

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES TO CREATE WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

IN WASHINGTON, DC

Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D.



# WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DC YOUTH

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## Foreword

Today's youth often face barriers that impact academic achievement and the securing of stable employment, as many are focused on surviving rather than thriving. While the main goal of DOES-administered youth programs is to connect participants to potential long-term employment as they complete their studies, youth often seek seasonal employment or short-term jobs that provide for needs in that moment. Dr. Toldson's report offers insight into how we can begin to shift the tone towards empowering youth to become their own advocates in educational spaces. This will be the groundwork that can ultimately lead youth to not just obtaining jobs but thriving in careers.

In 41 years, the District of Columbia's Mayor Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP) has evolved to include: scholarship opportunities that enable youth to invest in their post-secondary endeavors; innovative technology advances toward virtual engagement with program specialists and their employer; and financial literacy and professional development education. The program has cultivated key partnerships with District and federal government agencies, local businesses, major corporations and community organizations. MBSYEP has become the flagship workforce program for youth, with other major cities looking to DC as a model for summer youth employment program success.

The release of the report comes at a critical time. The nation is navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated the employment needs of residents, especially. However, in order to ensure long-term successful outcomes and break generational cycles that pose as challenges for our youth, strategic and innovative programming must continue to evolve.

I am proud of the progress DOES has made in impacting the District workforce by training residents to compete for in-demand jobs in emerging and growing industries. Dr. Toldson's work shines a light on the complexities of being a youth today and the challenges they face, while forcing stakeholders to examine our approach to providing services that position our young workforce for sustained success – a thoughtful approach for a complicated time.

***Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes***

Director, DC Department of Employment Services

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## Executive Summary

### PART 1: CIRCUMSTANCE AND CONTEXT

Youth between 16 and 24 years old make up 18 percent of the global population—an estimated 1.1 billion young people (Anderson & Nieves, 2020). Despite their high population, youth are still disproportionately affected by high unemployment. Gainful employment is especially important for ethnically and racially diverse youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. When the summer employment program was founded and developed by Marion Barry in 1979, his main idea was to help adolescents and young adults' transition from education programs to their career choices. Four decades later, the vision held by Barry has spread and thrived. Therefore, this report discusses the strategic priorities that can be used to create workforce opportunities for young people in Washington, DC.

Conceptually, youth employment is an important conduit between school and the permanent workforce. School experiences that are mostly positive or mostly negative can influence a young person's engagement with youth employment and the subsequent permanent workforce (O'Higgins, 2010). Theoretically, when the young person has positive experiences with school and meaningful youth work experiences, they have a better chance of delaying entry into the permanent workforce and performing at the highest level in professional work experiences. To the contrary, if a young person has negative experiences in school, followed by no or nonmeaningful youth work experiences, they are more likely to enter the permanent workforce prematurely, which typically leads to low-level jobs, underemployment, and unemployment. Therefore, the goal of youth employment should be to complement school experiences and prevent premature permanent workforce entry.

#### Economic Disparities

Black and Hispanic young people in Washington, DC, are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than White residents of the same age. Most young Black people who are employed work for the private for-profit sector. Only 8% of Black youth and 8% of Hispanic youth work for private nonprofit and charitable organizations, significantly less than the 17% of White youth who work for nonprofit organizations.

Nearly 1 in 4 young White residents of Washington, DC report an annual household income of more than \$200,000, compared to only 5.4 percent for young Black residents. Similar disparities exist for personal income, where young Black people are significantly more likely to report incomes of less than \$10,000 when compared to young White people.

#### Opportunity and Achievement

Graduation rates for African American students improved from 53% in 2011 to 64% in 2018; however, systemic inequalities are still evident on this indicator. The graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students are significantly lower than those of White and Asian students. DC public schools also have an achievement gap by gender. The current graduation rate among girls in Washington DC is 73% compared to 58% for boys.

40% of Washington, DC, residents between the ages of 15 and 24 are not enrolled in school compared with 27 percent of White DC residents.

### African American Male Youth

Compared to White and Hispanic youth, Black youth are less likely to be self-employed. To help African American male youth gain access to work opportunities, policymakers should institute programs that empower them.

Entrepreneurial and microenterprise programs can have a positive impact on the psychosocial and economic well-being of young men. Because of other social disparities, African American male youth may require tailored support for autonomy, risk avoidance, and engagement.

To create more gainful employment opportunities, researchers and policy makers must consider the counter-stereotyping identity of African American male youth. High-achieving Black students succeeded academically despite stereotypes, discounting the longstanding narrative that one's racial identity, in this case, the racial identity of Black students, negatively influences one's intellectual capacity.

Developing employment-support programs for African American male youth should involve the study of family dynamics and the way that these family structures have been impacted by historical factors (e.g., racial discrimination, mass incarceration).

While college education among young Black males has increased from 16 to 33%, issues persist. For example, White males who dropped out of school were still employed at higher rates compared to their Black counterparts, pointing to disparities in intentional workforce distribution.

Such research points to the need to develop initiatives that would focus on increasing academic achievement and labor market preparedness for African American male youth, creating community support for engaging African American male youth in early work experiences, and removing zero-tolerance school and arrest policies.

The empowerment of African American male youth should also involve a comprehensive model that would attend to student needs during elementary, middle, and high school. An availability of opportunities for African American male youth to meet with diverse representatives of their ethnic and social group is necessary to create an environment of engagement and an exchange of experiences.

## PART 2: LESSONS LEARNED

New York, Los Angeles, and Detroit have adopted diverse ways of dealing with youth unemployment. Washington, DC, can benchmark the three cities to improve their programs. Benchmarking will enable DC's leadership to understand the various challenges faced by young people and to prioritize strategies to address the challenges of youth unemployment.

### Promising Local Interventions in Washington, DC

For this investigation, we compared three nonprofit organizations with youth employment preparation programs in the District of Columbia: Alliance of Concerned Men, Beacon House Community Ministry, and So Others Might Eat (SOME). Agency characteristics were explored and executive personnel and team leaders were interviewed for this report. Qualitative data analysis revealed four primary themes and three secondary themes. The themes address agency strengths and needs, as well as the needs of the surrounding communities, against the backdrop of educational requirements and workforce professional standards:

Theme #1: Partnerships - discusses how strong relationships with the surrounding community agencies served as an organizational strength that drives success.

Theme #2: Professional Development and Adequate Resources - emphasizes the need for continuous



growth within career-centered initiatives for youth on the part of both the community and nonprofit agencies.

Theme #3: Education, College Preparedness, and Adult Learning - addresses a barrier that minority-youth-centered agencies face in that young Black men are not being prepared to enter the workforce or educational institutions due to the lack of support in their environments.

Theme #4: Mentorship and Social and Emotional Care Beyond Job Skill Training - highlights a driver to training quality community agency staff by challenging their candidates to develop a socioemotional understanding beyond the content knowledge.

Secondary Themes - brought more context and clarity to the primary issues facing youth-centered community agencies. “Agency Strengths” discusses various characteristics of the organizations and the initiatives that have served as positive factors in their efforts to advance their programs. “Agency Needs” discusses the need for more freedom, eliminating stigmatization of minorities, and financial support to adequately address the needs of the programs and the surrounding communities. “Parental Involvement,” discusses the challenges that community agencies face with retaining quality, trusting relationships with parents.

## PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

### Creating Youth-centered Employment Programs

Washington, DC, needs legislation and policies that are youth, race, and gender-centered; targeted; skill-focused; and innovative. To effectively empower young people, Washington, DC, must be very intentional and direct in the way they incorporate young people into organizations and society. Hence, the district should prioritize the following:

- ☐ Involve young people in the process of decision making
- ☐ Honor the voice of young people
- ☐ Understand and implement the ideas of young people in the policies
- ☐ Share adult privilege and power to make the community better for young people

### Focus on African American Males

Problems discussed in the literature require that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers examine the extent to which building employment support can reduce unemployment for African American male youth. When policymakers and community leaders collaborate on improving employment opportunities for African American male youth, they should consider essential elements of such a partnership: collaboration with employers to close the gap between the supply and demand of work, and support from intermediary organizations to identify more comprehensive tools and incentives for collaborative and supportive efforts.

educational factors play an imperative role in shaping the further success of African American male youth and future employment. The research calls for a demonstration of community responsibility that will further influence the preparation of African American male youth for education and employment. It is necessary that young children have the resources to become and remain engaged students and have the necessary skills to acquire meaningful and gainful employment. The fundamental goal of policies and programs should be to reduce the isolation of African American male youth within enclosed communities and minimize the causes and perpetuation of underlying racism that influence outcomes for this population.

## Closing the Opportunity and Achievement Gap

The programs initiated by Washington, DC, should focus on training young people and ensuring the programs help youth explore their talent, allowing them to become creative, and instilling innovativeness in them. However, the main question is how work-based learning can help in closing the achievement gap created by the talent gap in Washington, DC. The district can use the following strategies to close the achievement gap.

- ☐ Growing ideas using work-based learning
- ☐ Rebuilding marginalized communities, school reforms, and social and economic conditions
- ☐ Providing success opportunities for all youths by building communities
- ☐ Redefining youth success

## Critical Investment Areas

Washington, DC, has not effectively achieved its objective in reducing youth unemployment. Even though the district has implemented numerous programs to help with summer youth employment, there are still various challenges faced by the students. Also, only 56 percent of the students were employed in the summer of 2019, a low figure compared to other cities such as New York. The best practices and new strategies, when implemented, should ensure the quality of the programs is improved and more opportunities are created for the unemployed youth. The best practices include:

- ☐ Increasing employer engagement in the programs
- ☐ Encourage federal commitment to the programs
- ☐ Implement technology-focused programs to enhance innovation and creativity

## Conclusion

The summer youth employment programs have been in existence for decades. They are aimed at ensuring young people have access to employment opportunities during the summer holidays. However, with the changing trends in the job market, unemployment among youth has become a serious concern among lawmakers. In Washington, DC, youth unemployment has caused concerns. The existing programs cannot effectively address the high unemployment rate, and this has created the need to implement strategies and methods to ensure the district benefits from the available opportunities. In short, opportunities are often created for young people through these programs. Also, racial discrimination is a serious problem in youth employment. Because of the economic inequalities among marginalized communities, African American youth are at a disadvantage in getting full employment. The employment opportunities are also limited for marginalized groups. In this regard, the programs should focus on or target marginalized communities such as Latinos, African Americans, and other racial groups that are considered marginalized. Therefore, improving programs in this area is necessary to ensure full employment for young people in Washington, DC is achieved.





