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Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Dropout Recovery: What Cities Can Do To Get Students Back on Track
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MOORE: Good afternoon everyone. This is Andrew Moore. I am senior consultant for the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. It is a special unit within the National League of Cities, welcoming you to this month's regularly scheduled audioconference. Our topic today is "Dropout Recovery – What Cities Can Do to Get Students Back on Track." We will be providing, with the help of some expert resource persons, some great information over the next hour or so. Later on in today's call, we will have a time when we will be addressing questions that arise from those of you listening in today. We have already started receiving questions via e-mail. Please address your question in an e-mail to Karpman@nlc.org, for National League of Cities. We already have a backlog of questions and we will be happy to entertain more over the next 30-35 minutes, while we get rolling with the formal presentation and early discussion part of our call.

This audioconference is an outlook of the YEF Institute's ongoing initiative to promote and assist municipal leaders in expanding options and alternatives for high school. We have been working with several cities intensively and a larger group of mayor's education advisors, disseminating information between and among cities about good strategies for expanding options and alternatives for high school. Today's particular focus is on communities' strategies to re-engage dropouts where city governments, school districts, community based organizations and others typically come together to mount a concerted strategy to re-engage dropouts.

Just as a piece of initial framing for today's discussion, one of the most interesting ways of talking about dropout recovery these days is to say that what communities may want to strive for and, indeed, what the nation may want to strive for, more purposefully in years to

come, is high standards and higher graduation rates. We have seen a lot of emphasis over the past few years on higher standards that has not always been accompanied by a solid commitment to higher high school graduation rates and yet there is widespread recognition that it is indeed the completion of high school and the progression onto post-secondary education and training that is most likely to help young people prepare for full and rich lives as citizens, as workers, as parents, and so forth. So, today from this point forward, we are certainly keeping a need for high standards and higher graduation rates, which will likely only be achieved by taking on a variety of strategies. We are keeping that all in mind.

As I mentioned before, we have some great resource people with us today, from one national group and from one community. Joining us from the American Youth Policy Forum is Senior Program Associate, Nancy Martin. Nancy, would you like to introduce yourself so that folks recognize your voice?

MARTIN: Hello everyone. Nancy Martin here.

MOORE: And joining us from the City of Corpus Christi is City Manager George “Skip” Noe who is one of the team members down there in an ongoing effort to expand options and alternatives for high school.

NOE: Good afternoon everybody.

MOORE: One of his fellow team members is Scott Elliff, the acting superintendent of the Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD).

ELLIFF: Hello, everyone.

MOORE: So, thanks Nancy, Skip and Scott for introducing yourselves in brief there. We are going to move into a section of our call now where we hear some overviews from the speakers about their perspectives on what cities can do to get students back on track. And I just want to remind you once again that we are taking questions in a rolling fashion at Karpman@nlc.org. So, first I want to turn the microphone over to the team from Corpus Christi to tell us a little bit about the setting there and the reasons for action, who has been involved in the community strategy and the major aspects of their city and school strategies in Corpus Christi. Skip and Scott?

NOE: Yeah, Andrew. This is Skip. I will take a few minutes to kick this off. The kind of initial action that started the program was the 2003 state of the city speech by former Mayor Loyd Neal. He elected to focus on dropout rates as part of the focus. Former Mayor Neal’s daughter was a teacher from California, moving to Texas, and he had spent some time looking at some data and stood up and used a number that is certainly not the number that our local school district would have adopted as their dropout rate. I remember that the number was like a 30 to 40 percent dropout rate and he was talking about the number of 9th graders who did not complete high school at the end of 12th grade. That created quite a stir. In fact, he and I were at a function the next day and he claimed the entire two-hour trip to that function, he spent on the phone with the former superintendent. That did lead to a good dialogue, I think, on the part of the

community. Citizens for Educational Excellence, which is a group, a public education fund, which was started right around this time and, Scott at that point was the director, led the community through three community forums, talking about the dropout issue with the theory that the number is not important because even one would be too many.

So, how can we as a community engage to try and address this problem? So, there are a lot of strategies and information that was developed as a result of that. Right around that time, we were invited to apply for the technical assistance program that NLC developed working with the Gates Foundation to try to look at alternative high school strategies and how cities and schools might work together on that and utilizing the efforts of one of our schools, we applied and were successful in becoming a part of that ongoing dialogue. As a result, over that two-year period, there was a concerted effort to talk about community engagement and we had the opportunity to have our local school folks have a connection to the folks at Gates and NLC and learn a lot about program that are available. I think we have benefited significantly from the accessed information and data and resources through the initiative. And maybe now would be a good time to ask Scott to maybe talk a little bit about the results of some of that restructuring and that effort.

