

Transcript of Webinar

**Utilizing the Village:
Effective Re-Engagement and Recovery Programming in Rural Communities**

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BRIAN KEATING: All right. Well, without any further ado I'm going to turn things over to Ms. Terry Grobe, program director with Jobs for the Future in Boston, Massachusetts. Terry's going to go over the overview of the problem and new ideas in recovery programming. Terry?

TERRY GROBE: Thank you so much, Brian, and welcome everybody. It's just wonderful to see so many folks on the webinar today. We're very pleased that we have a chance to present and talk with you.

I want to spend the next few minutes setting a frame for this webinar that's focused on dropout recovery. We're going to first look at numbers that illustrate what's too often an invisible problem in rural localities and then explore some new ideas in dropout prevention and recovery that really have been informed by recent research and some very innovative practice.

And I think some of this information may be familiar to a lot of you, but we hope we've combined these ideas in ways that will be helpful and will further inform your good work on this important issue.

So unlike urban areas, where dropouts are very concentrated and the problem is often highly visible, rural dropouts can be an invisible issue. And to illustrate this point – first of all, we have a lot of students enrolled in rural schools; 3.4 million, to be exact. Twenty percent of the national student population are young people that attend schools in rural areas and the enrollment in rural schools is increasing.

And so since nearly every high school has students who don't complete high school, in the aggregate this adds up to a lot of students who need assistance to complete high school and take their next step. And it's further illustration of the problem of the 2000 high schools across the country that were identified a couple of years ago as having low graduation rates. One-fifth of these are in rural areas.

Education attainment, as I know all of you, in general in rural communities is limited. Only 17 percent of adults 25 years and older have a college degree in rural communities. And rural communities lag behind urban areas in terms of postsecondary degree attainment.

And finally, rural areas face special circumstances in addressing dropout concerns. As you all know and you live with every day, there are resource and staffing constraints. There's often limited postsecondary and job opportunities. That lowers people's expectations sometimes in their hopes that education can really provide payoff for them, their children and their families. And families can be very isolated geographically from their schools and communities and make it hard to reach out and to transform people's expectations and beliefs about education and opportunity.

So as communities attempt to both prevent and recover dropouts, they can really benefit from a wealth of new ideas in the field, and I want to provide a few examples as a frame for this event today.

First – and this is, I think, so significant for me. I've been working in this field for many, many years. We're really moving away from identifying potential dropouts using demographic information, like students being at risk because of low family income or young people who are growing up in single-parent families, and we're looking more at school factors that put students at risk of not completing high school.

Namely, we're really looking at what people call the "big three." We're looking at attendance issues, we're looking at behavior issues, and we're looking at course failures. And these are indicators that students are struggling and falling behind are particularly critical during transition years – the move from elementary to middle school where students can start to stumble or from middle to high school.

And really, the advantage of school staff tracking students' progress and intervening when necessary using school-related factors rather than demographics is that we can't change demographics but we have a good shot at changing school-related issues that get in the way of students persisting and succeeding, particularly in high school.

And even though in the prevention realm there are all sorts of districts that are designing early warning systems and doing early intervention, they still find that there are students in high school who are far off-track and they're really behind their – (inaudible) – in terms of finishing high school. And these are youth that even if they might hang in there and keep coming to school, albeit sporadically, will most likely without intervention not stay and graduate.

So JFF – Jobs for the Future – that does a lot of work in this area has an expanded view of recovery. We view recovery as programming for youth that are sometimes close to graduation, only missing several credits, need a little credit recovery work to finish; youth who are one or two years off-track for graduation and really behind their peer group; as well as those who've dropped out of school and need to return to earn a high school credential. And these students are not necessarily different – they're just in different places on a continuum with struggling in school and without interventions that work, falling farther and farther behind and eventually giving up and dropping out.

So for students that are one or two years behind in high school as well as for those who've dropped out and need to return, both groups need special programming. Very often recovery programming may serve both groups of young people. And that work pretty well unless you have great skilled differentiation needs.

The idea that you can serve young people who have very strong education gaps and students who are almost finished together in one program doesn't always work so well. Very often what people will find is that they do some credit recovery for those who are close to graduation. They do some special programming for that group in the middle who've got more long-term skill development needs.

So communities who have launched campaigns to get dropouts to return to school find they usually don't do well if they try to return to their home high school. And so they have designed, as we're talking about, smaller, more personalized learning environments where students get

good support, where they get accelerated instruction that helps them catch up and get their high school credential in a reasonable amount of time. They also receive transition support so they get ready to take their next steps to further education and training and are able to enter those programs and have what they need to stay and succeed.

And Jobs for the Future actually uses a framework that we have used with programs and leaders of recovery programs across the country. We call the framework Back on Track to College. It's proved helpful, I think, for districts and school leaders and even community-based organizations that run education programs like YouthBuild start and strengthen their recovery programs. And you'll find this framework attached with the resources here today.

So I hope that's a very quick but practical overview. Today we're spending the bulk of this webinar hearing more of the components of successful recovery programming. We're going to hear from two programs, the Communities and Schools Performance Learning Center in Berrien County, Georgia, and YouthBuild of Central Ohio. Both programs have been successfully serving dropouts or those who've fallen off-track from graduation. We'll be sharing fact sheets on these programs so that you'll have information on them in hand.

And we're also sharing fact sheets on two other recovery programs, the Goal Academy, an online school operating throughout the state of Colorado; and the Alternative Learning Center in Haywood County, North Carolina.

And after these presentations we're going to ask our presenters to share what they've learned through doing successful recovery programming, and we're going to draw lessons from them and also lessons and ideas from you, our audience.