## PART 1: CIRCUMSTANCE AND CONTEXT

### Introduction and Background

Youth between 16 and 24 years old make up 18 percent of the global population—an estimated 1.1 billion young people (Anderson & Nieves, 2020). Despite their high population, youth are still disproportionately affected by high unemployment. However, this issue does not receive adequate attention, and the severity of the problem often goes unrecognized (ILO, 2016). According to O’Higgins (2010), the problem of labor market entry among young people is inextricably linked to education.

The Center for Labor Market Studies (CMLS) testified before the Congress of the United States that youth employment in the summer of 2008 was extremely low. Only 34.2 percent of young people in the U.S. were employed at the time (Sum et al., 2008). More programs have been implemented to increase employment opportunities for American youth, and youth employment has increased steadily over the years. According to Brandtner, Lunn, and Young (2019), approximately 21 million youth aged between 16 and 24 years were employed in July 2019, giving an employment-population ratio for young people of 56.2 percent. Even with the increase, many youth still face the challenges and experiences of disproportionality in the employment sector, and this is an issue that federal, state, and local governments need to address.

Gainful employment is especially important for ethnically and racially diverse youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Employment rates are associated with the capacity to sustain one’s livelihood and avoid social exclusion. Focusing on efforts to prevent unemployment and underemployment could help reverse the trend of social exclusion and create an active and productive workforce that would contribute to promoting positive social integration.

Four decades later, the vision held by Barry has spread and thrived. Many cities have now established summer employment programs for youth to ensure they have access to opportunities that enable them to build their careers. In Washington, DC, Barry’s vision has been implemented over the past four decades, resulting in a program that provides young people graduating from college with the opportunity to transition into the private sector and local and federal government agencies. The program also seeks to train young people on professional development and financial literacy. In short, Washington, DC, is taking measures to ensure they usher students into an effective and proper career path with programs that provide them with the skills they need to prosper in the job market (Moore et al., 2015).

Young people in America are different than adults within the employment sector. Many young people seek employment seasonally. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported in 2019 that young people either working or actively looking for jobs grew between April and July (Brandtner, Lunn & Young, 2019). This trend is seen every year, indicating that youth employment

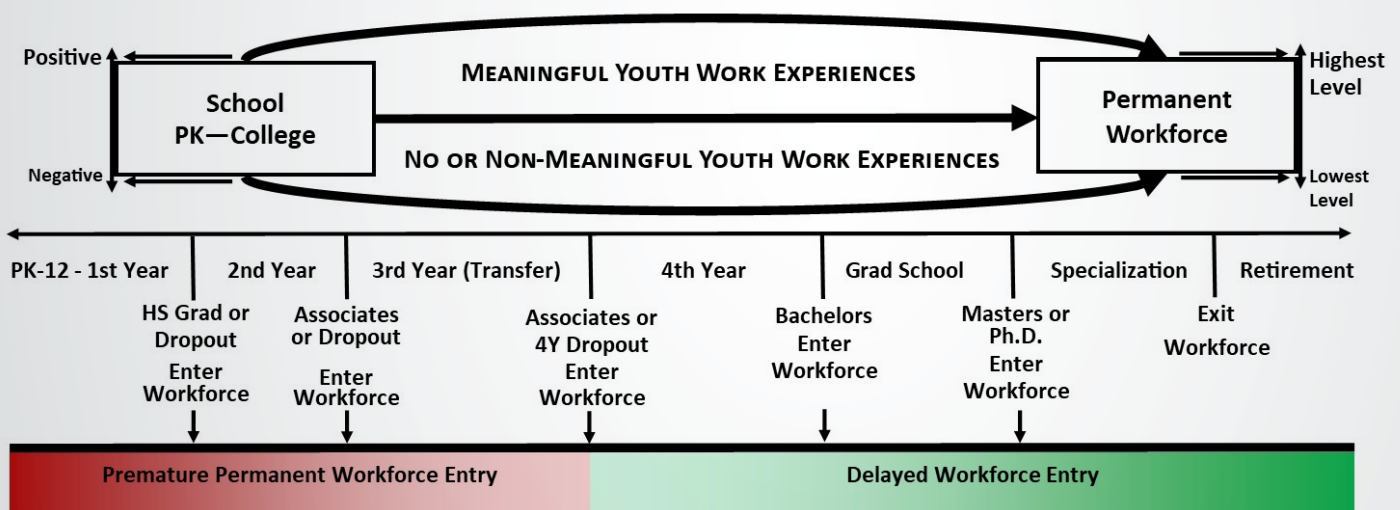
is seasonal. During the months between April and July, most colleges and schools close their institutions for holidays, and as a result, many students look for summer jobs. At the same time, many graduates also enter the labor market seeking permanent employment. Thus, programs designed to provide job or employment opportunities in the market should target both graduating and continuing students. In the U.S today, the BLS reports that the number of graduates seeking employment has increased over the years. Even though programs have been created to offer job opportunities for this vulnerable population, its size keeps growing, requiring more effective strategies toward this goal. For example, the BLS indicates that in the summer of 2019, the number of youths nationwide seeking employment increased by approximately 3 million. In Washington, DC, the district government is equally affected by this increase. Therefore, this report discusses the strategic priorities that can be used to create workforce opportunities for young people in Washington, DC.

*When the summer employment program was founded and developed by Marion Barry in 1979, his main idea was to help adolescents and young adults transition from education programs to their career choices.*

## Conceptual Framework

With the rising number of youths in the U.S., Washington, DC, can implement plans to empower young people to improve their ability to have access to jobs and careers. According to O’Sullivan, Mugglestone, and Allison (2014), youth empowerment is an effective way of solving youth unemployment. Ideally, youth empowerment is the process of encouraging and training young people to take control or charge of their lives and future. In Washington, DC, the number of youths graduating from college and looking for permanent employment has increased over the years. The most appropriate way to solve the problem is by building talent among young people and empowering them to use their talents and abilities to access careers and jobs. However, to empower the district’s young people, its leadership must evolve their strategies to cope with the increasing youth population in the city. Thus, the strategic priorities should economically empower young people to address the barriers of early engagement within the workforce.

**Figure 1 Conceptual model illustrating that positive school experiences + meaningful youth work experiences + delayed entry into the permanent workforce = (+) Outcomes, and negative school experiences + no or nonmeaningful youth work experiences + premature entry to the workforce = (-) Outcomes.**



Conceptually, youth employment is an important conduit between school and the permanent workforce. School experiences that are mostly positive or mostly negative can influence a young person’s engagement with youth employment and the subsequent permanent workforce (O’Higgins, 2010). Theoretically, when the young person has positive experiences with school and meaningful youth work experiences, they have a better chance of delaying entry into the permanent workforce and performing at the highest level in professional work experiences. To the contrary, if a young person has negative experiences in school, followed by no or nonmeaningful youth work experiences, they are more likely to enter the permanent workforce prematurely, which typically leads to low-level jobs, underemployment, and unemployment. Therefore, the goal of youth employment should be to complement school experiences and prevent premature permanent workforce entry.

*When the young person has positive experiences with school and meaningful youth work experiences, they have a better chance of delaying entry into the permanent workforce and performing at the highest level in professional work experiences.*

## Economic Disparities

Economic empowerment is an effective method of developing skills and abilities to access careers and jobs among young people. According to Orrell and Ouellette (2008), economic empowerment is an individual's or state's ability to act on or make decisions involving the allocation and control over financial resources. In Washington, DC, the economic empowerment consists of controlling and allocating resources aimed at ensuring young people have access to employment opportunities, including self-employment. The most effective way to address the challenges of unemployment, especially during the seasons young people are not in school, is by ensuring the district has allocated and controlled resources.

However, achieving this will require the district to develop and implement policies and district-level legislation that will support access and value-chain development. The district should develop appropriate financial structures and models that can enhance access among young people by providing them with the necessary resources they require to pursue their talents and skills. In short, the allocation and control of the resources should be aimed at providing young people with a chance to create their paths, supporting their entrepreneurial abilities and ideas, and ensuring the government creates a

conducive economic environment for their prosperity.

Also, racial inequalities are reflected in the employment sector. According to Wilson (2019), the unemployment rates among African American youth are now at 44.8%, which is the highest among racial groups in America. This unemployment rate is mainly affected by inability to access educational facilities and racial discrimination in the workplace. In a report done by Leonardo and Grubb (2018), African American workers are often left behind in full employment. Even though some have benefitted from youth employment programs, discrimination still creates disparities between African Americans and Whites. In short, the high unemployment rates among African Americans show discrimination and disparities among young people in America and indicate that young people in America still face racial discrimination in the job market.

Through programs that target young people in marginalized communities, Washington, DC, can help bridge the gap between ethnic groups in the job market by focusing on increasing opportunities for African Americans and enhancing the chances of them getting employment. This involves training the students or youth from the marginalized communities on the best ways to explore their talents.

**Table 1: Employment of African American, White, and Hispanic 16–24-Year-Old Residents of Washington, DC**

EMPLOYMENT	AFRICAN AMERICAN		WHITE		HISPANIC	
	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT
Private for-profit company	18,594	43.5%	19,104	53.0%	4,285	47.9%
Private not-for-profit, tax-exempt, or charitable organization	3,543	8.3%	6,383	17.7%	765	8.6%
Local government	2,968	6.9%	800	2.2%	243	2.7%
State government	888	2.1%	437	1.2%	54	0.6%
Federal government	1,693	4.0%	2,814	7.8%	459	5.1%
Self-employed - not incorporated	402	0.9%	935	2.6%	243	2.7%
Self-employed - incorporated	14	0.0%	100	0.3%	52	0.6%
Working without pay in family business or farm	42	0.1%	255	0.7%	0	0.0%
Total employed	28,144	65.9%	30,828	85.4%	6,101	68.2%
Not employed	14,566	34.1%	5,250	14.6%	2,846	31.8%
<b>TOTAL (AGE 16-24)</b>	<b>42,710</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>36,078</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>8,947</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

16–24-Year-Old Residents of the District of Columbia, American Community Survey, 5-Year Survey, 2014-2018.

\*Shaded figures are discussed in the report.



## WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DC YOUTH

*Black and Hispanic young people in Washington DC are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than White residents of the same age.*

Most young Black people who are employed work for the private for-profit sector. Only 8% of Black youth and 8% of Hispanic youth work for private nonprofit and charitable organizations, significantly less than the 17% of White youth who work for nonprofit organizations. The disproportionately small number of young people of color working in the nonprofit sector is concerning because these organizations receive tax exemptions based on public trust. Compared to White and Hispanic youth, Black youth are less likely to be self-employed. Local government is the only industry wherein Black youth are fairly represented in the workforce.