ELLIFF: Thank you, Skip. And let me say just a little bit about the community that we serve here in our district. The municipal boundaries of Corpus Christi actually encompass six different independent school districts, so our municipal boundary and our school district boundaries are not the same. There is one large district, about 39,000 students, in the Corpus Christi Independent School District and then some surrounding districts that have anywhere between 1,000-7,000 students in their enrollment. So, our district, Corpus Christi ISD is about 74 percent Latino, about 4 percent African-American and the remainder being Caucasian/Anglo-American. We have about a 60 percent free and reduced lunch population in our district, with some our schools at between 90-100 percent, free and reduced lunch. I just wanted to say a little bit about our community.

As a result of the dropout forums that we had, we have begun some initiative here in the community directly as a result of the mayor's focus on the dropout problem and our school district's response. Most of our energy has been focused on dropout prevention rather than in bringing students who have dropped out back into the system, although I can say a bit about that in a moment. After the initial forum, we conducted other forums focusing on the 15 strategies that the community had identified initially, really just to keep the conversation moving forward. Those included community forums on high school restructuring, the 40 developmental assets and teacher quality. We helped with the establishment of several small learning communities within one of our large comprehensive high schools, Moody High School. We have begun 9th grade academy work at three of our five high schools in our district and we established an early college high school, thanks to the support of the Gates Foundation and the Texas High School Project and I will say more about that program in a moment.

MOORE: Scott, that is a great initial sketch and I would like to turn things over if I could, unless there is just one snippet that you would like to add on dropout recovery and how that figures into the overall program.

ELLIFF: Just very quickly. We have a high school here, Coles High School, which is actually evolving into our center for dropout recovery. We have several programs within Coles High School focusing on students that have left school and want to come back and it is really evolving into more of an options center for us. I can go into more detail on that program, later in our presentation.

MOORE: Thank you. Turning our attention from Corpus Christi to the national scene as well as many communities that American Youth Policy Forum has been profiling recently. Please take it away, Nancy, and tells us about some of your recent work.

MARTIN: Oh good. Thank you, Andy. I want to begin by briefly talking about the American Youth Policy Forum and how we can start as a resource as those on the call. The American Youth Policy Forum is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that provides learning opportunities for policy leaders at the local, state and national level, so that they know what works for youth. We hold Capitol Hill forums. We organize on-site field trips and we write what we hope are accessible reports so that policy leaders at the state and local levels, and practitioners and researchers also can stay abreast of issues and alternatives that assess our nation's youth. We focus primarily on education reform, on career preparation and youth development and service.

We have been focusing over the last several years very heavily on documenting efforts by communities across the country to reconnect to out-of-school youth. And in addition to that, we analyze local, state and federal roles, supporting alternative education. We have convened an ongoing discussion group that focused on dropout recovery, with the idea of moving toward the development of policy guidelines that can be used at the local, state and national levels, as policymakers at all these levels wrestle with the challenges of improving educational outcomes for all high school age students.

Last year, we published *Whatever it Takes*, our report that includes case studies of 12 cities as well as descriptions of six national program models, looking at dropout recovery efforts, both programmatic and policy efforts at the local level and some state and national efforts as well. That publication was published in cooperation with the National League of Cities, as well as the Council of the Great City Schools, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National School Boards Association. We are really trying to reach across at various levels to try to raise the prominence of the issue.

MOORE: Okay, do you want to just mention briefly, which cities you looked at, some of the cities that you looked at for *Whatever it Takes*, Nancy?

MARTIN: Sure, Andy. We looked at Montgomery County, which is Dayton, Ohio; Jefferson County, which is Louisville, Ky.; Austin, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; Portland, Ore.; Oakland, Calif.; Trenton, N.J.; Baltimore, Md.; Pinna County, which is Tucson, Ariz.; Camden, N.J.; Milwaukee, Wis.; and Upper Philadelphia, Pa.

MOORE: And you selected those sites how?

MARTIN: We selected those sites as – they are not meant to be a list of the best or brightest, although they certainly probably rate on the list with them like that, but rather, a sampling of some of the variety of efforts going on across the country to reconnect with out-of-school youth. The idea for the *Whatever it Takes* publication, really, is to provide a lot of examples of different things being tried in different types of communities.

MOORE: And that is an example of a report, along with many others that are available on your Web site at www.aypf.org.

MARTIN: Yes.