So it promises to be an interactive session, even though that will be virtually interactive, and I'm hoping everybody will get a lot of good ideas out of the event today. So I'm now going to turn the program over to my colleague, Amanda Dorris, who will introduce our first presenters.

AMANDA DORRIS: Great. I'm so glad to be here with you guys today. I first just wanted to remind you that that chat you've been using over on the left-hand side has now been replaced. And throughout this presentation by the communities and schools both, you can go ahead and type in questions to them. At the end of the presentation we're going to come back together and we'll address as many of those questions as we can. So feel free to add any questions you have as we're going through.

So I'm very happy to introduce Mr. Gary Chapman, the executive vice president with the Communities in Schools National Network in Arlington, Virginia; and also Ms. Constance Thomas, who's the executive director of the Berrien County Collaborative, Communities in Schools/Family Connection that runs the performance learning center in Berrien County. She's located in Nashville, Georgia. Thanks so much.

GARY CHAPMAN: Great. Thank you. Good afternoon, everybody. This is Gary Chapman, very excited to be here with you all today. I am at the national office with CIS here in Arlington, Virginia, but I spend most of my career working in a rural community in south Georgia, known

as Nashville, Georgia. So Constance Thomas and Dr. Lilli Drawdy from Berrien are also going to be part of this presentation.

So overall, Communities in Schools works to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. And we have a proven model that had increased graduation rates and decreased dropout rates all across the country in urban, suburban and rural environments.

We really believe that there's three big components to supporting students, that it's about great leadership at the school level and in the district; really effective teaching and learning going on in the classroom; and the third area that many times gets left out is this thought around wraparound supports or intensive integration of student services. And so CIS really focuses on the integration of those services.

What you see up here on the slide is our CIS model of integrated student services. And while we're going to talk about the performance learning centers, I really just wanted to share briefly the larger role that CIS plays in supporting students in many, many different schools. So our goal would be that we have a professional site coordinator that's working in that school. In many communities they may be called a graduation coach, a student success coach, a campus manager – but someone who is there and highly engaged with school leadership and very passionate about supporting kids.

But they work with the school leaders and the teachers to come up with a plan for that school, to look at what are all of these services that are needed whether you be in elementary, middle school or high school. Maybe it's gang prevention work that needs to happen, or maybe it's just meeting the basic needs of families – college readiness supports, tutoring, many different things.

And then put together a plan for what those services would look like and go out and find the right partners to help to engage and bring into the school setting. They are bringing in mentors and tutors. They're working with the food bank, with counselors, health services, the social workers; making sure their college visit's happening, their service learning – a multitude of things that are happening in that school building.

And providing those services to the whole school, and also case managing a group of highly – students that are in very high need, so students that may be coming from homes where their parents are incarcerated. Maybe they are English language learning students; maybe their homeless – kids that have pretty significant challenges in front of them, and our goal is really to eliminate those nonacademic barriers for them.

So overall we have five services that we provide the most within the 2,400 schools that we work in. Academic assistance is number one, particularly in rural communities. Meeting the basic needs of families is number two; enrichment support, life skills and family engagement. So there's a number of things that we hope to bring in and support the school and support the students.

This is our 35th year of supporting schools and 48 percent of our network is rural. We have about 200 local and state nonprofit Communities in Schools programs that are operating. They have their own local control of what they're doing in their community. But 48 percent are in rural communities, so we know that this model works and we're seeing dramatic results.

We have 88 affiliates that are in rural communities in 11 states. We're working with 144 school districts and over 300,000 students to deliver the model that I just shared, and 89 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged. So we're working with schools that have high percentages of students that are in poverty.

I talked about the graduation and the dropout results, but you can also see the student improvement of the kids that we are working with intensively throughout the year. Ninety-three percent of those seniors are graduating; 98 percent that were monitored as potential dropouts remained in school; 95 percent were going to the next grade, and 81 percent met academic performance goals.

We also have a model within CIS where students that are overage and undercredited are served in an intensely academic and supportive environment. So Communities in Schools started performance learning centers in the state of Georgia about 10 years ago and have expanded throughout five states around the country. We have these performance learning centers – nontraditional schools in Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington and Pennsylvania. The highest concentration are in Georgia and in North Carolina. And so you're going to hear an example of the work that's happening in Berrien County.

These are centers for students – between 75 and 150 students that would be in a center, very intensive focus around helping them when they're overage and undercredited to catch up and to graduate on time and move on to some form of postsecondary education. These are students that haven't necessarily been successful in a traditional school environment, so we pulled them in – we have learning facilitators who are certified teachers that are working with students, but kids are working at their own pace.

They're working – at least 50 percent of their curriculum is online and the other 50 percent is happening through project-based learning as well and really engaging those students in service learning projects and things in the community.

This model has proven effective. In Georgia they did a study that showed that the districts that had performance learning centers outperformed districts that did not around their county graduation rates, just by serving a small number of students but really focusing on the right kids that needed the support – to re-engage students but also to support them if they are not succeeding in a traditional environment.

So with that I'd like to turn it over to Constance to talk more about Berrien County specifically.

CONSTANCE THOMAS: Thank you, Gary. We're so glad to be a part of this call and so excited about being a part of Communities in Schools and the success that we're having here.

I joined the Communities in Schools team about three years ago, and so I'd like to tell you a little bit about what we have going on. We are located in south Georgia, just north of Florida, and we are extremely rural. When you think of rural, I mean, in every aspect that is us. We were primarily an agricultural community for years. Tobacco was our main product. And when the demand for tobacco slacked off, we replaced some of those jobs with textile mills and factories.

But in the current economic situation we're in, we have an extremely high unemployment, as so many rural communities do. And one of the things that comes along with unemployment is a sense of hopelessness. And so the PLC – or performance learning center – came into our community at a perfect time, because we really had a lot of not just students but families that were still in a sense of hopelessness.

