

CHAPTER 5

Build Education and Workforce Pathways



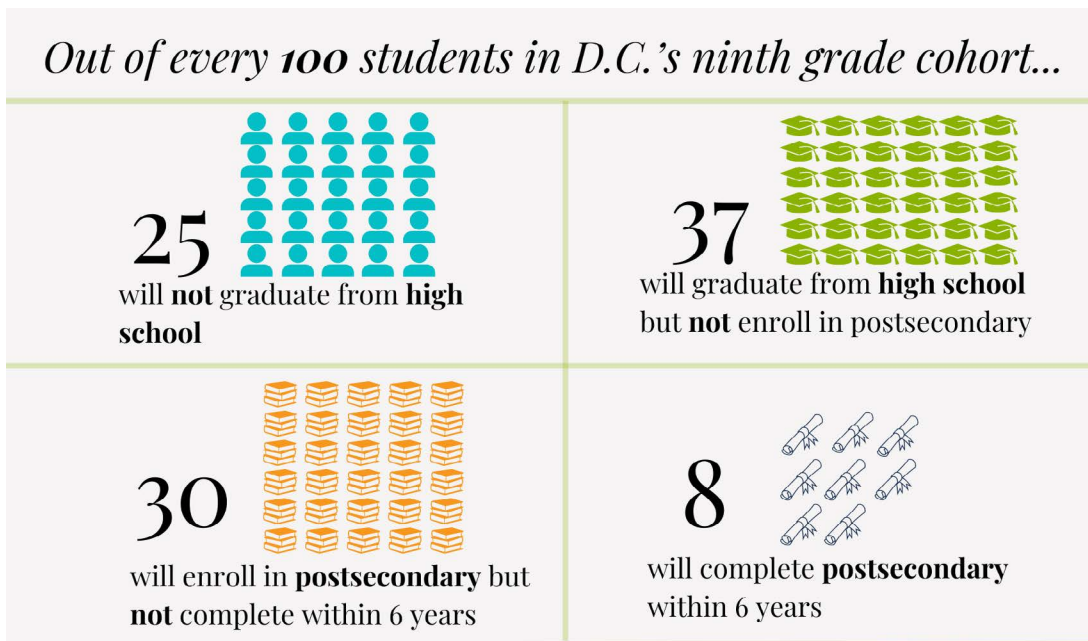
Education and workforce training provide many benefits to system-impacted emerging adults. The 2020-2025 YRA Strategic Plan called for investing in education and workforce training pathways (see Appendix A).

EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEVELS

Education and workforce training can help break cycles of poverty and crime by providing increased resources and opportunities. Attaining higher levels of education is linked to **civic engagement**, stronger community ties, and a **robust economy**. Research found that every additional \$1,000 per pupil investment in local schools correlated with a **2.4% decrease in property crime**. Education investments are also linked with lower rates of chronic engagement with the criminal legal system. Individuals with less than a high school diploma had the highest recidivism rates (60.4%), **followed by high school graduates (50.7%) and those with some college (39.3%)**. **College graduates had the lowest recidivism rates (19.1%)**.

In the District, only 8% of 9th graders from 2022 were projected to complete a postsecondary degree, and 25% will not graduate from high school. Education and workforce training are critical avenues to employment and stability for all District residents, particularly for system-impacted emerging adults.

FAILING TO EDUCATE, TRAIN EMERGING ADULTS IN THE DISTRICT HAS LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES FOR LIFETIME EARNING, EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