MOORE: So, great. Thanks for the initial sketches, Skip, Scott and Nancy. And now we would like to take a deeper look at what has been going on in Corpus Christi and what continues to go on in terms of city/schools collaboration and also the results that you have been seeing from specific strategies there. So, Skip and Scott? If you could get into that topic, that would be great.

NOE: Yeah, Andy. I think that part of the key here is that we have been able to develop what I think are key relationships and a lot of these rely on the ability of the key players to be able to interact and work together in a collaborative fashion. Something that is non-adversarial. No one is looking for blame. Everybody is looking for opportunities to work together in a positive way. We had a great opportunity to work together collaboratively with all the superintendents, with CCISD, our largest district. We have quarterly meetings to talk about development issues. We talk about opportunities to collaborate and share and information. There is a task force that we created to assist us into putting together the number of the community forums that involved the business community, nonprofit organizations. We have had great involvement from Delmar College, our local community college district and from Texas A&M, our local higher education group, so we have really had a broad cross-section of the community involved in a number of the initiatives.

A lot of the work has focused on things of the small learning communities work at the high school, which we think is important for us and for CCISD and a lot of the work has actually sort of flown out of that discussion, including the initiation of the collegiate high school in the fall of 2006. I think we are getting ready to start our second class, our sophomore class, next year. Scott, can maybe talk a little bit about that as well as the efforts and goals.

ELLIFF: Yeah. Thanks, Skip. We are beginning our second year, next year or our collegiate high school program, where high school students actually earn college credit while attending high school on our community college campus and they will graduate from high school with a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously. Our target populations there are students who have been at risk for one reason or another. We have people really knocking down the door to get into that program. It has been very exciting. At our Coles High School, which is our options center, we actually have a number of programs that are both dropout prevention and dropout recovery. A traditional alternative high school program, which operates on a flexible schedule, allowing students to work and complete their state mandated

course credits for graduation through a contract based system. So, some students may take four or five years to get out of that program. It is really at their own pace.

We have a teenage mothers school where students can attend both prenatal and after-delivery, with childcare to encourage those students who face what is a challenge for many, which is being a parent and going to school at the same time, giving them the opportunity to stay in school. We are looking at running an evening program that would be more of a drop-in program for students who are in the 18-20 year old range who left school without graduating, who want a traditional high school diploma, rather than a GED, but don't want to go to our adult basic education program because they do not feel that they fit in with that particular age group. So, we are looking at initiating that in the coming year.

Miller High School, which is probably our most challenged high school academically and a high school where many of our students face a considerable number of challenges, we are establishing a full service community schools concept there, which brings a variety of social, health and educational services into the schools, in the evenings and on the weekends for the students and their families to try to mitigate those challenges that lead to dropping out. At Miller, next year, we are also going to be implementing more flexible scheduling options to allow students to come to school at 11:00 A.M. or 12:00 noon, you know, then stay until 5:00 or 6:00 in the afternoon, rather than the traditional 8:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. or 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. We have many students there who are working in the evening until midnight or in some cases two a.m. and trying to come to school very early. So, we are looking at initiating a different scheduling concept there.

MOORE: Scott, I understand that it is still early for many of these initiatives that you are describing. Are there results that you can point to in one or more sites that are particularly exciting.

ELLIFF: Yes. The collegiate high school, this is our first year with that program, and of course, we have not received our academic achievement data back from the state yet, but one of the most exciting things that we have seen is the commitment of the students in terms of their attendance. This is a program that draws student from throughout our community to the Delmar College campus. The district does not provide transportation and we have almost a 100 percent attendance rate at this school from the beginning of the year, up until now. Students simply do not miss school. So, they are attending class every day and we have actually tracked the data on individual students looking at last years attendance data where students missed 14 to 16 days of school on the average in middle school, who are now attending school every single day and finding their own way to get to this program, which tells us that something is working there.

MOORE: Great. Thanks. Nancy, it would be great if you could talk a little bit about the variety of approaches that you have seen in the 12 communities that you profiled in *Whatever it Takes* as well as anything that is emerging in your mind, as you look across those cities as the key aspects of a truly city wide approach.