Well, when you create an environment that not only addresses the academic needs of the students, but looks deeper than that into the needs of the individual, that you begin to rebuild hopefulness. And that's exactly what the school has done. Gary did a wonderful job of explaining the specifics of it and it's fun for me to get to tell the story part of it.

We have children that have come in from very, very limited experiences, and again a true sense of hopelessness in not knowing that there's more available outside of Berrien County. So when the PLC was developed, it was a team effort. It was brought in and brought together – the idea came together through the minds of folks – the Berrien County board of education; the Berrien County Collaborative, which is a part of the national CIS organization. And the idea was that you take the kids that are most at-risk and pour into them and really meet the needs of the kids past just the desk, past just the textbook. But you look into what is missing or what services would help them focus more academically.

So that's how we started 10 years ago. The vision all came together and actually formed into the school. We serve about 75 kids a year. And that number, I say "about" because we hold 75 kids at a time. But because we're working with at-risk kids, a lot of these kids can graduate at different times. They may only need a few credits to graduate and we help facilitate that so that they can. So they may graduate in December and then we can bring other kids in, so we actually will have served more than 75 throughout the year.

We do target kids that are 14 to 19, and the reason for that is because some kids have gotten behind and we need those – you know, a little extra time to help them wrap up and finish up what they're working on. Again, on slide 20 you'll see the very last line talks about filling in the gap, and that is absolutely what happens for us here at the school.

The reason it is successful – CIS has done a wonderful job of creating a plan. But what needs to happen in each community past that plan is heart. And once you put the right people in place with the right plan, then that sense of hope comes back into a community. And a community is only going to be as strong as the individuals in that community. So when you really in a rural community accept that and realize that that means we have a responsibility to our kids and to the community as a whole to strengthen each other and to work together, then you can begin to see amazing success in the community as a whole as you see the twinkle come back in a kid's eye because they begin to feel successful. They begin to have hope in what's available for them.

So the key part of making this work is having a great site coordinator in the school that knows the need – gets to know the kids and taps into them so that they can be successful. And the thing that really – the icing on the cake is to know that the whole community is behind this site coordinator, and the whole community is willing to invest in these kids.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Thanks so much, Constance. I know we're got so much information about this wonderful program in such a short period of time.

Brian has just moved that chat box into the center of your screen, so if you have more questions please go ahead and type those in. And we'll go ahead – I wanted to let folks know that we have Gary Chapman and Constance Thomas available to answer questions, and also Dr. Lilli Drawdy, who's the assistant superintendent and works really closely with you guys, I know.

So I'll start us off. We've had a question in, and wanted to know about the strategies you're finding most effective to engage low-income families and particularly how or if you're doing home visits, what those look like and what's the focus.

LILLI DRAWDY: One of the things that we have done – we've got two different at-risk groups here, one being those students who are what I would call upperclassmen, and then the second group being freshmen who have already failed at one grade. And what we do is we use the local high school CTAE and auxiliary classes to help meet the needs of students.

So we actually have the freshmen being their day, their first block – we're a block schedule – at the high school, which then frees up the services coordinator to really focus on the upperclassmen who may be struggling with things like attendance or some social issue at home so that she can do home visits during that regular day or communicate with the child and/or their guardians on a regular basis.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Thanks. Was there anything else you wanted to add or would you like to move on to the next question?

MR. CHAPMAN: This is Gary. I'll just add quickly within the performance learning center there's an application process for students to come in, and as part of that there is a meeting with the family that's conducted and an application that's filled out. In many cases there would be home visits that are part of that as well. But for a student to come in, we've got to ensure that the family has bought into the process and to being part of the education of their student moving forward and look to see if there are other challenges that are going on in the family that CIS could then help to support as well.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Thanks so much, Gary.

We also had a question; specifically we talked about the ABCs in the early presentation; I wondered if you finding any specific red flags for students to be placed into the PLC, or recommended, referred to the PLC?

MS. THOMAS: We focus on kids that are at-risk, but they can be at-risk for any number of reasons. It may be that they have high unattendance rate. It may be that we know that they have a tough time with a physical illness that keeps them from being able to attend school. It could be behavior, but we don't focus on behavior. What we focus on is what's causing that problem, and then we put them in an environment – because the smaller environment helps a lot of kids that are feeling uneasy for a number of different reasons, we are open to anything out-of-the-box thinking on what is at-risk.

MR. CHAPMAN: And this is Gary. I would say overall we're looking for kids that are average and undercredited. So they are in many cases moving from 8th grade to 8th grade and they're already behind. They're not going to graduate within four years unless there's an intervention that is brought in.

The same thing would be happening if a kid went on to 9th grade but yet they weren't successful in a traditional environment. They might move into the PLC because they haven't been able to achieve their credit so far. They need a different environment so that they can learn at their own pace. And maybe they've had some behavior challenges as well, so they just need a different structure.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Thanks. Unfortunately I think we're going to have to move on. I did want to let you guys know that during the discussion portion at the end we're going to be focusing more on transition, so hopefully we'll get to that question about being career ready. And also we're going to be talking about forging partnerships. So we'll have some more time to talk with the folks from CIS.

I want to thank you so much and we're going to move on to our next presentation. You'll notice again in that chat area on the left that we're going to replace that with a new chat box specifically for the YouthBuild folks.

So I'm really happy to introduce YouthBuild of Southeast Ohio team. We've got Jeff Fite there, the director of job readiness and training at Sojourners Care Network. So thank you.

JEFF FITE: Yes. Thank you. We're happy to be sharing at this webinar and we're thrilled at the chance to talk about our program. I have Tim Jones, our teacher, here with us, and Kera Spriggs, a graduate of our program. They'll be sharing a little bit later.