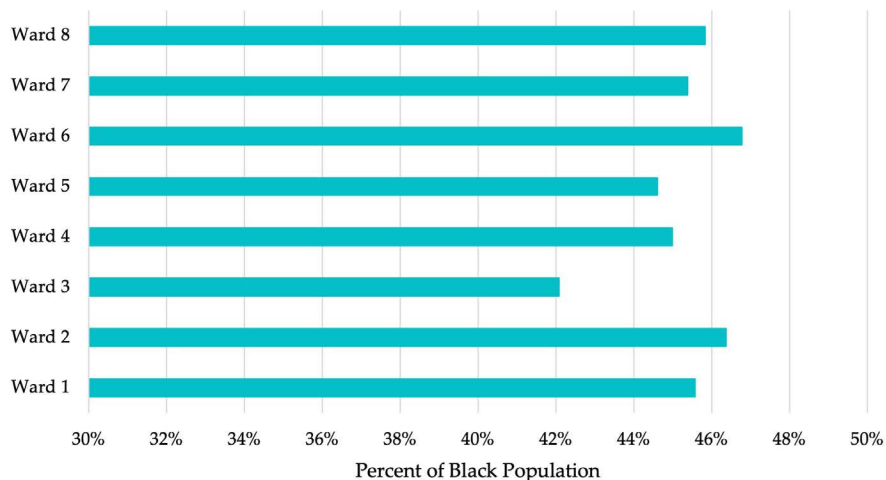


Source: DC Office of Education through Employment Pathways, Launching DC's Education through Employment Data System (2022).

In 2023, this amounts to more than **20,000 men over the age of 25 in the District who have less than a high school diploma**. The population of men, age 25 and older, who have less than a high school credential is highest in Wards 7 and 8 at **nearly 18% in Ward 7 and 16% in Ward 8**.

For Black males in DC age 25 and older, these numbers jump to about 45% across all wards.

NEARLY HALF OF ADULT BLACK MALES IN THE DISTRICT LACK A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE



Source: DC Health Matters, Black/African American Population: Male (2023).

For system-impacted emerging adults, these numbers are much higher. Interruptions in education may begin with an interaction with the criminal legal system even before adulthood. **Adolescents who experience youth incarceration are much less likely to re-enroll in high school.** In fact, institutionalization (including incarceration) was the **strongest correlating factor with U.S. high school drop-out rates.** Chronic absenteeism is also directly linked with crime: **for every 10% increase in chronic absenteeism in a district, violent crime increased by 4%.** System-impacted emerging adults also have a higher rate of special education needs. **More than 90% of system-involved young people in DC have special education needs.**

In addition to education, emerging adults need job training and job placement. Out of nearly 10,000 clients serviced by the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency in 2018 (people who had had experience with the criminal legal system), 72% were considered “employable,” and of these, 42% were employed, 43% were unemployed, and 15% had an unknown employment status.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE MODELS

The District has made progress in recent years by providing a foundation for educating and training its system-impacted youth and emerging adults. **Maya Angelou Schools** operates academies for youth and emerging adults at New Beginnings, the Youth Services Center (YSC), and the DC Jail. These schools provide accelerated learning to help students progress toward and/or complete their high school diploma or GED. Local universities partner with DYRS and the DOC to provide postsecondary education. Students at YSC and New Beginnings can take online courses from the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). Some residents at the DC Jail can take in-person classes from local and other universities on-site at the jail. Other programs like the **Petey Greene Program** provide tutoring, writing courses, and developmental education preparation at the DC Jail. The Lead Up, Lead Out program at the DC Jail offers additional learning opportunities. Workforce training is also available to the District’s incarcerated youth and emerging adults, with various programs being offered. Commercial Drivers License training has been available at the DC Jail and YSC. (See additional models in Appendix B: Chapter 5 Education Programs and Workforce Training Programs.)



While existing offerings provide a foundation, more is needed. Each of these offerings can be impacted by a lack of support from agency leadership or staff, internal vision changes that can disrupt the stability and continuity of the program, and a lack of funding prioritization that can hinder a program's ability to be fully staffed and supported with the necessary tools. Other basic issues, such as lack of access to students or insufficient space or implements for learning, can also get in the way.

We need more programs where they are pushing education like at YME. You have to want better things for yourself. - Trevon

We need more educational and training programs and more permanent jobs instead of just summer jobs. - Idris

We need programs in the community that will make people prepared for life - how to get a job, start a business, and be productive in life. It starts young. If you don't have that information, you won't be as productive. - Lamar

LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

WHAT LEVEL OF EDUCATION HAVE YOU COMPLETED?