MARTIN: Okay. In our work on programs and policies for disconnected youth, we really focus on what can be done to reconnect our young people to opportunities for building useful lives and work, family and citizenship. Corpus Christi's excellent work in the schools there,

notwithstanding, our central assumption is that schools cannot solve with the dropout crisis alone. So, we are looking much more broadly than just what is going on within the district. We found a variety of dropout recovery efforts that encompass a lot of different realms. The efforts are at the program, district, city, county, state and national level. They are focused on GED preparation, high school completion, associate's degree completion, employment preparation. They are offered by public school districts. They are offered by community based organizations, community colleges, private companies in some cases and we found that schools programs and college initiatives encourage the programming itself. Some examples of what some communities are doing to address the problem, other than our fine work in Corpus Christi that you are hearing about... and I will just speak briefly about these. I will happy to talk about them in more depth, later during the call.

In Philadelphia, a citywide campaign, called Project U-Turn, has focused the public's attention on Philadelphia's dropout crisis, providing the public with some excellent detailed data on the extent of the crisis and also really implementing a set of strategies and investments to resolve the crisis. In Portland, Ore., Portland Community College is offering former dropouts the opportunity to complete high school and an associate's degree or significant college credit and it fact that program is called Gateway to College, and is being replicated across the country now by Portland Community College. In Montgomery County, Ohio, which is the Dayton area, the county funded out-of-school youth initiative has reduced the dropout rate dramatically by targeting programming to 16-24 year-olds without a high school diploma. So, really a variety of approaches are being used.

MOORE: Great. Anything more to say about the key aspects of the citywide approach and maybe it is a good time to go onto a related type of question about specific roles that you think mayors and city managers can play regarding dropout recovery, based on what you have seen around the country. So, I will go to you first, Nancy, as a continuation of the answer that you just gave and then come back to Skip and Scott.

MARTIN: Well, I think that mayors provide real leadership on the dropout recovery issue by promoting data collection and sharing of that data. It is really important for communities to figure out a way – like I said mayors are providing leadership, but they certainly cannot do all of this. Communities need to be developing and maintaining the capacity for collecting the data, analyzing it and somehow reporting to the public, the real graduation data that we have not really been seeing in the past. So, that we can really figure out how many students we are losing, which students they are, when they leave, why they leave and try to make some sense of that in thinking about how to get them back. So, I would say that one piece is really promoting data collection and sharing. An example that goes back to Philadelphia, they, as part of this Project U-Turn, this large city initiative, they have created the kids integrated data system (KIDS) and last fall, they released a report documenting the dropout data for the class of 2004 that followed a group of students or cohorts from the years 2000 – 2005, so a five year period, to look at exactly what was happening. That is the real system-wide approach in that data collection is offered to different youth serving systems. So, it is not just a matter of the schools having a student identifier, it is all the youth serving systems in the community. It is really an advanced approach at trying to learn what is going on with students and where we are losing them.

I would say, second, promoting collaboration across youth serving systems, as you mentioned, Andy. Many systems are serving the population, but no one system can really end the crisis alone. So, there needs to be a lot more collaboration to understand what is happening and do something about it. I would say along with that that funding could be much better combined to meet the needs of this population of students and so we would really see much better results for young people with increased coordination. An example, in Baltimore, Md., the Career Academy at Harbor City High School has a program that provides 16-21 year-olds with education, experience or learning careers, specific training and some social skills also and that is really a demonstration of an enhanced collaboration among Baltimore's Mayor's Office of Employment Development, The Baltimore Work Force Investment Ward and the Harbor City High School. So, it really expands educational options for out-of-school youth.

The final point that I would make in an area where I would like to see some leadership from mayors, but again, it is about a citywide approach, offering the assistance of municipal resources. There are all sorts of funds that can be used creatively. Most of them are small pots of money, but they need to be creatively combined to really serve the population well. Parents, community development funds, block grant funds, health funds, law enforcement funds, homelessness funds, general revenue and we need to think much more creatively at a city level about some of those resources, even the smaller pots.

I will give you an example, which is not a city example, it is a county example, but I really think that it is applicable to cities, an analogy. In Montgomery County, Ohio, the county administrator, a few years ago, realized no one was responsible for dropouts until they committed a crime or had a baby, as she puts it. I am quoting Deborah Feldman, who is a Montgomery County Administrator and she realized that she did not want to be tearing at the back end, she wanted to be tearing at the front end and that it was really important to serve this population and it was the right thing to do and it would cost her less, ultimately. So, she has convinced the county to provide \$500,000 as a grant, each year, to support the Sinclair Fast Forward Center, which is a centralized dropout referral center in Dayton, Ohio. It is part of a large collaborative effort with Sinclair Community College, the city, a lot of the local school districts and some community based organizations, as well as the business community as well. There you have it.