First of all I'd like to say that YouthBuild is part of a national movement funded predominantly by Department of Labor. There are approximately 275 programs across the country, many based in large urban areas. We're very fortunate to have a YouthBuild program in our neck of the woods. It's probably safe to say we're one of the most rural programs in the YouthBuild family.

I've been with the program 12 years, the last seven as program director. My formal training is in the trades as a carpenter and welder. So I was thrilled at the chance to run a program where I could combine two loves of my life, and that is building things and helping young people. So with that we'll jump into the nuts and bolts of the program.

We are located in rural southeastern Ohio, the least populated county in the state. Appalachian culture is very strong here. The primary industries are the extraction industry, timber and coal, the traditional where lots of commerce is done. And unfortunately, though, both have fallen on hard times in the last few years. And timber being tied so closely to construction, so we're hoping that will come back somewhat, timber and the sawmill industry. Unfortunately, coal, historically a strong business in our area, may never come back to the extent that it once was.

Unfortunately also, Vinton County has a "distressed" designation which is based on three indices: unemployment, per capita market income and poverty rate. It does have that designation, but there are lots of good things going on in southeast Ohio as well, including our program.

Brief history of Sojourners. Sojourners started 13 years ago as a private nonprofit. It started as a therapeutic foster care, but fairly quickly our co-founders thought, well, let's not just give young people places to stay and food; let's give them meaningful things to do. And so within the first year, the first YouthBuild grant was procured and we've been fortunate to have been in continuous operation ever since.

We serve 50 students over a two-year grant cycle, 25 to 30 at any one time. We serve youth ages 16 to 24, most of whom who have dropped out of high school and many lack basic academic skills.

Just a few more numbers to get a profile of our students. After our last grant cycle the average age at entry was 18.2 years. The average student who came in had dropped out in the 10th grade. On average the student who came in was two grades behind. Also on average they're doing reading and math at about the 6th grade level. And 46 of the 51 were deemed basic skills deficient.

Also as far as our work and our community development, we do engage the students in building affordable housing. We're proud to say that we have built or rehabbed 25 units – houses and apartments – in our 12-year history.

Can you go back one? Yeah.

As the time that the students are here, half the time they're in academics pursuing their high school credential or GED; 46 percent of the time they're in job training; and 10 percent of the time they're doing leadership development and community service.

The last slide I need to clarify just a little bit. We have been offering the GED the entire 12 years that we have been in existence. It's just in the last five years we've also added the high school diploma.

On school days, 10 to 15 students work in online curriculum with support from a certified teacher. They're doing that in one of three ways. We have three providers. One is the PLATO curriculum. The other two are online high schools that we have various partnerships with. On work days the students work in the shop on training or at a live work site doing the low-income housing.

I would also like to say that our program is really set up – and this is kind of the meat of our program, and the next bullet top talks about the levels where students are promoted through the program, from pledge to trainee to apprentice to crew leader. And this is really the meat of our program, that I think goes a long way to explaining how and why it works.

The levels are designed as an incentive and the pay does not start until milestones are hit – the students hit milestones in their employability. Those milestones – they need to be here 90 percent of the time. They need to hit a certain score on their daily performance evaluation. All schoolwork must be current. The National Construction Curriculum needs to be done. The individual development plan needs to be done. A professional résumé needs to be accomplished. And they have to conduct a live scored interview as well as providing a clean drug screen.

The students have a minimum of six weeks to accomplish those things or longer if they need longer. Once those milestones are hit, they become eligible to receive a weekly stipend. And so it is very incentive-based, and it works. Students also participate in group service, postsecondary exploration, leadership activities. Students have access to counseling and IBP development. After-care is mandated and provided for nine months after the students leave the program.

So there are some more numbers that you're welcome to read, but I'd like to pitch over to Kera, who has joined us. She was a graduate of our program. I'm very proud to have her here and join us to explain a little bit about her experience with the program. And I guess, Kera, I'd just like to ask you what made you feel different from traditional school and what was the most helpful and powerful part.

KERA SPRIGGS: Well, what makes YouthBuild different from traditional high school is that the students can all go at their own pace, which is good because each young adult learns at their own speed. Also, the students get more one-on-one personal attention, unlike high schools with a 30:1 student-teacher ratio with a small amount of time to do the work with.

The most powerful part of the YouthBuild program was the staff because they encouraged me to want more and want better stuff for myself and my daughter.

MR. FITE: So Kera, you also have the added challenge of being a young mother while you were in the program. Can you talk about a little bit and the special challenges around that?

MS. SPRIGGS: Well, being a single mother I was trying to better myself for my daughter, which made me want to do more.

MR. FITE: And Kera was always very driven and motivated by that scenario. Also, she benefitted from the stipend, which allowed her to participate and drop some money into the household, so that was very, very important to her.

So I think that's about it as far as an overview of the program. I'll be happy to field any questions that folks may have.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Thanks so much. And Kera, we want to particularly thank you for joining us. I know that folks always really appreciate hearing right from the folks who have participated and graduated. So thank you.

MS. SPRIGGS: Thank you.

MS. DORRIS: Great to have you. We'll turn it over to questions, and I want to let folks that in addition to Jeff Fite and Kera Spriggs we also have Tim Jones on the line, and he's the certified YouthBuild teacher. So if you have any questions for any of them, please send them on in and we'll get started.

I know that some folks wanted to know a little bit more about how you're funded, Jeff.

MR. FITE: Yes. One of the challenges of being in such a rural community is there are a lot of large corporations and fewer resources. We are predominantly funded in two-year grant cycles from Department of Labor, which provides the majority of our funding. That's two program years plus a third after-care year.