**Table 2: Household Income of African American, White and Hispanic 16–24-Year-Old Residents of Washington, DC**

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	AFRICAN AMERICAN		WHITE		HISPANIC	
	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT
<\$10,000	4,144	13.3%	1,658	8.2%	480	6.9%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	2,079	6.7%	562	2.8%	155	2.2%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	3,307	10.6%	597	3.0%	322	4.6%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	3,689	11.8%	1,152	5.7%	540	7.8%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	3,412	10.9%	1,933	9.6%	878	12.6%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	4,352	13.9%	2,308	11.5%	1,604	23.1%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	3,392	10.9%	2,030	10.1%	963	13.8%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	3,330	10.7%	2,904	14.4%	740	10.6%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	1,852	5.9%	2,151	10.7%	481	6.9%
\$200,000 +	1,690	5.4%	4,816	23.9%	795	11.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31,247</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>20,111</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>6,958</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

16–24-Year-Old Residents of the District of Columbia, American Community Survey, 5-Year Survey, 2014-2018;

\*Shaded figures are discussed in the report.

The household income of Washington, DC, residents age 16 to 24 can represent either the parents' income for dependent youth or the personal and/or partner income of nondependent young people. As Table 2 demonstrates, there are profound racial disparities in household income in Washington, DC. Nearly 1 in 4 young White residents of Washington, DC report an annual household income of more than \$200,000, compared to only 5.4 percent for young Black residents. Similar disparities exist for personal income, where young Black people are significantly more likely to report incomes of less than \$10,000 when compared to young White people.

## WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DC YOUTH

**Table 3: Personal Income of African American, White and Hispanic 16–24-Year-Old Residents of Washington, DC**

PERSONAL INCOME	AFRICAN AMERICAN		WHITE		HISPANIC	
	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT
<\$10,000	30,774	72.1%	22,770	63.1%	6,014	67.2%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	2,876	6.7%	1,768	4.9%	563	6.3%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	3,265	7.7%	2,629	7.3%	1,111	12.4%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	2,725	6.4%	2,110	5.8%	657	7.3%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	1,608	3.8%	3,304	9.2%	380	4.2%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	917	2.1%	2,852	7.9%	149	1.7%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	410	1.0%	433	1.2%	50	0.6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	70	0.2%	181	0.5%	17	0.2%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	34	0.1%	5	0.0%	0	0.0%
\$200,000 +	0	0.0%	26	0.1%	6	0.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42,679</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>36,078</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>8,947</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

16–24-Year-Old Residents of the District of Columbia, American Community Survey, 5-Year Survey, 2014-2018; \*Shaded figures are discussed in the report.

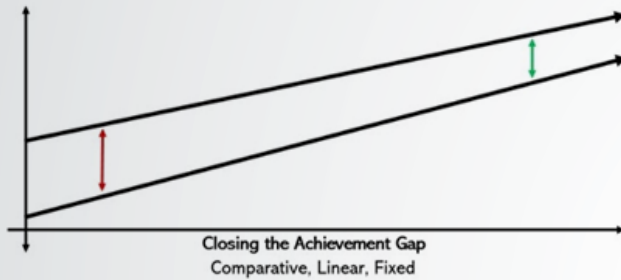
Nearly 1 in 4 young White residents of Washington, DC report an annual household income of more than \$200,000, compared to only 5.4 percent for young Black residents.



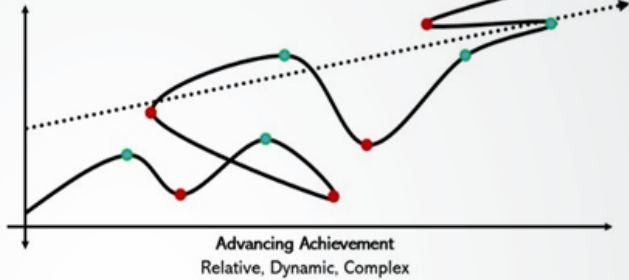
## Opportunity and Achievement

# The Achievement Gap is a Social Construct

**We are conditioned to do this:**



**When we should be doing this:**



We pervert the true character of achievement and marginalize Black learners when our primary objective is to close the achievement gap rather than to **ADVANCE ACHIEVEMENT**.

Even though Washington, DC, has established effective programs for young people, there are still statistical observations commonly known as the “achievement gap.” The racial and economic diversity are the main influences on the achievement gap in the district. However, to ensure the district secures a better future for young people in Washington, DC, the district must initiate programs and strategies that focus on achievement. Promoting higher levels of achievement among Black DC residents will increase the district’s tax revenues and GDP by improving the future earnings of young people. Therefore, the economy of the district is dependent on young people (Gelber, Isen & Kessler, 2016). Young people graduating from colleges provide the district with a working population that helps build the economy. For instance, the current generation of youth in Washington, DC, will achieve better living when they become adults if the opportunity gap is closed.

The data paint a bleak picture of the social, economic, and educational experiences of young Black people in Washington, DC, and the circumstances that frame their experiences. Although the statistics are sobering and reflect the realities of Black people in the district and urban areas around the country, these numbers do not represent the experiences of all

Black youth. In order to promote their academic success and well-being, there is a need to go beyond the data to understand the various ways in which they are surviving, thriving, and demonstrating a level of resilience belied by the statistics.

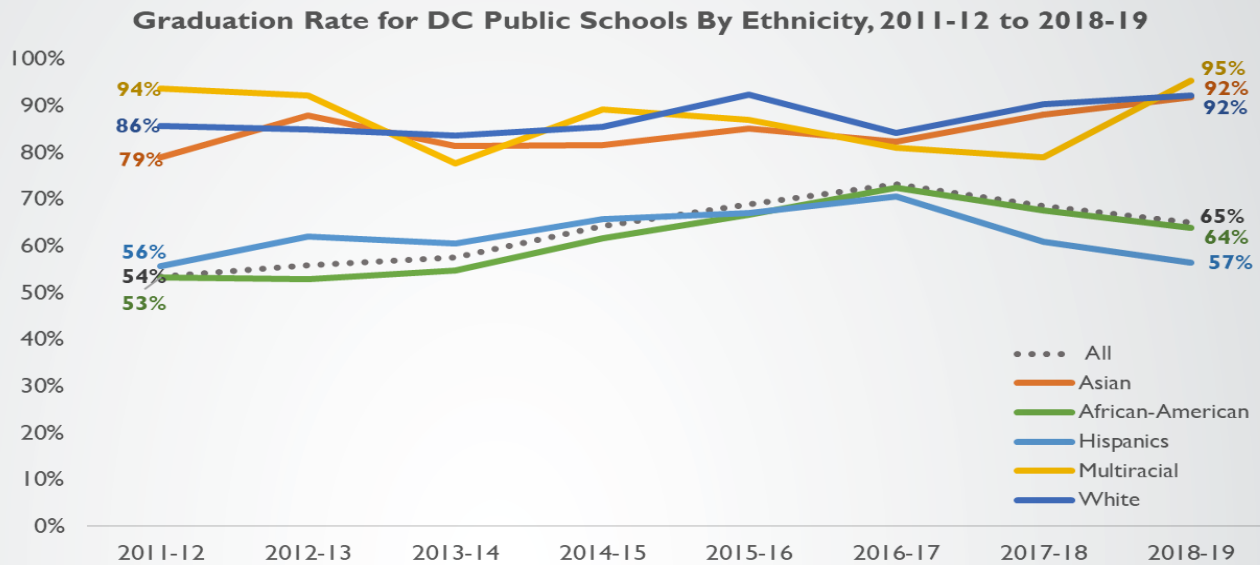
Based on the asset development model, racial socialization is a mechanism that enhances positive racial identity and strategies to deal with racial discrimination (Gaylord-Harden, Burrow & Cunningham, 2012). These strategies are important in shaping the racial identity of Black people. Young Black people in Washington, DC, are keenly aware of the problems facing their community. They and the adults who care for them are less clear about how to capitalize on the unique opportunities for character building, leadership, and civic engagement that germinate in imperfect living situations. In this view, assessing young Black peoples’ potential through the statistics cited is difficult. Youth employment programs can help young Black people redefine their personal and cultural standards of success so that education and work development can become less passive and abstract, and more affirming, relevant, and tangible. Youth work programs can also provide many of the skills and aptitudes young Black people need to achieve meaningful progress in school and beyond.

*Compared to White and Hispanic youth, Black youth are less likely to be self-employed. To help African American male youth gain access to work opportunities, policymakers should institute programs that empower them.*



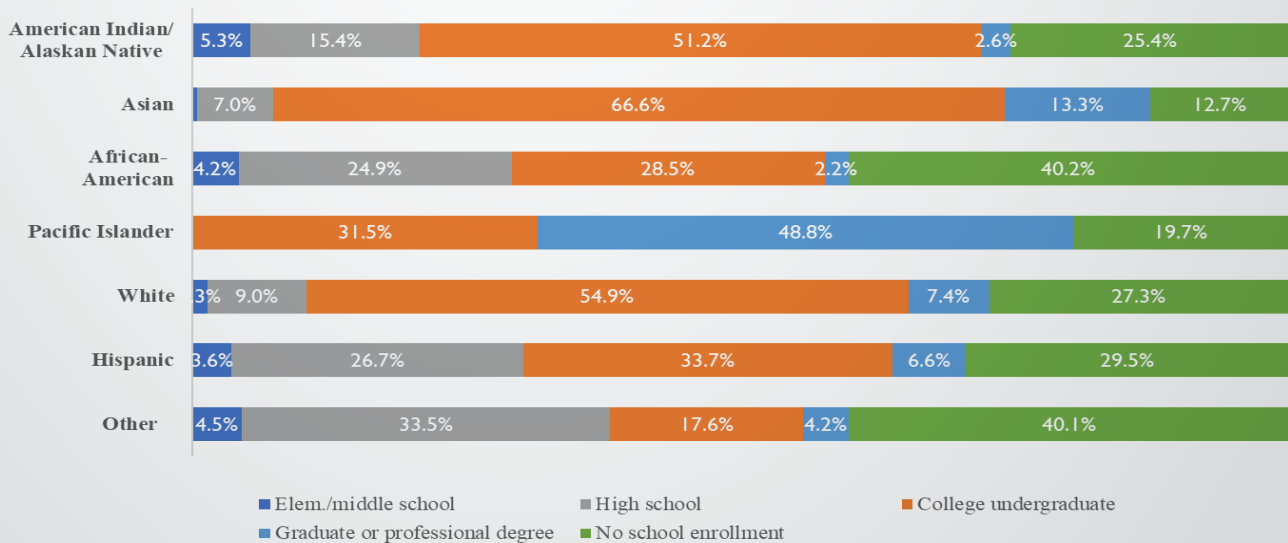
## WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DC YOUTH

**Figure 2 Graduation Rate for DC Public Schools By Ethnicity, 2011-12 to 2018-19; Source: DC Public Schools, <https://dcps.dc.gov/service/dcps-downloadable-data-sets>**



Source: DC Public Schools, <https://dcps.dc.gov/service/dcps-downloadable-data-sets>

The conceptual model connects meaningful experiences with youth work to positive experiences in school. Data from publicly assessable sources indicate that Black students, Black male students in particular, do not share the same positive experiences in school as their White and Asian counterparts. Figure 2 displays the graduation rates for DC public school students by race between 2011 and 2019. Graduation rates for African American students improved from 53% in 2011 to 64% in 2018; however, systemic inequalities are still evident on this indicator. The graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students are significantly lower than those of White and Asian students. DC public schools also have an achievement gap by gender. The current graduation rate among girls in Washington DC is 73% compared to 58% for boys.