MOORE: Thanks for that great rundown. Skip and Scott, I thought perhaps you could give us your perspectives on what you would suggest for other cities about the roles of people in your shoes, Skip, as a city manager, what roles they could take on or what you would recommend for mayors and, similarly, I use Corpus Christi as an example of a place where the city government and the school districts have agreed to work together, but what you would recommend about getting that kind of working together started?

NOE: Scott, do you want to start?

ELLIFF: Yeah. Let me give you a specific example about something that we are really excited about here, because we know that truancy is really a gateway behavior to students dropping out. We have, this year, initiated a program with the city and also with our county courts that handle our truancy cases, where we provide the folks at the city and the county with viewing rights to all our student information, in terms of grades, absences, enrollment, etc. So,

we developed inter-local agreements with the city and with the county and then had our technology departments work together so that when students show up in court, the judges are not having to rely on outdated information that is contained in some sort of folder somewhere, they can actually go online and see, as of that day, what the student's attendance record is and information about their grades and their behavior as well. We were able to accomplish that because of the cooperative working relationship that we have with the city and the county as well.

NOE: Yeah. See I think we really have not spent much time, Andrew, talking about the juvenile assessments and the juvenile court and then tying it into the school districts. We created the juvenile assessment center, I guess, five or six years back, as a way to try to deal with truancy early. Basically, every juvenile offense goes to a separate juvenile court that is tied directly and physically to an assessment center with a designated staff that actually case manages each situation in dealing with the family problems in each circumstance and monitoring this over time. We are actually to the point where the recidivism rate has been almost nil, as a result of the early intervention in these kinds of behaviors and working with the school district to have that real time data on school performance has been very useful.

I think that a lot of it is about collaboration. Collaboration was mentioned earlier. I think mayors and city managers have the opportunity from a public standpoint to provide focus on the issue that can sometimes end up on the back pages of the newspaper, get them off of page 12 and onto page one. I think that kind of focus is important. I think that we can assist in trying to provide community support. Have offices call to the business folks and community groups to come together and collaborate on an issue. We tend to get a good response and I think that we have been able to put together those kinds of collaborative efforts, but we also spend every day looking for opportunities for us to each get better by helping one another and there are lots of days where every day that folks at Scott's level and my level talk about how we can collaborate on services, whether that is the latchkey program that we collaborate on or the school library partnership that we are going to work on in one of our local middle schools. A lot of it is about those every day relationships.

MOORE: George, thanks for underscoring that. I wanted to make a little bit of a transition to say get back to this topic that we were talking about earlier of results and measurement of success. I am curious to hear you talk, Skip and Scott, about what key indicators you are paying attention to. How will you know if these new initiatives you have launched are succeeding and what will help you understand that you are really on a roll and ready to scale up a particular approach?

ELLIFF: Well, obviously, we are looking at attendance, completion rate, achievement results, the sorts of things that school districts would typically look at in measuring the effectiveness of any of the programs that would be implemented. I will tell you that we are at a bit of an advantage in Texas. When I was hearing Nancy talk about the information management program in Philadelphia, we are at a bit of an advantage in Texas in that we have a statewide public education management system that tracks every student in the state by a unique identifying number, so, when a student leaves our school district and goes to another, we are able to insure that they are enrolled and have not dropped out and as a result, the state has gotten a lot

better about providing us with data, not only on annual drop outs but four year longitudinal drop out data. So, we do look at that information in measuring the success of our programs.

Moody High School, the comprehensive high school that is now structured around five distinct learning communities, the community that they established first, the Health/Science Academy had a 100 percent graduation rate last year with 100 percent student acceptance to college. We are very proud of that and they are doing a great job. We hope to see similar success in the other smaller communities at Miller as well. As I mentioned earlier, collegiate high school has the highest attendance rate in the district and we provide no transportation to that program. Now, collegiate high school is a district charter school, meaning that our board of trustees granted them a charter, but they have a number of performance measures that they have to meet in terms of achievement on our state mandated testing system, on attendance, on completion, on matriculation, on time. So, there are a number of indicators that we would be looking at as a function of the charter agreement that they have with our district, to be able to operate on the Delmar campus.

MOORE: Thanks, Scott. Nancy, what have you been seeing in the way of indicators and success measures that other cities are using?

MARTIN: I will provide one example and that is increased enrollment. So, that is an indicator of success and dropout recovery. In Portland, Ore., where they have documented the number of struggling students and former out-of-school youths, served by the community-based organization (CBO) run high school. They have seen a real increase in their total enrollment and their CBOs along with the district have really documented what it has meant for the arrangement that they have. In Portland, Ore., the school contracts with out 20 different community-based organizations to offer high school programs for struggling students and out of school youth. So, the CBOs are contracted to the public schools and, in fact, I would argue that there are so many charters there now because of that, that longstanding relationship. So, there they have seen an increase in enrollment.