Right now we're looking at different ways, including a recycling center that we're in process of opening, to help to generate some revenue that would support the program. And we're always looking for opportunities and partners like that. It is tough being grant-funded, but as I say, we have been very fortunate to have put together funding for the entire 12 years and to stay operational.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Those are some innovative ways of thinking outside the box. That's great.

We have had a couple questions also about students when they come into the program, whether you give them a math and reading placement test; and then if students who are particularly struggling with those basic skills, if they have any difficulty with your online courses.

TIM JONES: Yes. This is Tim. We do – when they come into the program we do a TABE test on them for the basic placement of it. And from there, we're able to assess at what level we need to start with.

And the second part of your question, it was about – could you repeat it for me?

MS. DORRIS: Yes, sure. We were just wondering for those students that are identified as needing a lot of extra help, do they struggle with the online program? And what services do you provide them?

MR. JONES: A lot of the online teachers are available as they go through the course. And then also I am there in the room to assist, to do the one-on-one instruction and tutoring and to do – kind of like the go-between between the online teacher if the response isn't quick enough for them; and then to readapt maybe any lesson that the online teacher has provided to adjust it to any IEP that might be needing help with for the reading or the math.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Thanks, Tim. We also had a question – and this is probably for Jeff and for Kera – if you could tell us a little bit about how you specifically support young parents.

MR. FITE: You want to take a stab at it or I can.

Well, the first thing is we make sure that they know that they're welcome in the program and they're going to get lots of individualized life planning attention.

The other thing that we do is we take a very direct course. As I mentioned in the staff's part, the average length of stay in the program is slightly less than a year. So we do not have very long with the students at all. And so we take a very direct course with the students, which as far as the credit recovery, many times a young parent and they're really on it. Their life has speeded (sic) up tremendously. And so we help them get from point A to point B and then to point C, which in this case would be transitioning to the next thing. And in Kera's case, we were able to help her get into our – start our community college and take some college courses.

So we're very straightforward in our approach and we realize that time is of the essence. So the life planning happens quickly and we expedite the process there very much.

MS. DORRIS: Great. Well, thank you so much. Unfortunately I think we're going to have to move on due to time constraints, but I want to thank you all very much for answering all those questions and we're going to move on to the next portion of the agenda. We're going to spend a lot more time getting into details and looking at some specific topic areas.

So I will turn it over to my colleague, Terry Grobe, who's going to facilitate this portion of the agenda.

MS. GROBE: Terrific. Thank you so much. So we're now going to move into the discussion part of this webinar and address some of the big topic areas that people had questions about.

And I wanted to make a point that our presenters today represent programs that communities have brought in by one means or another, either by connecting with a large national organization that supports the recovery work, like Communities in Schools, or through getting a federal grant and bringing in a YouthBuild program. Many of you know that the U.S. Department of Labor does competitions and support YouthBuild programs throughout the country.

But we also know that many of you may be developing programs on your own. These programs are kind of homegrown recovery programs. So we thought we'd really delve into what these leaders and practitioners have learned as a result of their program development efforts and ask them to share lessons that they believe are relevant, whether a community brings in an outside provider to help them with recovery programming or whether they're developing their own program.

And although there are so many areas we could explore, we're really going to look at three areas of programming that we consider pretty important in terms of designing a program that works

and is sustainable, and the areas are really in curriculum and instruction; in developing partnerships; and in providing transition services and support for students.

We have 10 minutes for each of these discussion areas. I'm going to pose questions for our presenters and ask them to address the questions. And while we're doing that we'd like to invite you to share your ideas in these topic areas and also your learning in the discussion in the chat window. And at the end of each discussion area we're going to move that chat box to the center screen and ask Christina from the Department of Education to emphasize a few points; maybe show us what she thinks are particularly interesting lessons or even played-out patterns in the audience responses.

So I'm first going to start with a curriculum area and my first question, which is how you deliver your curriculum in a way that's engaging and relevant for students – perhaps students who haven't always liked school or been successful in school. And how do you deliver your curriculum in a way that helps them recover their confidence as learners? And I think I'll ask Tim and Jeff from YouthBuild to maybe tackle the answer to this question first.

MR. JONES: Well, the curriculum part for our school – being an online school, of course, it's already provided. And so the bigger part is implementing for us a supportive area; to provide an atmosphere for a better learning environment.

So what we're able to do, then, since we have such smaller numbers, is to build and foster a better one-on-one type of relationship with the students. And by doing that we can address a lot of the long-term goals that they might have and even the shorter-term goals where we break it down into a day-by-day – what they want to accomplish through the day and connecting those to those long-term goals for the day, the week, and then even after they leave the program.

And one of the phrases that we use to help put ownership to the students is "because I said I would." It's not a program that we're forcing them to do. This is something when they come to us, they are wanting to finish their high school or they're wanting to get their GED. So it really changes the game a little bit compared to a traditional school for them. And it puts them in the driver's seat of their own future, so that changes – it's easier to acquire your goals like this if it's your goal and not somebody else's.

So the curriculum part is there and they can take that, of course, as far as they want. But we strive to, like I said, help them to recognize what they're to do it for. I don't know if you have anything, Jeff.

MS. GROBE: Good. Can I just ask a follow-up question? Because I'm always so intrigued by online learning systems and how students relate to those systems. Do you find that students need a lot of support from the teacher to access those and to get help with the lessons? Do you think they take to them fairly quickly? Does the pace of it actually help them get motivated and believe that they can move through the curriculum quickly? How do that work for your students?

MR. JONES: For our students I think it works really well for them, a lot better than the traditional high school because they see the whole thing lined out. They can see the end goal

because all of the lessons are available to them at once. It really gives them an opportunity to catch up because they can set their own pace. And at the same time, like I said, we also encourage them at a daily rate and pace.