Perhaps more concerning is the high percentage of young Black people who are not enrolled in school in Washington, DC. As Figure 3 demonstrates, 40% of Washington, DC, residents between the ages of 15 and 24 are not enrolled in school compared with 27 percent of White DC residents. Connecting this finding to the conceptual model, African American residents in Washington, DC, are more likely to exit school early and join the permanent workforce prematurely.



*Black males should be provided with support and care within educational sites to respond to their specific needs. Policymakers should develop strategies that promote self-efficacy, eliminate barriers that prevent access to educational services, and create opportunities for overall increased educational and social mobility.*

### African American Male Youth

African American male youth often experience severe limitations associated with employment. Therefore, the current study and policy proposal focuses on African American male youth who reside in urban settings. Improved policies targeting Black males will address educational and social limitations to their joining the workforce. Creating an inclusive workforce will benefit not only the economy but also industries that need to diversify their staff to welcome innovative ideas and increase productivity.

#### Personal and Emotional Factors

The impact of personal and emotional factors to creating workforce placements for young people implies the analysis of specific characteristics that influence choices and opportunities. To help African American male youth gain access to work opportunities, policymakers should institute programs that empower them. As stated by Jennings (2014), entrepreneurial and microenterprise programs can have a positive impact on the psychosocial and economic well-being of young men. Because of other social disparities, African American male youth may require tailored support for autonomy, risk avoidance, and engagement. For increased effectiveness when developing support programs, policymakers should attend to the specific needs of African American male youth.

Despite intentions of support programs to eliminate the influence of race related to personal and emotional factors, these factors play a significant role in preventing educational and employment opportunities. The Briggs (2017) study focusing on Caribbean Black youth found that there were counter-narratives embedded within the perpetuation of racial biases. Stereotyping prevented Caribbean Black youth from inclusion in employment and educational opportunities, which also impacted their personal and emotional well-being.

The use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) frameworks in the analysis of potential work and learning opportunities can also shed light on the diverse experiences of African American male youth.

Further studies on the effects of stereotyping on opportunities for Black males should also investigate physical, psychological, and emotional factors (Williams & Mohammed, 2009) because personal and emotional barriers to accessing employment opportunities are also connected to excessive stereotyping by employers. According to Philips, Dumas, and Rothbard (2018), Black employees may fear disclosing their experiences

to potential coworkers or employers because of continued stereotyping. However, to create more gainful employment opportunities, researchers and policy makers must consider the counter-stereotyping identity of African American male youth. Harpalani (2017) noted that high-achieving Black students succeeded academically despite stereotypes, discounting the longstanding narrative that one's racial identity, in this case, the racial identity of Black students, negatively influences one's intellectual capacity.

Additionally, the lack of employment opportunities for African American male youth can negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being. A report prepared by the Public Interest Government Relations Office (2018) for the American Psychological Association found that unemployment, in combination with other social barriers, can have an adverse effect on emotional well-being. Research showed that emotional health issues and job insecurity were closely related, leading to the emergence of further complications such as depression and anxiety.

These effects do not go unnoticed. African American males can “become increasingly aware of their restricted opportunities,” which creates high stress levels (Public Interest Government Relations Office, 2018, p. 2). Hence, policymakers should pay special attention to the links between mental health and unemployment to develop strategies that will not only provide work opportunities but also address negative psychological implications and effects of racism.

### Family Factors

Family factors also influence employment opportunities among African American male youth. The family unit represents large systems with multiple contributing components. Such factors include the composition of households, the education and employment status of parents, and parent-child relationships. Winship, Reeves, and Guyot (2018) studied the inheritance of poverty related to family factors, finding that there was an intergenerational cycle of poverty among Black males and communities, drastically affecting economic outcomes and ongoing family dynamics. Therefore, developing employment-support programs for African American male youth should involve the study of family dynamics and the way that these family structures have been impacted by historical factors (e.g., racial discrimination, mass incarceration) (Hurt, McElroy, Sheats, Landor, & Bryant, 2014; Winship, 2018).

*The lack of employment opportunities for African American male youth can negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being.*

Furthermore, low-income contexts create limitations to pre employment training and education. For example, a report by Shierholz, Davis, and Kimball (2014) noted that approximately a fifth of recent high school graduates were neither enrolled in further education nor employed. Much of the sample population within this study also experienced lower economic conditions, affecting their families' ability to provide additional and necessary support. As the job market declines, African American males are at a higher risk of being unemployed because of these intersectional aspects.

### School-Related Factors

Among the school-related factors that impact the rise in unemployment are school funding inequities and push-out disciplinary policies. Other factors include school curricula and pedagogy, the perceptions of young people about their schools, and their connections with teachers and instructors. The absence of the necessary level of education and skills limits the scope of potential workplace opportunities. Of the 3 million Black males aged between 16 and 24, 663 thousand either dropped out of a school or were incarcerated. Furthermore, the rate of imprisonment for Black male youth between ages 18 and 24 is 7–9 times the rate of their White counterparts (Harris & CLASP, 2013). Because 60% of employers will not hire formerly incarcerated citizens, the problem of unemployment is further exacerbated as African American male youth who have previously been incarcerated may not be able to access employment due to biases and other structural issues.

While college education among young Black males has increased from 16 to 33%, issues persist. For example, White males who dropped out of school were still employed at higher rates compared to their Black counterparts, pointing to disparities in intentional workforce distribution (Harris & CLASP, 2013). Larger economic issues impact these statistics as well.



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The great recession of 2008–2012 increased the unemployment rate more for Black males in comparison to other demographic groups.

Such research points to the need to develop initiatives that would focus on increasing academic achievement and labor market preparedness for African American male youth, creating community support for engaging African American male youth in early work experiences, and removing zero-tolerance school and arrest policies. Alternative strategies include but are not limited to community and counseling services.

Structural constraints can also limit the educational and social mobility of African American male youth. As mentioned by Baldrige, Hill, and Davis (2011), these structural constraints are usually compounded by the intersectional identity dynamics pertaining to social class, gender, and race. Researchers studied the impact of national community after-school programs intended to facilitate the positive experiences of young Black males within the educational context. Scholars suggest that Black males should be provided with support and care within educational sites to respond to their specific needs. Since the majority of complications with education and employment occur due to the complex and intersectional circumstances of African American male youth, policymakers should develop strategies that would promote self-efficacy, eliminate barriers that prevent the group from accessing the desired educational services, and create opportunities for overall increased educational and social mobility.

The school-related gaps lead to the emergence of male adults who are chronically underemployed and/or unemployed, have access to fewer healthcare resources, and experience higher rates of incarceration. The current graduation rate for Black male youth is approximately 47% compared to 75% for White and 57% for Latino males (Kafele, 2012). Disparities are magnified in urban contexts and large school districts (e.g., Miami, New York City, and Detroit) where graduation rates can be as low as 20% (Kafele, 2012). Lower levels of achievement, higher expulsion and suspension rates, and disproportionate percentages of referrals to special education are affected by culturally deficient guidance and support and a host of other environmental limitations that hinder successful learning experiences and outcomes.

Kafele (2012) advocates for an empowerment program that targets Black male youth and includes male mentors. The empowerment of African American male youth should also involve a comprehensive model that would attend to student needs during elementary, middle, and high school. An availability of opportunities for African American male youth to meet with diverse representatives of their ethnic and social group is necessary to create an environment of engagement and an exchange of experiences. Such empowerment programs could help mitigate the larger problem of unemployment.

*These programs are mainly aimed at alleviating individuals from poverty and ensuring individuals are provided with opportunities to help them and their communities flourish.*



## PART 2: LESSONS LEARNED

### Benchmarking Washington, DC, with Similar Cities Regarding Youth Employment

In the United States, different cities have devised different approaches to deal with the problem of youth unemployment. Washington, DC, has implemented various programs to help students access job opportunities during their summer holidays. These programs have not fully addressed unemployment, and there is room for improvement, especially when the district's leadership benchmarks with other cities that have done well in ensuring young people have access to employment opportunities (Robinson, Shanks & Meehan, 2017). Ideally, summer employment programs are critical in engaging young people and addressing unemployment among them, offering jobs designed to put young people on the path of career longevity. Even though Washington, DC, has embraced and adopted the vision developed by Mayor Barry, they still face challenges of youth unemployment and can learn strategies from other cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Detroit, that have adopted different approaches. Benchmarking will enable DC's leadership to understand the various challenges faced by young people and to prioritize strategies to address the challenges of youth unemployment.

#### New York

Summer Youth Employment Programs in New York have been effective over the years. New York's policies and youth-centered legislations tend to support the labor market. The employment market in New York involves both public employment and state-subsidized employment programs aimed at supporting youth activities. In New York, the subsidized programs are solely meant to empower young people by providing them with opportunities within government agencies and ensuring their ideas are taken into consideration when developing legislation (Sachdev, 2012). For instance, New York has invested in providing youth with summer employment opportunities. They have liaised with the private sector to establish programs aimed at ensuring young people within the city have access to job opportunities. For instance, the New York Summer Youth Employment Program 2020 is the largest youth employment program in the United States. It connects young people aged between 14 and 24 years with job opportunities. The program has been in existence for the past few years and has grown to become one of the most successful programs in America. The NYC summer youth employment program has unique features that set it apart from other programs across the country, and Washington, DC, can effectively learn from it to improve their own youth programs.

