth programs.
- Maintain Youth Councils or, as an alternative, an analogous community entity focusing on youth and facilitating cross-system collaboration.
- Encourage collaboration between youth employment agencies and high-growth high-demand industries.

## Pathways to Education and Employment

Build bridges from youth employment programs to post-secondary programs, ensuring that former dropouts and struggling students receive support, services, and opportunities designed to increase their postsecondary enrollment, persistence and completion by enacting the **Re-engaging Americans in Serious Education by Uniting Programs (RAISE UP) Act**. This legislation would provide disadvantaged children and youth with the support needed to: attain a secondary school diploma; attain a postsecondary credential, including those offered by institutions of higher education, industry groups, or registered apprenticeship programs; and secure and succeed in a family-supporting career.

Support **YouthBuild**, as authorized under WIA and administered by ETA, which enables disconnected 16–24 year old youth to complete their secondary education, obtain job skills while serving their communities through building or renovating affordable housing, and transition to post-secondary education and careers.





# Family Strengthening

While our recommendations focus on needs of children and youth, National Collaboration for Youth and all of its member agencies recognize that children do better when their families do well and the communities they live in thrive. The love and support of family and the ability of family to provide for the economic well-being of children and youth are absolutely fundamental.

Support government policies that better meets the needs of vulnerable families, including:

- **Family Economic Success:** Help families improve self-sufficiency through expanded opportunities to work, earn a living wage that provides for the basic needs of the family, and build assets that grow with the family over time, such as homeownership and retirement accounts.
- **Family Support Systems:** Build appropriate and adequate systems of support for healthy family development that encompass health care, child care, education, and other essential components of strong families.
- **Thriving and Nurturing Communities:** Build a nurturing and supportive environment in which healthy families can pursue long-term goals critical to sustainable family development. Essential components for family success include access to affordable housing, strong neighborhood institutions, safe streets, supportive social networks, and an environment that promotes community and strengthens bonds between families.

A vital component in supporting families is expansion of, as well as increased access to, and enrollment in, **federal and state benefit programs** and work supports that can help low-income families to cover basic needs such as: Medicaid, SCHIP, SNAP (Food Stamps), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children, School Meals Program, LIHEAP and Section 8 Housing Vouchers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Unemployment Insurance and tax credits such as the earned income tax credit and the child tax credit.



For more information on family supporting policies visit the National Collaboration for Families at:

[www.nationalassembly.org/FSPC](http://www.nationalassembly.org/FSPC)



*There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.*

—Nelson Mandela

## Acknowledgements

The public policy recommendations in this agenda call for a more rational, integrated and effective approach to child and youth development, one that bridges bureaucratic boundaries, customs and laws to the best possible advantage of America's young people. This agenda could not have been possible without the participation of all members of the National Collaboration for Youth and without knowledge and expertise of the NCY members who served on the Advisory Committee for this agenda:

Erik Peterson > *Afterschool Alliance*  
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Susie Gorden > *Big Brothers, Big Sisters of America*  
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Bob Reeg > *National Network for Youth*  
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Irv Katz, CEO  
*National Collaboration for Youth*

Kathy Cloninger, Chair, National Collaboration for Youth  
*CEO, Girl Scouts of the USA*

Karen Pittman, Co-Lead, National Collaboration for Youth  
*Co-Founder, President and CEO, The Forum for Youth Investment*

The National Collaboration for Youth is a 45-year old coalition of more than 50 of the nation's leading child and youth serving organizations. Its mission is to provide a united voice as advocates for children and youth to improve the conditions of young people in America, and to help young people reach their full potential. The National Collaboration for Youth brings together experts in public policy, programming and research to share knowledge and promote collective action to improve the lives of America's youth.

**[www.collab4youth.org](http://www.collab4youth.org)**

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