WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Disengaged youth present an increasing challenge for the state of Massachusetts. The percentage of unemployed teens aged 16-19 has reached a high of 69 percent, and almost 3 percent of all students dropped out of school following the 2010-2011 school year. A 2011 analysis conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education found that halving the number of state dropouts would amount to $88 million in increased earnings and $12 million in increased tax revenue. Realizing that funding focused on improving the outcomes of disengaged youth would benefit youth and the state as a whole, Governor Deval Patrick issued a directive in 2007 that incorporated a team of youth workforce development experts into the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board (MWIB) Youth Committee. These experts included academics, researchers, employers, and practitioners who were called on to analyze and recommend improvements to the youth employment system in Massachusetts. Focusing on how best to develop youth academic and professional skills needed to succeed in the 21st century, the committee made three recommendations:

- Increase the quantity and quality of work experiences and career exploration programs for all youth
- Facilitate and improve partnerships and collaboration among education, workforce, and service-providing agencies
- Pilot a “multiple pathways” approach, combining education, workforce development, and support services that are necessary to ensure a successful transition for youth into economically stable adulthood

Following the release of these recommendations, in the summer of 2009, state-subsidized workforce investment boards throughout the state offered employment and workplace learning to over 15,400 youth through the state’s YouthWorks program. Despite this initiative, the problem of unemployed and disengaged youth in Massachusetts persists, especially following the recent recession.
In 2011, federal stimulus money that helped provide almost 2,000 Massachusetts youth with jobs was cut, and the state legislature is considering more cuts for youth employment programs amounting to as much as $2 million.\(^7\) Realizing the dire need to fund youth career development programs, Governor Patrick announced $6 million in statewide funding for youth jobs in 2011 in the hopes of creating 3,000 jobs throughout the state, 15 percent of which were geared toward at-risk youth.\(^8\) Most recently, as part of the fiscal year 2013 state budget, the governor proposed $8.6 million in funding for YouthWorks.\(^9\)

**COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

**Youth Jobs Coalition**

The Youth Jobs Coalition has been actively fighting for more funding for sustainable youth jobs throughout the state.\(^10\) In February 2012, the coalition, based in Dorchester, organized a rally in downtown Boston to demand more state funding for youth employment programs. The coalition, other nonprofits, and young people throughout Boston and the state continue to be outraged by the lack of funding for youth employment programs and companies’ aversion to hiring youth employees.\(^11\) Community members throughout the state agree that increasing numbers of unemployed and disengaged youth lead directly to increases in youth crime, violence, and risky behavior. Members of the Youth Jobs Coalition request that the state government raise summer job funding to at least $12.4 million this year to address youth career development.\(^12\)

**REFERENCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

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**ABOUT SOCIAL IMPACT RESEARCH**

Social Impact Research (SIR) is the independent research department of Root Cause, a research and consulting firm dedicated to mobilizing the nonprofit, public and business sectors to work collaboratively in a new social impact market. Modeled after private sector equity research firms, SIR conducts research on social issues and independent analysis of program performance to provide leaders and funders with the rigorous, actionable information they need to make strategic decisions about creating and investing in social impact.

**ENDNOTES**

2. Lifetime cost is calculated by subtracting transfers plus jail or prison costs from lifetime mean taxes paid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
13. “7002-0012 - Summer Jobs Program for At Risk Youth” (Governor’s Budget FY2013, Appropriation Recommendations).