NYC Program Designs. The NYC summer youth program gives a different approach to their programs. In the summer program, the participants are allowed to explore their career pathways and interests, engage in the learning experience, and develop their civic, social, and leadership skills. Their participation in work-based opportunities and structured projects enhances their employment chances and prepares them for their future career paths. In the NYC summer program, young people are divided into two categories: the 14–15-year-olds and 16–24-year-olds (Sachdev, 2012). Each of the two categories has special projects and programs aimed at improving their leadership and social skills. For instance, the 14–15-year-olds participate in projects aimed at exploring their different career

*New York, Los Angeles, and Detroit have adopted different ways of dealing with youth unemployment. Washington, DC, can benchmark the three cities to improve their programs.*



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chances and opportunities. All of these programs are paid, and young people in this category are allowed to explore their skills and interests while also benefiting financially from the program. The program has helped enhance the leadership abilities of many students and youth, and this has improved how young people in New York approach their career paths and use the talents and skills to forge their way into their careers. For the 16–24-year-olds, the approach is different. For this category, young people can apply for paid summer jobs. In addition, they are trained in various aspects of their careers. For instance, young people receive training to manage their finances and in leadership, civic, and social skills. In short, at this point, young people are ready to take up new job opportunities.

Furthermore, the support given to these programs by the government enhances its success. The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has been actively involved in supporting youth programs in New York. For instance, they invest heavily in community-based programs and organizations. These programs are mainly aimed at alleviating individuals from poverty and ensuring individuals are provided with opportunities to help them and their communities flourish. However, the main target is often young people. With the programs designed to help young people enhance their social, civic, and leadership skills, the DYCD funds a wide range of high-quality community-based youth employment programs (Modestino & Paulsen, 2015), including after school, family support, community development, literacy services, youth services, and youth workforce development programs. The benefits of these programs include project-based learning, work-readiness training, summer jobs, and financial literacy training. In short, the programs are aimed at preparing the students for employment by instilling the civic, social, and leadership skills required to prosper in the job market. As such, compared to young people programs in other cities, the NYC summer youth employment programs are designed to produce leaders in the business world and youth that understand their potential and abilities in the job



market. Also, along with the training young people undergo in the program, the government liaises with many private sectors to provide employment opportunities for the students. The training received by the students in these programs is high quality and makes them eligible for employment in some of the largest corporations and businesses in the world.

The NYC employment programs are also skill- and talent-based. With the funding from the state and federal government, the programs focus on identifying students with innovative abilities and talents. In this age of technology, innovativeness is one of the essential ingredients of desirable employees within the business world. However, the NYC employment programs focus more on supporting the different ideas from young people. The investments provided by the state are often enough to support talent and abilities. The programs do not just focus on training young people and preparing them for employment, but also encourage innovation. In these programs, young people are also allowed to express their culture and beliefs. For example, the Manhattan Multicultural Summer Youth Program (MMSYP) is an organization that helps young people develop their talents and allows them to express their cultures. This program is not an employment agency, but an organization formed and funded to identify talents and abilities and ensure those are supported. It is through this

*Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the management has implemented online classes and training for young people in Detroit. This training is conducted to ensure young people keep social distance while continuing to learn.*



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program that young people can be allowed to explore their talents. For example, young people with talents for sports will join the program to enhance their chances of entering the sports world. The program offers specialized training for different talents and provides networks for young people to transition to their careers. Also, the program supports innovation. Many youths are creative and innovative. Notably, in the age of technology, supporting innovation can effectively help build lucrative career opportunities for young people. In this regard, the NYC summer youth programs do not just focus on positioning young people for employment, but also on encouraging them to explore their talents and innovative abilities.

**Policy Environment.** The policies in New York have created a favorable environment for young people to pursue their dreams and career objectives. Since the 1960s, NYC has funded employment for young people. For instance, between 2005 and 2008, the NYC summer youth employment program funded training and employment for young people aged between 14 and 24 years (Modestino & Paulsen, 2015). Young people were provided with paid jobs of up to seven weeks between July and August. In addition, NYC has established policies compelling it to fund the SYEPs within the city. They fund the administration of the programs, including the participants in their summer employment. For example, between 2005 and 2008, the average pay for young people within the employment program was \$1,403, which is relatively higher than that of other cities. (Modestino & Paulsen, 2015). With 10 percent of the funding coming from the federal government, over 40 percent of the total funds received by the SYEPs come from NYC, which demonstrates why their programs have been the most effective in the United States. The city has the biggest responsibility of ensuring the programs are running smoothly, and young people within the city are effectively caring for and involved in the programs. Benchmarking in New York will help Washington, DC, learn how New York runs its program with a focus on multicultural programs, employment programs, and policies to improve their SYEPs and to capture the fundamental issues affecting young people.



### Detroit

Detroit has one of the most progressive programs in the United States. Like New York, Detroit is focused on growing the talents and innovativeness of the young generation. Even though they offer employment programs and opportunities for young people, the programs initiated in Detroit are mainly talent-based. For instance, Grow Detroit's Young Talent (GDYT), one of the well-known programs in Detroit, has excelled in its purpose for years and has effectively empowered young people in the city to embrace and use their talents and abilities. The program was established to train youth aged between 14 and 24 on civic, social, and leadership skills (Schwartz, Leos-Urbel & Wiswall, 2015) and offers paid training experiences for young people. Like other programs from New York and other parts of the country, GDYT aims to provide the young people in Detroit with an opportunity to compete effectively in the increasingly competitive job market. Today, businesses focus on creativity and innovativeness when hiring. However, the emergence of technology has created massive opportunities for youth. Through the GDYT, Detroit has created platforms for young people to explore their talents and abilities, while also ensuring they remain competitive in the market. Since the GDYT was formed five years ago, it has grown to become one of the most progressive and effective youth programs in

America. The local government is the primary funding source; however, donors and the federal government also support the program.

What Washington, DC, can learn from Detroit's young people employment programs is the ability of the program leaders to adapt to the changing technological environment. According to Schwartz, Leos-Urbel, and Wiswall (2015), GDYT has been able to adjust to the current changing times. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the management has implemented online classes and training for young people in Detroit. This training is conducted to ensure young people keep social distance while continuing to learn. This has not been seen in other cities. It is also not new in Detroit: the city has employed online classes and training before to reach more youth. In Detroit, not all youth attend classes and training programs physically. Some of them are trained through online programs. In short, Detroit has taken advantage of emerging technologies to reach more youth. As a result, they have reduced their youth unemployment rates over the past few years. For instance, since the GDYT was formed five years ago, young people's unemployment in Detroit has reduced by approximately 16 percent. This demonstrates the commitment the city has in ensuring young people in the city have access to job opportunities and are

trained effectively to take advantage of their various talents and skills.

What Washington, DC, can also take from Detroit's approach is the ability to utilize emerging technologies to enhance young people's careers. Young people, particularly generation Z and Y, are technology fanatics (Schwartz, Leos-Urbel & Wiswall, 2015) and technology natives. In this regard, the use of technologies to enhance their training is an effective way of motivating young people and ensuring they take the programs seriously. Washington, DC, can use emerging technologies such as online platforms to reach more youths and students and address its high rate of unemployment.

## Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, youth programs are equally taken seriously. The city has implemented different programs to prepare young people for the job market. However, in Los Angeles, the programs mainly target young people living in poverty or those that face substantial barriers for their productive lives. As such, the programs aim to train these vulnerable youths to be ready for the job market and assist them with their career and educational paths. There are numerous similarities between youth programs in Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Programs from both cities focus on training students and youth to be job-ready, providing them with expert guidance and with resources and support, through subsidized and unpaid programs, that they need to become self-sufficient (Schwartz, Leos-Urbel & Wiswall, 2015). Also, the programs provide employment experience opportunities as well as job placement and search assistance. In short, Los Angeles and Washington, DC, have similar ways of approaching the unemployment issue. They

have implemented plans and programs and ensure they fully support the programs to help young people create better career paths for themselves. There have been numerous success stories in Los Angeles regarding young people programs. For instance, in a story told by Schwartz, Leos-Urbel, and Wiswall (2015), Rasika, one of the beneficiaries of LA's young people programs, was brought up in a low-income family. She dropped out of school to take care of her siblings. However, when she enrolled in one of young people programs, JVS SoCal's Youth Services, as an intern, she advanced her career. Today, she is a coach for young people in youth programs. The story is just one of the many success stories associated with LA's youth programs.

What Washington, DC, can learn from Los Angeles is the diversification of youth programs to target distinct categories of young people. In Los Angeles, numerous youth employment programs deal with particular categories of young people. For example, the WIOA Youth Program was established by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This program does not serve all young people in Los Angeles, but mainly targets youth aged between 17 and 24 years old. This category of young people is believed to be out of school and looking for permanent employment opportunities. Like other programs, participants receive several services including career exploration, job readiness, job training, and job placement. Many students or youth have benefitted from the program. It mainly focuses on ensuring the student's transition successfully from their educational training to their careers. Another WIOA-established youth program in Los Angeles is the Young People at Work program. This program mainly targets youth as young as 14 years old. Its main objective is to provide these young people with the experience they need to advance their careers. The program also trains the valuable skills youth can use to earn their income. The Santa Monica Community Youth Program also targets youth aged between 16 and 24 years. It operates within Santa Monica and mainly focuses on high school and college students from poor backgrounds who have substantial barriers to employment and for productive lives. The program trains and teaches students to overcome the different barriers to employment. In short, Washington, DC, can equally diversify their programs to capture different skills and aspects of students' challenges. Skill-focused programs will attract more youth and result in more effective youth programs in Washington, DC.





## Promising Local Interventions in Washington, DC

### Methods

**Participants:** For this investigation, we compared three nonprofit organizations with youth employment preparation programs in the District of Columbia: Alliance of Concerned Men, Beacon House Community Ministry, and So Others Might Eat (SOME). Agency characteristics were explored and executive personnel and team leaders were interviewed for this report.

We derived agency characteristics from our observations and analysis of data from interviews. Interviews were conducted by a research assistant under the supervision of a PI and consisted of a five-part questionnaire instrument presented one time per agency. The questionnaire consisted of eleven main questions and varying follow-up questions that covered program success and key components of employment programs. The collection period expanded over a course of 5 months within a 12-month period. Specific contributing factors that we explored with interviews included: program goal aspirations and achievements, demographics of populations served, program success, current methods and strategies to advance work experience and career exposure, challenges and barriers, and lessons learned for future advancements. This information gave us a context for the interview but was not reported in this report. Secondary data sources were also used to understand racial disparities in the communities adjacent to the participating agencies.