Jeff has something he'd like to add.

MR. FITE: When we started the online education five years ago we were actually warned by many people, don't do that online learning, it doesn't work. But we simply could not – one, we were responding to the student need, that our students were actually wanting to finish high school and we only offered GEDs. So we were responding to a student need, and the only way we could do it was through online learning.

The key, though, is putting that certified teacher in the room with the student to keep the progress going and keep the accountability going. And I think that really is the key to successful online education.

MS. GROBE: Good. I know that there's a lot to unpack in that box on online learning, and that for many, many students it just is a godsend. And that point about really seeing it all laid out and the goal in sight is very motivating.

I have another question. I think I'll ask Constance if she could address this. It's really about the curricular balance in these programs, because it's always so challenging to try to figure out both how to help students recover and grow their basic academic skills, accelerate the content so you can get students who are behind through as quickly as is reasonable, but also to bring them to higher standards so that they're college and career ready. That's a lot to expect a recovery program to balance and address successfully, and I wanted to ask you, Constance, what you've learned about the challenge of doing all that.

MS. THOMAS: You're right; it is a challenge. It really comes back to staffing and to being very clear with the facts, about the facts to the folks involved in the education of these kids. This is not just about presenting a worksheet for kids to do. This is about taking kids all the way to being a successful adult. And that it requires more effort from the educator, to look into the kid and to see what – help tap into what their goals are, help tap into what their interests are, and be a part of being a part of coming over the obstacles that have gotten them in this situation in the first place; believing in the kid and presenting the opportunities to them.

I'll let Dr. Drawdy finish up if she has anything to add, but the main thing is it really comes back to your staff being willing to invest in that kid and see the process through.

MS. DRAWDY: I also think that especially with Communities in Schools' support, we're able to give our students the opportunity to see what possibilities are out there for them, because a lot of times these children come to us and they see a lot of their opportunities as a dead-end street. And we do a lot of work with local community colleges and local employers so that we can build that vision for them to show what they can become, what they can do if they put forth this work effort.

And a lot of times, if they see that that work effort can lead to an attainment goal, something that is realistic for them, that helps to motivate the child. And a lot of times, it'll even help to motivate their family as well.

MS. GROBE: Great. Yeah. I just think that motivation is so key.

The other thing I was going to ask, which is a follow-up question here, and it's about sort of how you do an awful lot with just a limited amount of time, and do it so that the students can respond to it and not be overwhelmed. You know, both programs I think have additional supposedly non-academic offerings, the leadership development and the work site components in the case of YouthBuild and service projects in the case of Communities in Schools.

So I just was going to ask whether those present additional opportunities to help young people learn academic content and actually apply their academics in real-life settings. Does that help you cover academic skills for students in kind of a more authentic way and give you additional opportunities to give students time to practice academic skills?

MS. DRAWDY: This is Dr. Drawdy again. We have built into their academic schedule every day what we call extended learning time, which is a 40-minute block of time. And during that time we have a number of opportunities for them. If the child is struggling with, let's say, content literacy, our student services coordinator, her certification is high school language arts. And so she works with that group of students.

And if it is a child who is looking to attain employment in one of the local offices, we'll say, we have great community support. And we'll have people from chamber of commerce who come in here and present lessons to our students about telephone etiquette, for example. Those kinds of things help to land real-world experience to what they're learning, let's say, in their language arts class. So we do have a lot of opportunities for that, and I think being in a small community helps us to be able to do that.

MS. GROBE: Excellent. So I think we'll sum this up, just so that we can cover all of our areas. So I'll turn it over to Christina. Do you want to give us a flavor of what our participants have said while we were having our discussion?

CHRISTINA WEETER: Yes. Thank you, Terry. It seems that the participants really have a lot of interest in some of the online or virtual modalities. A few of the curriculum that were coming up were PLATO, Apex, E2020, NovaNet, OdysseyWare. At least one person was kind of interested in the flipped classroom, and I think all of these are sort of examples of the nontraditional classroom that we've been seeing for the past 50 years. And so I think there's a recognition that we need to do things a little bit differently.

Another person mentioned, which I think is important to point out, that students can be really motivated by earning credits based on mastery or competency-based credits. This is something that really varies state to state, based on whatever the local policy is.

We can't forget the importance of dedicated partners, and specifically the instructors or local community colleges were mentioned. I think someone else also talked about pacing guides and how that can be important for ensuring that students are able to move at their own pace and not just transition at the end of a semester or a quarter, and that that really can help keep students motivated.

We see a lot of great comments coming in, and we'll talk more about this at the end. But we really want to encourage folks to continue these conversations even after the webinar, and we're going to let you know how to do that. Because I think you can see from the chat that there are a lot of people participating today who have some great knowledge and things to share about what's working well for them that can benefit others in the webinar space and beyond.

So let's see if there's anything else that I missed. I think those are the general themes that I'm noticing, so I'm going to pass it back to you so we can talk more about partnerships.

MS. GROBE: Terrific. And it sounds like people are moving there in their questions and comments as well.

So we really do want to explore this notion of partnerships a little bit. And my first question is really about what organizations or groups in the community have been your strongest partners, and what's the biggest payoff of working with these organizations? Jeff, you want to take this first question?

MR. FITE: Sure. And many of our partners have been addressed in the last several minutes, actually.

As one of the slides mentioned earlier, we were part of a community movement to bring Rio Grande Community College into our small town, which three years ago they did open a branch in our small town, which is huge. They've had tremendous success with it. So just the close proximity of folks not having to drive 45 minutes to the nearest training center or college campus, that was absolutely huge.

Also, our other community college is Hocking College. Their emphasis on hands-on learning and their ability to understand and work with nontraditional students, that has been a tremendous help to us.