I received my GED inside of jail and am thinking of getting other work training. - Amir

I completed most of high school while incarcerated. I am on track to graduate high school. - Micah

As a kid, I was on the honor roll until I reached middle school. Once I moved to a foster home, things went downhill. Since I was always in a new home, I was also always in a new school, which messed up my grades and made me not want to be in school anymore. Schools didn't have my transcripts, so I started missing days and not really caring because I felt like I was being held back. Now I am attending Maya Angelou Academy at the Youth Services Center. I am kind of back on track, but I think I may try to get my GED instead because I don't want to be behind. - Idris

I got my high school diploma at New Beginnings. I am going to go to UDC for business. - Zane

I stopped going to high school in 9th grade; started my GED and passed three sections. I tried to get my GED at the jail but was kicked out, so I started going to the high school at the jail and I am still working on my diploma. - Bryce

I completed high school in Maryland and went to trade school at Prince George's Community College and got certified in HVAC, electrician, plumbing, weathering, and carpentry. I was there for 14 weeks. - Trevon

WHAT ARE YOUR EDUCATION AND CAREER GOALS?

I want to get a diploma and am thinking of going to college; I want to be a chef and am interested in culinary school. - Trevon

Once I get out, I'll look into HVAC. Everyone needs air and heat. I also see myself owning a non-profit program. I like helping people. - Trevon

I was very excited and proud to graduate high school. I want to enroll in college now. - Micah

Hopefully I am able to get a job and obtain my GED and just be able to provide for myself and my family. - Idris

I want to get my bachelor's degree. I want to start a clothing business. - Lamar

I want to go into plumbing when I finish high school. - Kofi

I want to be a therapist or mentor; I want to talk to the youth and tell them where I came from and share my experiences. - Keon

I want to own my own business someday. I don't want to work for anybody. - Zane

I've written up a non-profit business plan to mentor youth and get them outside of the neighborhood. My goal is to curb the incarceration rate of young Black men and try to change the trajectory of their lives. - Tyree

I want to graduate with my high school diploma. I do not want to go to college but I don't mind going to trade school or getting a certificate in business. - Dario



PRIORITY: BUILD EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

The District needs to ensure all system-impacted emerging adults can enter and complete pathways to earning a postsecondary credential or training in a high-demand field at a family-sustaining wage. This starts with prioritizing funded education and training while emerging adults and youth are in carceral facilities and continuing those pathways with a seamless transition once they return to the community.

- 1. Give education and training programs the full support of DOC and DYRS.** District leadership must prioritize learning in all DOC and DYRS secure facilities. That means DOC and DYRS leadership need to work closely with education and training providers to ensure young people can access timely learning resources. Leadership needs to create open lines of communication and coordination to address issues and barriers with education and training providers and provide a cohesive experience so that learners can advance.
- 2. Make education and training programs mandatory at the DC Jail and secure facilities.** Currently, only emerging adults at the DC Jail with an individual education plan (IEP) receive mandatory education to pursue their GED. Those who do not have an IEP or have already completed high school or their GED are not required to participate in education and training programs. Make education and training programs mandatory in the DOC and DYRS secure facilities and incentivize participation to increase greater engagement and better outcomes. This will enable emerging adults to optimize their time in the facility and gain new skills and competencies that will help them progress toward a credential and/or employment.
- 3. Commit to only high-quality offerings that are connected to future work and/or learning.** All education and training programs in the DC Jail should be focused on helping emerging adults build skills and credentials toward further education and/or high-demand jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. To ensure all offerings are high-quality and connected to a pathway, take the following steps:
 - **Make all courses count.** All postsecondary education and training programs at the jail and other secure facilities should count towards either college credit, a workforce credential that leads to a job that is in high need of workers, or a documented skill that can be shared and considered an asset when seeking employment.
 - **Prioritize stackable content.** Focus on certificates, micro-credentials, and other forms of education and training that can stack towards a postsecondary degree or workforce credential.
 - **Incorporate job-readiness skills.** To support emerging adults in the workforce, prepare them with basic job readiness skills that will facilitate their success in entry-level positions. These are known as **soft skills or durable skills** and can include elements such as resilience, oral communication, collaboration, creative problem solving, intercultural fluency, and more.
 - **Identify priority pathways.** Determine which jobs in the region are in high demand that would be a good fit for emerging adults. Survey emerging adults to identify top programs of interest. Design pathways towards these jobs with partners.