They have been able to document 2,392 high school students were served by the CBOs in the years 2005 and 2006, which increased the total number of high school students in the Portland public schools from about 12,500 to close to 15,000. So a close to 17 percent increase. Of those students that were served by CBOs a good portion were brought back into the district. In other words, they were serving some of the struggling students who were almost dropouts, but the vast majority that they were serving were students that who were out of the district. They had dropped out. They were not in school so they were really brought back in. It has been a really effective strategy so that CBOs working with the schools in Portland to really document this closely over the years, to show the really value added in that relationship.

MOORE: I do not want to go forward assuming that there is never a hurdle or a roadblock to progress and so, I wanted to be sure to ask from the perspective of Corpus Christi, or from your perspective, Nancy, your familiarity with other cities, what are some of the challenges that cities may expect if they undertake a dropout recovery initiative and what are some examples of ways to get past hurdles that may arrive.

NOE: Just a couple of comments, Andy. I think that many of these problems are rooted in social challenges, whether that is drug and alcohol abuse, family abuse, all kinds of issues, homelessness within the community to give rise to some of the issues and to me one of the biggest challenges that we all face is the fact that this is long term work. There is no short term fix. There is nothing that will produce instant results tomorrow and you really have to be committed to the long term and so that means you have to work on creating permanent structures and real change. We have been very fortunate, I think, in Corpus Christi to have a local education fund that Scott was actually instrumental in getting started that helps, in a permanent structure, to be an external group to prod us all on to continue to focus on improving the quality of our outcomes.

MOORE: Thanks. Scott, anything else to add about challenges and overcoming hurdles?

ELLIFF: Well, you know, in our particular community, a challenge is that we have so many school districts within one city and so the way to overcome that, as I think Skip has said, is to make sure that the channels of communication are there and that you actually have to be intentional about putting structures in place so that the leaders of all of these different districts and the city government and county government, that all are having an opportunity to come together and talk. So, I think it is really about being intentional about putting those structures together so that communication is not a happy accident, but a strategic act.

MOORE: Nancy, any observations from your look across many communities about challenges?

MARTIN: Certainly. I think one of the biggest is it is a real challenge to admit that this is a problem that is not the fault or the responsibility of one system alone. So, you know, yes, districts need to be encouraged to take responsibility for all students of high school age, not just the ones that are the two thirds that, depending on the community, that show up at school regularly, but districts cannot be expected to solve the problem alone and until you get a situation like it sounds like you have in Corpus Christi, where there is some understanding that this is a community-wide problem, you just cannot get to the point of sharing the information that needs to be shared that did the work or collaborating on any number of fronts to make a difference. So, I think often districts feel attacked for the high drop out rates and that those who are willing to take an honest look at the numbers, and end up forwarding that information, need to find that they are not attacked and that they are, in fact, embraced by the community and encouraged. That is a real difficulty.

I would also argue that I think it is really hard for us to think outside the box when it comes to high school and that is what we need to be doing. We need to be providing more options and more flexibility to all of our young people, really. So, things like multiple pathways to a recognized credential as they are working on it in New York City, the department of education there is really trying to ... you know, with such a large district, they have the luxury of being able to come up with fine tuning all sorts of different types of programming, whether it is for overage, under-credit students who are on the brink of dropping out to the full range of struggling students and dropouts.

We need to be looking at things like flexibility around time. By that, I mean open entry and open exit structures, so that students start when they are ready and finish when they are done, not September you start and June you are done. Also, flexibility around the day, you know, so we have different times of the day that students can start and stop the school day and also compressed and extended high school programs. Some students are going to take longer. We know that four years is not a reasonable goal for all students and some are going to whiz through and be done in three and a half years.

We need to provide opportunities for dual enrollment in post-secondary institutions. I mentioned earlier the Gateway to College model, in Portland Community College. We need to be providing opportunities for credit recovery. In Jefferson County, which is Louisville, Ky., they are doing a great job of that. Schedule flexibility; evenings, weekends, year round schools. Gonzalo Garza High School, which is part of the Austin Independent School District in Austin, Texas, not only lets students start and stop whenever they are ready to start and stop and they go out for coffee often and then come back, but they are all a year round program, so they are really meeting the needs of some students with that flexibility. Also, the daylight/twilight high school which is in parts of the Trenton public schools in Trenton, N.J., they are offering young people and adults a second chance at high school by opening their doors to three school days, from 7:30 in the morning till 7:30 at night and they accept students year round and, at this point, daylight/twilight has about 500 graduates a year, which has basically doubled the amount of diplomas that Trenton public schools are awarding each year.