In regards to that, I can't overstate the importance with our type of young person that comes into our program this whole arena of college knowledge. Where many of our students, when they come to us, they've not really pursued or thought about and their family has not. They're first-generation college students. They don't know what a semester is. They don't know what a major is. They don't know the college – they don't have the college lingo. So we try to get them on campuses, tear those walls down and just expose them to the postsecondary opportunities.

In addition to that, we've also been the recipient of a National Schools Initiative grant, which is a pass-through grant from YouthBuild USA provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The purpose of that grant is improving secondary school outcomes, particularly with a focus on

college readiness. And those resources have been really helpful in helping us to figure out how to help students make that transition, and the technical assistance that came along with that.

In addition, the adult career centers also are coming more and more prominently into play for our students, and the concept that there are other ways to win. Not every student is going to go and get a four-year college degree, that there are other ways to train yourself and have a successful life.

And then I guess the last partner I would mention are our area One-Stop Job Centers and Career Centers, who have worked with us to get students in there to expose them to job opportunities, career opportunities, résumé building, résumé writing and those types of tools.

So those are our most prominent partners at this point. And there are many, many more, by the way.

MS. GROBE: That's great. That's great. And you know, one of the things I was thinking about – I mean, YouthBuild has been so effective in their partnerships with a range of providers and with employers. And I think that Communities in Schools have been so known for having a whole range of partners that provides that comprehensive – the comprehensive wraparound support that Gary and others talked about.

So I'm really curious to hear from Communities in Schools how you've been so successful with your partnership work and what makes partners want to work with you? We know that partnerships work best when it benefits both parties, both the program and the outside partners. So why do people want to work with cities and schools? And what do they – what creates this kind of win-win for both your program and your outside partners?

MR. CHAPMAN: Sure. This is Gary again. I mean, you're right. Our whole model is based on coalition building and working with many different partners. So I think in order to really do this the right way, you want to make sure you have the right partners at the table to begin with. So you're looking at, of course, the school district and departments of labor, departments of health, family and children, department of justice. You've got your business community, maybe your chamber at the table; we heard Lilli talk about that. You're community colleges in particular are there, your faith-based community.

So you're looking at all the key partners that are already in the community that are looking to work together towards a common goal of supporting students and supporting the schools. So if you can really bring them together and make sure that they are aligned with the highest needs of the students.

So everybody wants to do great work for kids, but getting them to the right school to provide the right support is really critical so that you don't have duplication of services from different partners. I think that what makes it strong is when you start with the school and you start with the needs of that school first, and the students, and then branch out to find the right partners from there. So you keep it embedded within the needs of the school and the students first and foremost.

And then that you really negotiate what those partnerships look like. And I think in particular the faith-based community is a great place to start. Mentors, financial support, helping to meet the basic needs; there's a lot of things that in rural communities faith-based partners can really bring to the table.

MS. GROBE: Terrific. And so do partners – do you think, Gary, partners, when they work together with an organization like Communities in Schools in community, feel like they can do their work better or they're more satisfied with outcomes?

MR. CHAPMAN: Yeah. Absolutely. So –

MS. GROBE: (Inaudible) – making – what's the win?

MR. CHAPMAN: Yeah. So within the community that we're working in there's really this alignment that's in place. So everybody's coming to the table. They're creating a plan – a strategic plan for what changes they want to see happen in the community, and then they are deployed against the pieces that they can help to benefit the most. And so whatever support they're bringing to the table can really be tailored to meet a specific need; a specific population of students, in particular.

So they're getting to the kids that need the service the most and they're able to report their outcomes much more easily in this unified and cohesive fashion.

MS. GROBE: Excellent.

MR. CHAPMAN: I think the other important thing is that there are agreements in place. So we know that you're not partnering for partnership's sake but that there is a need and there is an identified resource that you bring to the table. And there are agreed-upon steps that you're going to take to do your work and report back, and that there is going to be a win-win situation so that you're getting what you need out of this as a partner as well. But there's real agreement and alignment.

MS. GROBE: Right. Yeah. And I think then there's that recognition that certain partners can provide services better than another and that no one organization can do it all. So if you're using people in the best way that you can, you really start to get synergy, right?

MR. CHAPMAN: Right.

MS. GROBE: In the service mix.

MR. CHAPMAN: But I do think in rural communities in particular, my experience has been that with CIS can really help to bring that evidence-based practice to the table. So people are there and they want to do good work, but they don't necessarily know how to implement the best model to do that. So by having a larger body of research behind the work, you can help your partners to implement the best program that they can.

MS. THOMAS: This is Constance. And I would just like to add to that that it is nice to have a partnership that starts with Communities in Schools that sort of has a platform of we want to help build the individuals in this community, therefore building the community. When you stick to that as what your goal is and you have the guidance of CIS, then it helps engage everybody at the table.

And when you start with the school system – and you realize that your – they realize that the agenda is very pure, in that we are wanting children to succeed and we understand that that creates a successful community, then it's very helpful. That helps bring everybody to the table with the right frame of mind, that we're all here to put our own personal agendas aside for a few minutes and see how we can bring these kids to a greater level of success. And that will benefit all of us at the table and this is how we can help to have that happen for the kids.

MS. GROBE: Terrific. So I was going to ask the question about advice for folks who are just starting to build partnerships. So I think we've done an awful lot in terms of kind of articulating the groundwork and the rationale and the way that you head into these things in terms of making the goals really clear and the accountability clear and helping each organization meet its goals better by working together.

Is there anything else that you want to add that would be good advice to folks who've got some programming on the ground and want to reach out more deliberately to partners? (Pause.)

MR. CHAPMAN: I don't think so.