We interviewed executive personnel and team leaders at the three nonprofit agencies. Researchers engaged the research assistant to transcribe the interview data. Upon receipt of the interview transcription, the research team embarked on understanding the qualitative data through a series of activities including organizing the data, generating themes and patterns, searching for alternative explanations for the data, and writing the report. Researchers drew on this analysis to further identify preliminary themes and create coding categories.

Qualitative data analysis revealed four primary themes and three secondary themes. The themes address agency strengths and needs, as well as the needs of the surrounding communities, against the backdrop of educational requirements and workforce professional standards.





### THEME #1: PARTNERSHIPS

Agencies emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships between agencies, other youth development programs, and the community. One agency leader said, “We can build family support services, but we have to have the resources to be able to sustain it. Sustainability is essentially important.”

Another shared a similar sentiment, “We’re always looking for more community partners and I think that’s probably the most important thing to us expanding...”

Agency leaders reported having good relationships with other youth development programs in the community, “College Bound is a nonprofit and has different locations or sites (I guess host sites in DC is a more accurate way to put it) and we have a great relationship with them,” said one executive describing their relationship.

The interviewees attributed these strong relationships in part to the commonalities between community organizations and the demographics of the communities being served. Many executives commented on the mission to eliminate crime in the community and increase exposure to positive opportunities, stating that sharing resources with other agencies empowers the community. The executive and team leaders also noted being known in the community. Further, many of the staff members at the agencies are current or former members of the community.

Executive team leaders noted working with parents to understand the needs of their communities. In addition, agencies are engaging with the community with various education and mentor initiatives. With this, agencies reach within their own areas and provide scholarships, employment, and resources for young people. This sometimes results in those youth returning to participate as mentors.

Also, these initiatives target youth and young adults who are living in high crime areas and have been in the judicial system. Agency initiatives assist them in obtaining job skills and employment training. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen relationships, including efforts to increase parent involvement and provide practical support. One agency leader said, *“Everyone learns differently, and sometimes you have to find the proper way of teaching people things. With the homeless community, they may have not had a really traditional way of doing things, so just kind of finding the right curriculum for everybody.”*

### THEME #2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADEQUATE RESOURCES

The interviews revealed a consensus regarding the importance of professional development and access to adequate resources for continuous growth on the part of both the agencies and members of the community. A lack thereof is a downside as one agency leader noted, “They [young Black men] have to have the opportunity for a job that will be able to help sustain them.”

He goes on to express that without professional development opportunities for youth, communities will not view youth employment as a valuable contribution to the growth of the community, “It will never filter down.” The agencies have made efforts to provide professional development for community youth and young adult Black men. These opportunities help agencies develop growth plans and modules for working with young Black men to help them prepare for college or trade schools, prepare for living wage careers, and offer certificate programs. As mentioned above, the need for professional development and access to resources is two-fold.

One agency leader said, “space is an issue for us... we don’t really have a ton of funding for high school.”

She also discussed the gap in years of work experience among colleagues,

*“There’s some people who’ve been there for 15+ years and some people who’ve been there for less than 5, and so there’s a little bit of a difference in the way that the organization is run. A lot of things—there are a lot of differences.”*

Continued nurturing and support is necessary for novice agency workers, those who recently completed their studies and are entering their first years of nonprofit and community work. This continuation of the grooming process leads to preparing effective agency leaders.

### THEME #3: EDUCATION, COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS, AND ADULT LEARNING

Many young Black men are not prepared to enter college, trade schools, or the workforce due to the environmental barriers they face. As a result, young men's competitiveness as college and job applicants is thwarted. To address this, agencies have offered certificate programs, GED programs, adult learning classes for job skills, and mentorship programs that will enable young Black men to be prepared for college and living wage careers. Continued and targeted efforts are necessary as noted in this statement:

*"There are people who come in with a significant learning gap. You need at least a middle or high school level of reading and understanding math. Some people, they have a lot of difficulty. When you apply for a job and they see that you might not be as educationally qualified or you might not have your GED we have to, I mean—you kind of have to get through that barrier."*

Another shared a similar experience:

*"With a mentoring component, create the environment that will be conducive to who they are and what they're going through until they are able to take on the full responsibility of what comes with full employment."*

Further, earlier interventions are necessary. As one agency leader noted, "I started to focus more on ways for our kids to be more successful. I strongly encouraged a lot of our 8th graders to join the program, and I'll continue doing that going forward because there's a lot of exposure to colleges." In significantly distressed communities, it is difficult for young Black men to envision productive lives for themselves.

One agency leader stated that a substantial proportion of young Black men in these communities turn to street violence because "they basically conceptualize life to be in the fatalist structures that they have grown up in." There are several effective programs which address these issues, and community agencies should allocate attention to reviewing what successful communities are doing and then institute those effective practices within their respective communities, if feasible.

### THEME #4: MENTORSHIP AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CARE BEYOND JOB SKILL TRAINING

The agency leaders highlighted their shared mission to produce staff who are highly qualified to mentor youth in high-risk communities in the DC area. To accomplish this, it is imperative that mentors possess an understanding beyond the content knowledge to be truly effective. Moreover, in addition to college prep and career skills training, the agency leaders discussed the shared expectation that their mentors excel in areas related to social justice and socioemotional learning.

One agency leader explained,

*"we're really education focused—helping to support kids and their academic achievement, but we're also social and emotionally focused on their mental health and well-being as well...[we're] really trying to break that generational cycle of poverty for them through or in any and all areas."*

Mentors need to have a lot more socioemotional effectiveness, resourcefulness, and compassion, and a better understanding of the world and of diverse cultures.

A common strength of these community agencies is that they forge long-term mentor/mentee relationships. "Part of the sports program is huge into mentorship. So, these kids feel really deep connections to our coaches in terms of the fact that they've just been mentees for 15–20 years of their life, you know. And they keep in touch with them after [they leave the program] so a lot of them [students] come back and serve as volunteer coaches," said one agency leader. This ensures that mentors understand what it truly takes to create the kind of environment in which young African American males are inspired to learn.

## Secondary Themes

**Agency Strengths.** The agency leaders noted community strengths as well as program characteristics that enable success in quality work experience and career exposure. They also reported strengths through receiving support from other community agencies, maintaining good reputations among local businesses, involvement in city-led youth initiatives, and previous program members staying connected to their communities. One leader discussed how the agency utilizes a city-led initiative, “So we probably employ about 13 or so every summer. We generally employ our own students but they go through the Summer Youth Employment Program so they’re paid by the city. We are able to employ a lot of our program kids that we support.”

Another stated that their reputation with local businesses allows for more job opportunities for the people they serve, “we’re really respected in the community so that also helps getting people into the right spot.” Regarding support youth gain from staying connected in the community, one leader said, “They’re [graduates] still talking to our whole network—their teachers and advisors. They’re talking to the people that they did their internships with. So, the community is really tight and that really helps people get through.” The support received within the agency was attributed to the staff’s ability to find purpose in their work, “We feel like that’s because it gives us motivation and drive.”

Characteristic of the agencies is the quality of the planned programming that empowers individuals as they engage in the career-training experiences offered. When highlighting their program, one leader said:

*“Our number one goal is to end the cycle of homelessness. And what that usually looks like for us is we offer a lot of services for the homeless community, mostly in DC. Usually the foot in the door is often eating in the dining room, first. After eating in the dining room, people are usually more likely to get connected to the rest of our services. Whether that includes maybe going to the clinic.... A lot people come in and they don’t have an I.D. After our clinic, it usually leads to our center for employment training which leads to single adult family housing, senior housing and that’s kind of the continuum we try to get people involved in.”*



Often the individuals in these programs view mentoring as a way to give back to the communities from where they come. The agency leaders noted that they had great success in assisting graduates to obtain local job or college placements after the completion of the program. One agency leader said:

*“So, success would look like—I mean the most important thing is we want people to feel independent, but also be dignified in doing it and really be able to handle themselves and not need our services. The people that are in our center for employment upwards about 80% are graduating and moving on.”*

Another agency leader reported the success of partnering with another community agency, “College Bound has 100% graduation and acceptance into college rate. So yeah, they’re amazing and they give out scholarships. Every student gets a scholarship.”

**Agency needs.** Freedom, eliminating stigmatization of minorities, and financial support were emphasized as the current needs of the agencies. Agency leaders reported a lack of resources, such as adequate program space, which does not allow for a lot of freedom for these agencies to meet the needs of young people in the best way. One leader reported



that sharing space with other organizations has slowed down program development, “I want to have an actual high school program. The program that I talked about, where they employ our high schoolers to tutor our second and third graders, they take over what is designated the high school space for like, 5 days a week”, she stated.

Agency leaders discussed the need to destigmatize ideologies about the populations they serve. Changing how minority communities are seen can lead to understanding and providing for their needs. One leader commented, “There’s a negative stigma that goes along with being homeless, and that’s what all of our clients are. So I think people are working against that stigma.” He goes on to comment on internalized stigma about education, “We try to show them [adult learners] that a graduation with a certificate with our employment program is just as valuable as a college certificate.”

Financial support is a continual need at community agencies for addressing the lack of career exposure among youth.

One agency leader said, “part of what having a bigger or more robust program for me would be the career exposure and exposure to colleges.” She goes on to say, “I mean we don’t have funding for this right now and funding is always the big obstacle.”

**Parental Involvement.** The organizations in the DC area are facing challenges with retaining parent trust and involvement. The agency leaders attributed it to the need to establish relationships between parents and newer staff members at community agencies as changes within organizations are made. In addition, parents tend to have solid relationships with staff that have been with the organization for a long time, which often results in newer staff having a difficult time forging trusting relationships with parents. One leader said regarding her two-year status, “For me that’s a barrier because I don’t have a long-term relationship with kids. I’m still working on gathering the trust of the parents because when I came in there with a really big change they weren’t completely on board.”

## Summary

Interviews with community agency and organization leaders highlighted both the drivers and barriers to job preparation within the community. The first theme, “Partnerships,” discusses how strong relationships with the surrounding community agencies served as an organizational strength that drives success. The second theme, “Professional Development and Adequate Resources,” emphasizes the need for continuous growth within career-centered initiatives for youth on the part of both the community and nonprofit agencies. The third theme, “Education, College Preparedness, and Adult Learning,” addresses a barrier that minority-youth-centered agencies face in that young Black men are not being prepared to enter the workforce or educational institutions due to the lack of support in their environments. The fourth theme, “Mentorship and Social and Emotional Care Beyond Job Skill Training,” highlights a driver to training quality community agency staff by challenging their candidates to develop a socioemotional understanding beyond the content knowledge.