MOORE: Great example, Nancy. Thanks.

MARTIN: I would like to make one final, quick comment about that. I really think some of the excellent examples that we are seeing of programs that are into dropout recovery or maybe it is struggling students that are preventing students from dropping out when they were about to. They are really pushing the envelope in a variety of changes that we should be considering for all students. I really think that there is a lot of information for a large high school reform discussion to be mined from dropout recovery programs. I bet that Corpus Christi would probably say that their schools are now better for all students, not just those who are struggling or dropping out as a result of some of the reforms that they have made in the public schools there.

ELLIFF: Absolutely. This is Scott speaking. One of the things that we are really looking forward to is seeing the results on our state achievement tests at Collegiate High School, where we know that their instructional approach has not been a drill and kill test preparation approach, a real higher order thinking approach to teaching and learning. We are really excited to see what their results are going to be, because we think that is going to be a lesson for the rest of our system.

MOORE: I wanted to take a few minutes with our resource people and reflect back on questions that we are getting from the field. One cluster of questions has to do with how dropout prevention recovery efforts can take account of the special needs of young people who are involved in the social services system or homeless or involved in the courts. Do you have some particular experience that you could reflect on with those young people?

NOE: I will give you a couple of examples of what we do here in Corpus Christi. We actually have a person on our staff who is a coordinator for homeless student services and she actually coordinates all sorts of services for students and their families for getting them vouchers for clothing or school uniforms to linking them up with other social service agencies in the community. We also have a very strong communities and schools program. Communities and Schools is a nonprofit organization that provides caseworkers in our schools that are funded through Title I. So, they have been very strong partners with us for a number of years.

MOORE: Does that bridge over, Scott, into any of your city government connections, the way you are trying to serve the young people with special needs or public system connections?

ELLIFF: Well, to the extent that we are always looking in both the Communities and Schools Program and with Ms. Reyes, our social worker for homeless services, certainly, they are always looking for whatever the right connection is for them and if that means connecting them with the city/county health department or with other services provided by the city or county, then they do that.

MOORE: Good, thanks. Nancy, any examples, one or two examples that you might call upon from around the country, ways that local governments and the school districts have focused in on dropout recovery and prevention for young people who are involved in these social service systems?

MARTIN: Well, I would say that in Portland, Ore., there are a number of programs serving homeless youth and they are very well coordinated with other entities in the city to make sure that young people are brought back into education, so Avenues for Youth is a homeless youth program in Portland that they have school from 9:00 A.M to 12:00 noon. They coordinate with the Portland public schools and also with higher education. They are not a full high school program themselves, but as part of their programming, after getting young people stabilized in their living situation, pretty quickly, part of the program is that you are doing some school work each morning, to get that back in as part of their routine and they are closely collaborating with the district around that education component.

I would say more generally that some of the better examples of so called alternatives schools, schools serving struggling students and those who have left in the past, really understand. They are really kind of tipping the equation for the teachers and what the adult staff are providing. Shifting the ration of sort of compiling support, you know, a higher level of that with the students so that, you know, often teachers are considered resource specialists, you know, different kinds of names and titles. Yes, you are part of my education and you are also part of all the different things going on in my life and that is tied in with a much lower student/teacher ratio and really leads to somewhat of what was being mentioned in Corpus Christi as a community youth school type of model.

MOORE: There is another small sort of cluster of questions and for folks listening, we are not going to be able to touch on all of the good questions that have come in from the field, but there is a small cluster asking about one connection that exists out there, is that mayors typically

have appointment power to the local work force board, but the question really is do local work force boards figure into these joint efforts at dropout prevention and recovery?

NOE: At least in Texas, I know that the mayor actually has a very limited role, in the regional workforce operation. It is the area, I know, however, that the mayor and council are in the process of placing some additional focus on a going forward basis. In fact, looking at a comprehensive community wide analysis of all the programs and a suggestion that we have a multiyear strategy to address our work force issue and our work force group has been very cooperative in working on that initiative.

MOORE: Nancy, do any examples come to mind to significant involvement of either the local work force boards or more broadly the community of folks that pay a lot of attention to work force issues such as employers or other job related resources?