- **Partner with postsecondary institutions and employers on post-release pathways.** Ensure all education and training programs at the DC Jail are created and offered in conjunction with at least one college or employer partner who can continue training or hire individuals who complete the program. District agencies should partner with the **Second Chance Hiring Alliance** and colleges already in the DC Jail. All education and training partners should be required to facilitate or participate in the transition from incarceration to learning or work or bring in new partners who can facilitate that transition in a coordinated and seamless manner.
 - **Incorporate paid internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning.** Help guide emerging adults into post-release opportunities to learn and work at the same time. Do this in close collaboration with employer and educational partners.
- 4. Design accelerated GED to degree or credential pathways.** For many system-impacted learners, the timeline to complete their GED and move to additional education or training is simply too long. A GED can take up to a year or more to complete before the learner is able to begin postsecondary education or training. If the goal is readiness for work and the ability to earn a stable income, this timeline must be condensed. The District should prioritize accelerated offerings in its secure facilities and community to combine GED completion with a college degree or workforce credential. This model is being used in many places around the country.
- 5. Make competency-based online programs more accessible.** Provide access to high-quality online postsecondary programs, especially for emerging adults in the community who may not be able to travel to in-person classes due to transportation issues or personal safety concerns. Prioritize accelerated competency-based options and non-profit institutions known for serving adult learners well. Provide scholarships for emerging adults to access postsecondary options.



FIRST STEP: PROVIDE ACCESS AND AWARD CREDIT FOR LEARNING

In the immediate term, the District needs to help emerging adults access existing educational and training options and receive educational credit for their learning.

- 1. Support credit recovery.** Ensure credit transfer beyond DC. Many system-impacted learners have had their high school education disrupted during incarceration. While the District currently provides education at all its secure facilities for youth and emerging adults with an IEP, credits for these courses do not always transfer. System-impacted learners may be in and out of secure facilities for shorter periods than a traditional school term. Even though the current education provider, Maya Angelou Schools, provides accelerated learning to help learners catch up and move forward, DC Public Schools does not accept partial credits. So if a student received 1/4 or 1/2 credit towards their high school diploma, it likely will not count in DCPS and other places. Prior legislation was drafted to change this policy but it never passed. All incarcerated learners need to know that the learning they do and the progress they make will count.
- 2. Expand paid employment year-round.** Many system-impacted youth and emerging adults have participated or will participate in the District's Summer Youth Employment Program. However, once summer is over, they are out of work. Develop opportunities for youth and emerging adults to gain more year-round employment that focuses on building their skills and professional networks through paid internships, work-based learning, and other funded learn-and-earn programs.
- 3. Give all system-impacted learners access to Pell Grants.** Incarcerated learners can now access federal financial aid through Pell Grants. Secure facilities and educational partners need to take steps to help incarcerated learners complete a simplified FAFSA form and receive Pell funding for college courses.
- 4. Provide wraparound support.** Ensure that emerging adults, both in facilities and those in the community, are provided with a strong network of wraparound support services, such as mentors, tutors, college and career counseling, and other resources, to ensure their retention and success in education, training, and the workforce and to help them avoid any obstacles that may prevent their success.



This is a single chapter from the full report, **Building a Brighter Future: A Plan to Invest in DC's Emerging Adults**. Please visit the [report's landing page](#) to access other chapters and the appendices for each chapter.