Several secondary themes brought more context and clarity to the primary issues facing youth-centered community agencies. “Agency Strengths” discusses various characteristics of the organizations and the initiatives that have served as positive factors in their efforts to advance their programs. “Agency Needs” discusses the need for more freedom, eliminating stigmatization of minorities, and financial support to adequately address the needs of the programs and the surrounding communities. “Parental Involvement,” discusses the challenges that community agencies face with retaining quality, trusting relationships with parents.

The themes discussed above allow for a better understanding of the challenges faced and successes of youth-centered community agencies/organizations in producing quality workforce and career-exposure programs. Moreover, they provide insight into the ways that youth-centered organizations can exert more leadership in their surrounding communities to help resolve some of the educational and workforce issues that plague African American males in particular and students who are underrepresented in general.

## PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

### Creating Youth-centered Employment Programs

Washington, DC, needs legislation and policies that are youth, race, and gender-centered; targeted; skill-focused; and innovative. Even though many programs are supporting youth employment, policies and legislations have not been developed and implemented to ensure all youth have access to employment opportunities. With the high unemployment rate among young people, the increase in the young people population in the job market will cause more problems for the district. In this regard, economic empowerment is a priority strategy to address impending problems. Through the development and implementation of legislation and policies in Washington, DC, the district should develop financial structures and models that are easily accessible to young people. However, to effectively empower young people, Washington, DC, must be very intentional and direct in the way they incorporate young people into organizations and society. Hence, the district should prioritize the following:

#### *a. Involve young people in the process of decision making*

Young people understand their challenges and problems more than the people in power. Developing legislation and policies that will support access and value-chain development requires the input of young people. For instance, young people understand the problems that affect them in the job market and the solutions that address these problems. Involving the young people in the decision-making process entails taking their input into consideration and creating room for the representatives of young people. Ideally, this may be done by conducting interviews and surveys in colleges and schools as well as obtaining the input of the students who have been in employment (Naccarato, Brophy & LaClair, 2013). The surveys should focus on understanding the challenges young people face when seeking employment or job opportunities, the new trends in society that may help in creating job and career opportunities for young people, and the solutions, from the perspective of young people, for the challenges they face in the job market. In short, developing policies and legislation should be based on and informed by the experiences of young people. For example, racial disparities are a major problem in youth employment. Every policy affecting young people should be focused on addressing racial discrimination. Washington, DC, could design ways to choose representatives from different ethnic groups to air their views on the best practices they expect from the government. The district can then use these views to come up with effective policies that will address racial inequalities and provide opportunities for young people. As such, the policies will touch on the fundamental issues affecting young people and address the barriers that exist in their quest to access the job or employment opportunities.

#### *b. Honor the voice of young people*

Washington, DC, also struggles with racial discrimination in youth employment. Even though the programs have not addressed the issue, the district has an opportunity to listen to young people, understand their challenges, and ensure their policies reflect the voice of young people. Involving young people in the process of decision making is one thing. Honoring their voices and wishes is another challenge for the district. According to Franklin (2018), the policies and legislations centered on the issues affecting young people are often created by legislators who have no idea about what young people need. As such, when young people are involved in the decision making, their input will directly solve the problems they experience. To effectively deal with the issue of unemployment among young people, the district should honor the voices of young people. They understand the trends that affect their lives. For instance, technological advancement has affected young people the most. Notably, generation Z and Y are known to be technology natives (Franklin, 2018). With the many opportunities and chances presented by technological advancements such as the advent of social media and social influencing, the Baby Boomers are not in the best position to understand how technological advancements can be used to solve the challenges of unemployment. In this regard, young people better understand the opportunities available to them based on the emerging trends in society. Honoring their voices in policy formulation may empower young people to take control of their lives and address the problems of unemployment.

### ***c. Understand and implement the ideas of young people in the policies***

The ideas presented by young people are often based on their honest views. These ideas are often informed by current or emerging trends in the market. To effectively formulate youth-centered policies and legislations for empowerment, the legislators must understand the ideas presented by young people. Because these ideas are informed by the experiences of young people in the employment sector, they represent the true depiction of what is required to address the challenges faced in the job market. For instance, many youth have taken advantage of social media's influence and created job opportunities for themselves and other youth. With their experience using social media and interacting with other technologies, their ideas will assist the district (Franklin, 2018). In this regard, understanding and implementing the ideas presented by young people will help in establishing effective policies relevant to young people. Because they understand the impact the emerging technologies has on their lives, supporting them with relevant and effective policies will empower young people to explore these opportunities, which will eventually address the challenges of unemployment among the young people.

### ***d. Share adult privilege and power to make the community better for young people***

As it stands in society, adults are responsible for making decisions that impact the lives of young people. They are also tasked with making decisions that define or shape the future of young people. However, young people aged between 16 and 24 years have grown up in a completely different era from the adults in charge of decision making (Mixon Jr. & Stephenson, 2016). This means that the opportunities that the Baby Boomers accessed while growing up are not the same as those that generation Z and Y currently have. For example, society has changed in the era of social media. Students and youth now have opportunities to showcase their talents and skills on social media as well as to form their career path using social media. However, to effectively achieve this, they need policies that create a favorable environment for them to create opportunities for themselves. The adults should be able and willing to share their privileges and power with young people. This will enable the parties to make decisions that will create a better society for everyone. When the adults make decisions, the decisions are made from their perspectives. However, sharing their privileges with young people may help adults in diversifying their ideas and ensuring they consider all the views and perspectives when developing and implementing policies.

## **Focus on African American Males**

### **a. Reducing unemployment for African American males**

Problems discussed in the literature require that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers examine the extent to which building employment support can reduce unemployment for African American male youth. When policymakers and community leaders collaborate on improving employment opportunities for African American male youth, they should consider essential elements of such a partnership: collaboration with employers to close the gap between the supply and demand of work, and support from intermediary organizations to identify more comprehensive tools and incentives for collaborative and supportive efforts. By employing young people as early as possible, stakeholders are more likely to create a positive workforce environment that mitigates biases faced by African American male youth.

For African American male youth who may lack the formal skills and education to become successful in their careers, work-based learning can be of great benefit. This strategy includes implementing courses that help young people attain academic and technical skills for facilitating employability. However, research concerning work-based learning opportunities is limited, revealing a substantial gap in the literature. Therefore, new research is needed to develop opportunities for work-based learning for African American male youth and to analyze its impact on future employment. Additionally, further research should be conducted on the role of schools and community organizations, as these can be direct contributors to developing work-based learning opportunities for African American male youth.



### **b. Education and workforce development among African American males**

The findings of considered research illustrate the need to develop a robust educational foundation to support Black male youth. Supporting children from African American communities before ages 8 to 9 would give them a foundation that would help to become more productive and engaged in learning. Students would benefit from high-quality, seamless prekindergarten continuum programs that improve early cognitive and emotional development (ETS, 2011). Through consistent and intentional implementation, these programs would benefit students' educational experiences and achievement. Additionally, evidence-based models such as afterschool and community-based programs would improve the preparedness of children for school. Beyond helping learners attain such basic skills as effective reading and writing, community-based programs would help to develop normed skills for African American children.

Support should continue through middle and high school. The Eagle Academy initiative provides an exemplar of such support. This program was developed to provide high school boys from the Bronx neighborhoods with access to a college education (ETS, 2011). The Eagle Academy became the first all-male public school in New York City within recent decades. African American males had unfettered access to this institution. Furthermore, the Eagle Academy included an emphasis on ethics and individual potential.

Similar to mentoring programs that can address the socioenvironmental challenges of African American male youth, educational leadership should implement comprehensive mentoring for educational purposes as well (ETS, 2011). Students can and should connect with adult male mentors who can identify with and help them manage educational, social, and economic challenges as well as find areas of interest that may be used in future learning and specialization. Also, engaging activities, such as sports and technological pursuits, can help to enhance the effectiveness of such mentoring programs (ETS, 2011). Importantly, the earlier mentoring and other supportive programs begin, the higher the likelihood that African American male youth will benefit from these resources.

Unemployment and underemployment remain a pressing issue for African American male youth reaching college. Therefore, implementation of intense programs at this stage is also necessary because many graduates and college students need further preparation and may not always have the physical or economic access to such preparation. Policies should be created to facilitate the implementation of pre-college programs for African American male high school graduates. Also, advisors should be made aware of indicators impacting the success of African American male youth. Teachers, mentors, and college counselors should also be mindful of potential problems that may arise during programs, such as reduced engagement from participants and the lack of resources for participation.

To summarize, educational factors play an imperative role in shaping the further success of African American male youth and future employment. The research calls for a demonstration of community responsibility that will further influence the preparation of African American male youth for education and employment. It is necessary that young children have the resources to become and remain engaged students and have the necessary skills to acquire meaningful and gainful employment. The fundamental goal of policies and programs should be to reduce the isolation of African American male youth within enclosed communities and minimize the causes and perpetuation of underlying racism that influence outcomes for this population.

## **Closing the Opportunity and Achievement Gap**

In Washington, DC, closing the achievement gap means ensuring the students are ready for the current business environment. According to Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2016), the current business environment has evolved. Today, businesses look for skilled, creative, and innovative employees. Unlike decades ago, the competition between organizations and businesses has created a high demand for innovative and creative employees. Washington, DC, understands that their programs must produce students or youth that are creative and innovative. According to Bellotti et al. (2010), innovation, advancement, and production are mainly driven by talent.

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Work-based learning opportunities in Washington, DC, should focus on conserving and encouraging talent. The programs should not be only focused on training young people on how to survive in the job market but should also bring out their creative and innovative abilities. This way, they will compete effectively and favorably in the job market. In short, in Washington, DC, today, the most critical aspect businesses and employers look for when hiring or trying to employ young people is their ability to cope in an extremely competitive business environment. With the emergence of technology, leadership requires strategic management and employees need to be creative and innovative. This will enhance the performance of businesses and organizations. In this regard, when looking for employees in the market, employers will often consider creative and innovative individuals more than any others, and this puts young people today in a unique position to prosper in the job market.

The programs initiated by Washington, DC, should focus on training young people and ensuring the programs help youth explore their talent, allowing them to become creative, and instilling innovativeness in them. However, the main question is how work-based learning can help in closing the achievement gap created by the talent gap in Washington, DC. The district can use the following strategies to close the achievement gap.