MARTIN: Well, I mentioned before, I would say in Baltimore, there is a heavy involvement of the workforce board. But I would argue that even there, it is iffy. There are not a lot of workforce dollars aimed at youth and youth are not getting workforce support. Even if they have a lot, they will tell you no. So, if you want to have leverage of those dollars you need to be hooked into what is going on with the public schools and the efforts of the mayor's office and other community efforts at this population, which is, again, potentially a wonderful part of the workforce or potentially not in the workforce at all if we neglect them. So, I would say that places where workforce boards have been much more hooked in with other youth-serving systems to do some of this mingling of funds as possible, are getting a lot more bang for their buck, since there are not very many bucks.

MOORE: Thanks. Scott, anything to add on this front about collaboration with workforce agencies and programs?

ELLIFF: Well, we do a number of programs, our district does, with our local workforce board, not necessarily around dropout prevention though, but they certainly have been great partners with us.

MOORE: Okay, thanks. So, as we near the end of our hour, I wanted to give each of our resource people a chance to just say what one or two key pieces of advice would you give to someone in another city interested in taking a strategic approach to reengaging dropouts? Whether it is where to start, what goals to set, who to involve and who might lead such an effort. So, we are interested in your perspective on that, based on your experience, Skip, Scott and Nancy.

NOE: This is Skip. Just a couple of comments. I would say that I think that one of the things that has been instrumental in our success has been making sure that we take a very broad approach to involvement. We literally reached out and involved every segment of our community in the forums and the engagement process that we put together and having a broad approach to involvement, I think, has been important. I think having commitment on the part of

our case, the superintendent and the school board, all the superintendents of all of our districts in this ongoing dialogue has been very useful.

One thing we have not spent much time on, but I think has a whole lot of potential for us has been the engagement of the business community. Part of the success that I think we have seen with the smaller communities at Moody has been a direct result of the intense effort that the administration has there to engage the private sector, our local businesses, in the curriculum, in what happens in the classroom and in the outcomes at the end. I think that has been very important to that success.

ELLIFF: I will add to what Skip said. I think one of the things that we did in the beginning that turned out to be pretty important in moving our work forward was recognizing that everybody thinks that they know what the answer is to the dropout problem. They think there is an answer to a problem, and we had to start by letting people get that out. So, our very first forum was about people's perception of why students drop out of school and until we allow all of that to be sort of put out on the table, then we could come back with what research tells us about why students drop out and why it is complicated and not simple. We knew that all we would continue to get was a lot of background noise that sounded like blaming one system or another. So, we felt that it was important to start by letting the players put out there what their perceptions were and kind of clear the base of all that noise.

Another thing that I would say is important, in addition to all the collaboration that Skip has mentioned, we did involve students, actually hearing from them, about why they left school or why they felt like they were on the verge of leaving school and found that often times their perceptions were very different from the grown ups in the community. So, hearing that student voice was very important as well.

MOORE: Thanks. And Nancy, quickly, any advice that you would give to cities setting out on reengaging dropouts?

MARTIN: Yes. Well, I think there is a tendency to look at only dropout prevention and fail to address the need for well-lit pathways back into education and employment training for those who have dropped out of school. So, my advice would be to keep remembering that this population is very important. Yes, it is hard, just educating the ones that are still in school and that is the tendency to say, "Well, I can't even deal with these kids." But we really need to focus on those who are not making it in our current systems. There is really ample evidence that they and we as a society at large, will really pay dearly if we do not do that. So, I would like to put a plug for making sure that we are not looking simply at dropout prevention, even though, obviously we would love it if that is all we had to do.

MOORE: Great. So, I would like to once again thank our great resource people for helping build out such a good set of evidence here for the many aspects of a community-wide strategy to reengaging dropouts, whether it is leadership or promoting the right kind of collaboration, drawing upon resources from multiple angles, establishing a strategy that is broad and deep and establishing a means of good communication between and among systems. All of these themes that have been sounded again and again in today's call. So, thanks for explaining that all so clearly and thanks to our folks around the country who are listening and participating with your

questions. If you have additional questions, you are welcome to send them in to me, moore@nlc.org or karpman@nlc.org and we will try to make sure that good information gets posted or referred to you to help get your questions answered.

We will continue next month with another in our ongoing series of audio-conferences. Our concerns at the Youth, Education, and Families Institute extends from teens to tots and beyond. So, on Thursday, April 19th, at 4:00 P.M. Eastern Time, the topic will be, "Supporting School Readiness, A Critical Economic Investment for Cities." Please continue to check www.nlc.org/iyef for additional resources. The *Whatever It Takes* report is available at www.aypf.org and again, we thank you all for your participation and our resource people for great information today. See you next month.