### **a. Growing ideas using work-based learning**

The current youth employment programs are mainly focused on the learning experiences, preparing the students or youth for the job market, and providing students with working experiences. Closing the achievement gap requires the programs to focus on the talents of young people. In the 21st century, many people lack the credentials and skills necessary to compete in the job market effectively. The talent gap causes this. However, employers and businesses today look for talent in the form of creativity and innovativeness (Franklin, 2018), reiterating the need for programs to focus on young people's talents to enhance their opportunities in the market. In this regard, growing their ideas using work-based learning involves teaching young people the most appropriate ways of using their talents to create. Instead of focusing on providing them with working experience, they are provided with the training on how they can use their talents to think critically, create, and innovate. Therefore, the programs developed by Washington, DC, should be focused on harnessing talent. They should create platforms where young people can pitch their innovative ideas and support the ideas to create opportunities for young people. Creating an environment that encourages innovativeness and creativity will help the district enhance those abilities in young people. This will help in creating employment opportunities for young people as well as increasing their chances of employment. The result can close the achievement gap using talent.

Work-based learning is an ideal component that has been adopted in California to assist in improving secondary education (McKoy, Stern & Bierbaum, 2011). The experiences such as career practicum were found to be effective in complementing both the academic and technical coursework of individuals and preparing them for future tasks. However, this task can only be implemented if there exists equality among all individuals. By engaging both the Black and White individuals equally, it will enhance their success and eradicate the levels of unemployment.

### **b. Rebuilding marginalized communities, school reforms, and social and economic conditions**

One of the essential strategies to close the achievement gap is rebuilding struggling and marginalized communities. The main problem with the wide achievement gap is the economic inequality in America. Washington, DC, is also not spared of the impact of the inequalities in the economic sphere. For instance, African American youth are at a high disadvantage when accessing employment opportunities. According to a study conducted by Leonardo and Grubb (2018), African Americans are more likely to be denied employment opportunities compared to their White counterparts. The study found that Black youths have a 29 percent chance of getting employment while their White counterparts have a 71 percent chance of getting an employment opportunity they apply for. The statistic shows racial inequality that demonstrates there are marginalized communities that suffer from limited access to employment opportunities. These communities are economically marginalized, which widens the achievement gap among young people. To close the achievement gap, Washington, DC, should focus on rebuilding the marginalized communities through work-based learning and programs. The learning programs should target the less fortunate youth or youth from low-income households.

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This way, Washington, DC, will enhance young people's access to employment and close the achievement gap. This strategy is premised on the assumption that the achievement gap is caused by the economic and racial inequalities in America. Targeting less fortunate youth will empower them, thus allowing them to compete favorably with young people from other economic and social groups. For example, targeting young people from poor backgrounds encourages more student or youth engagement, introduces them to the world of work, and enables them to access more opportunities in Washington, DC

### **c. Providing success opportunities for all youths by building communities**

According to Wilson (2019), the economic disparities in Washington, DC, prevent the economically disadvantaged youth from having an equal opportunity to access employment. The economic disparities mainly result from the limited resources for young people. As such, youth from poor backgrounds may have limited opportunities to access employment. The implementation of work-based learning in community schools will enhance the students' or youths' ability to compete favorably in the job market with young people from other social and economic classes. According to Orrell and Ouellette (2008), the true value of implementing quality work-based learning is the ability of the program to provide opportunities or to level the playing field for young people from different social and economic backgrounds. As it stands, young people with better economic backgrounds have a high chance of getting well-paying jobs because of their ability to access advanced educational programs. In the process, the achievement gap continues to widen between the two categories of young people. However, Washington, DC, can effectively close the gap by building up low-income communities and providing young people in these areas with opportunities to access classroom learning, work-based learning, and training programs that will enable them to compete effectively with other youths. For instance, the district can structure its work-based-learning programs to offer youths the opportunity to engage with business opportunities that were previously not available to them. Exposure is the main driver for obtaining good employment opportunities.

Furthermore, providing success opportunities for young people involves widening the lens through which they perceive society. The idea is to enable young people to grow their community by exploring their talents and creative abilities. For instance, work-based-learning programs should be focused on training young people in life skills. They should not focus only on how they can attain employment, but how they can use their talents and skills to create employment for themselves. According to Mixon Jr. and Stephenson (2016), many youths in poor communities resort to crimes and illegal activities because they believe they cannot make it without a college education. Work-based-learning programs will focus on teaching young people how they can use the talents and abilities they have to create opportunities for themselves. This will involve identifying the talents among young people and working to build and support these talents. For example, work-based-learning programs can focus on sports-talent search. In these communities, numerous sports talents have not been identified because of the lack of platforms. The district can organize talent search programs that identify youth with sports, musical, acting, and other talents. Young people will then be enrolled in training programs that will specifically focus on building and growing their talents. This way, the programs can enhance the students' ability to create careers for themselves while also closing or bridging the achievement gap that has widened over the years. Therefore, implementing work-based-learning programs in poor communities will enhance the district's ability to train young people on their talents and ensure the playing field is level among young people within Washington, DC.

### **d. Redefining youth success**

In America, student success or youth success is associated with educational achievement. In traditional homes, parents often urge students to complete their education and get employment from one of the largest companies. However, with the limited opportunities in the companies, it is not possible to accommodate all young people. As such, it results in high youth unemployment in Washington, DC, and the U.S. in general. Washington, DC, should focus on redefining youth success (Mixon Jr. & Stephenson, 2016). Work-based learning should redefine youth success by opening or widening the lens through which young people view success. For instance, Washington, DC, can increase the relevance of learning by



including training for young people to use their diverse talents to create lucrative careers for themselves. High-quality work-based learning exposes students or young people to numerous opportunities. It opens the perception of young people and helps them expand their definition of success. For instance, traditional education programs focus on test preparations. Success, in this context, is restricted to students with the best or high aptitude. However, work-based learning refocuses young people's attention to their skills and abilities. Because students have different abilities, defining success in the context of academic achievement limits opportunities for students with low aptitude. Implementing work-based-learning programs helps students expand their lens and perception about success and this motivates them to create opportunities for themselves or build careers based on their skills, talents, and abilities. In this regard, Washington, DC, should use work-based-learning programs to redefine success. They should focus on exploring different abilities and skills among students, and ensure the students or youths understand that they can achieve success through exploring and pursuing their talents and skills.

### Critical Investment Areas

Washington, DC, has not effectively achieved its objective in reducing youth unemployment. Even though the district has implemented numerous programs to help with summer youth employment, there are still various challenges faced by the students. Also, only 56 percent of the students were employed in the summer of 2019, a low figure compared to other cities such as New York. The idea of summer youth employment was started by Mayor Barry of Washington, DC. Currently, the largest program for youth employment is in New York. However, there are still numerous programs aimed at providing opportunities for young people in Washington, DC, and these have created employment opportunities for young people in the district. However, massive improvements are needed to bridge the achievement gap and the unemployment rate among young people. The best practices and new strategies, when implemented, should ensure the quality of the programs is improved and more opportunities are created for the unemployed youth. The best practices include:

#### a. Increasing employer engagement in the programs

The programs are mainly focused on preparing young people for the job market. Even though some programs provide job placement opportunities, most youths are only trained and prepared for the job market. However, according to Mixon Jr. and Stephenson (2016), involving or engaging employers in the training process will enhance the chances of young people in getting employment opportunities. Employers understand what they need in their employees. In this regard, their engagement in the program will help the programs focus more on what employers need and the skills required by young people to succeed in the job market. Also, employers will enhance the trainers' understanding of the job market and ensure they train young people according to the standards required for the market. For example, employer demands keep changing with the changes in consumer demands. In this regard, what employers look for in employees also keeps changing. Therefore, to improve the quality of the programs and enhance young people's chances of employment, Washington, DC, should focus on liaising with different employers in increasing opportunities for young people and ensure the training is skill-based.

#### b. Encourage federal commitment to the programs

With the high population of young people in Washington, DC, the district needs reinforcements from the federal government and private sector. Currently, the federal government only contributes 10 percent to the summer youth employment programs in Washington, DC. The unemployment rate among young people is very high, and the district cannot address the problem entirely without the help of the federal government. In this regard, renewal of the federal commitment to the summer youth employment programs will help in addressing the problem while also ensuring Washington, DC, is relieved of the burden of funding the programs. For instance, the federal government should increase its funding to \$1.5 billion on an annual basis to help fund the programs (Robinson, Shanks & Meehan, 2017). With the current high youth population, supporting the programs means empowering young people. The more young people are empowered,

the more the government will benefit through an improved economy. In short, the federal and district governments should collaborate to improve the scope of the summer youth employment programs and also ensure more youths have access to the training. The financial support will expand the programs and ensure the problem of unemployment is addressed completely. Therefore, Washington, DC, should involve the federal government in the process and encourage them to increase their funding on the program.

### **c. Implement technology-focused programs to enhance innovation and creativity**

The current employment programs are focused on preparing students and young people for employment opportunities. However, with the limited opportunities in the job market, the program should focus more on helping young people understand the importance of creating their employment opportunities rather than relying on employers for jobs. For instance, there are numerous opportunities for youth on social media. With the emergence of social media and social influencing, the programs can encourage students and young people to take advantage of the emerging technologies and explore their talents and abilities (Robinson, Shanks & Meehan, 2017). For instance, content creating is an emerging trend that has created career opportunities for creative students. Such opportunities have enabled many youths to earn from their talents and skills. The current programs should shift from traditional to more progressive approaches. For example, instead of focusing on educational achievements, the programs should focus more on harnessing talent, supporting the talents, and encouraging young people to explore and utilize their talents. Therefore, the new practice will enhance the students' ability to create their career paths rather than relying on employment opportunities from businesses or companies.

## **Conclusion**

The summer youth employment programs have been in existence for decades. They are aimed at ensuring young people have access to employment opportunities during the summer holidays. However, with the changing trends in the job market, unemployment among youth has become a serious concern among lawmakers. In Washington, DC, youth unemployment has caused concerns. The existing programs cannot effectively address the high unemployment rate, and this has created the need to implement strategies and methods to ensure the district benefits from the available opportunities. In short, opportunities are often created for young people through these programs. Also, racial discrimination is a serious problem in youth employment. Because of the economic inequalities among marginalized communities, African American youth are at a disadvantage in getting full employment. The employment opportunities are also limited for marginalized groups. In this regard, the programs should focus on or target marginalized communities such as Latinos, African Americans, and other racial groups that are considered marginalized. Therefore, the improvement of the programs in this area is necessary to ensure the unemployment problem is addressed effectively.

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