MS. GROBE: OK. I think you've done a good job. So I think I'm going to turn this over to Christina to summarize the participant feedback in this area. And then we'll move on to transitioning students beyond high school to further education and training. So Christina?

MS. WEETER: Great. Thank you, Terry, again for a good conversation with our participant presenters today. We've seen a lot of excellent examples from the participants in the chat about who they're partnering with already and who are somewhat being their champions, I guess. So a lot of these are local nonprofits.

I did see a mention of the United Way, which is something that I've been hearing about all across the country. The United Way seems to be really engaged in this kind of work and supporting schools and districts with this population of young people.

Large employers can be a good partner; that was brought up. Particularly if you start having conversations with folks at the top who have sort of more leverage and they're able to encourage the local branches in the various communities to be more engaged with the schools and the district.

Community colleges, of course, can be an excellent partner, especially around dual enrollment or waiving certain fees.

So those are some of the trends. We've also seen some health organizations, nonprofit organizations, as I mentioned before, social organizations, youth development centers. Intermediaries definitely have a role to play and that can become interesting with trying to pull – or useful, particularly to pull all the different partnering organizations together and find a common direction.

So there's a lot more ideas coming in. And again, we'll encourage you all to continue sharing those as we move forward. So thank you, Terry.

MS. GROBE: Thank you, Christina. So we'll tackle the last discussion area, which is about student transition. And my first question is for cities and schools. And the question is, how do you support students during their post-program transition either to more – to some postsecondary education or to a career?

MR. CHAPMAN: Sure. This is Gary. So first of all, I can say that most of our work is really in supporting kids before they transition to postsecondary. We're starting to see some work throughout our network, particularly in North Carolina and in Charlotte and some in Texas as well, where there are site coordinators or graduation coaches that are supporting students as they transition into postsecondary. So there's someone else at the particularly community college level that's supporting students.

But the foundation of our work is really around a curriculum called Charting for Success. It's a process that Communities in Schools of Georgia and Communities in Schools of North Carolina put together that is 48 modules that are used throughout the course of the school year in 8th to 9th grade or into high school that really helps the student plan out what they want their academic career to look like.

So they're really tracking what their credits are and what they need to graduate, what their interests are after graduation, and then what's the right path for them to move that forward. So we'd have site coordinators and we'd have volunteers that deliver that curriculum in the classroom throughout the course of the school year with them to really help them map out what their postsecondary experience will look like and how they're going to pay for that in order to make it happen.

So we do a lot of work in that arena before students transition. We are really looking for partners to help us move to the next level with supporting kids as they move into postsecondary.

MS. GROBE: That's great. Yeah. I think this is a fertile area for partnership development. And so many programs are beginning to work with our community colleges to see if they can get some further help or assistance in advising students about postsecondary programs of study and also helping them bridge and then transition to the school.

I wanted to ask YouthBuild a question too because one of the challenges is I think for programs, when they've always got a new cohort coming in the door, is to track and see what happens to students after they leave the program and the use a little bit about what they learn to strengthen their program design. Because if you can track and see what happens with them and you can

hear from them in what ways they felt ready to tackle the next thing and in which ways they felt like they weren't, then you learn a lot about how you have to change or adjust or strengthen your program.

And YouthBuild has built into the model some – a nine-month follow-up at least for students once they leave the program. So Jeff, I'd love to have you just describe that briefly what you do in terms of following students after they leave the program, and what you've learned about those students that have helped you strengthen your program.

MR. FITE: Sure. I'd love to. And I must say, I do – we've been funded by other funding sources, originally by HUD. And seven years ago now, I think, YouthBuild nationally transitioned over to Department of Labor. One of the smart things that Department of Labor did was build in that mandated after-care period because it was a weakness before. So it has to be tracked. The contact has to be monitored and it is grant-funded as a part of the program then.

So we make – it is our goal to make multiple contacts with the student after they leave. And at that point we hope that we have built excellent working relationships so they're very comfortable coming and asking us – asking for help and guidance and resources and just that comfort is level is there.

Just to back up what my colleague said from Georgia, because of the short-term nature of our – and transitional nature of our programs, we talk about begin with the end in mind. So literally, from day one, when a new cohort comes in, we are talking about what are you doing next? And we're – you need to build a life plan and we're beginning to compel them to discussions around, OK, what's next for you? What makes the most sense? We'll help you explore, but you have to make some tough decisions.

We start from day one and we reinforce to them YouthBuild is not an end; it's a beginning; it's a transition. We say to our students, we love you but you can't stay. We're in this for life, but you can't stay. You have to figure out what your next best thing is for you once you leave. So all those things are very important.

What we've learned? A couple of things. That just contact and relationships are huge, that we just have to stay in contact. And not to make bad assumptions on behalf of the students. So just because we've started a student at the community college doesn't mean they're passing, doesn't mean they're going to class, doesn't mean they're – so we have to stay engaged. Stay engaged in the process, even after they leave so they don't get discouraged. And they don't understand an assignment so they stop going to class.

And those are some of the hard lessons that we've learned. And also that our staff – there are many stops and starts and false starts on behalf of our students. And so it's going to happen. So we encourage our staff: Don't take it personally. Just help the student get back up and get going again.

And those are all very important interpersonal strengths that I think we possess. And that's just good people being in place and wanting to do the right thing by students.

MS. GROBE: That's great. Thank you so much. And you know, I've often heard from staff in recovery programs that trying to get students to ask for help early enough and in a timely way when they get themselves into these situations is one of the greatest challenges and the thing they need the most help in managing as they leave the program.

My last question, though, is for Kera. Save the best to last. And Kera, I wanted you to talk with folks about YouthBuild helped you as you finished the program. And what do you think it's important – what's most important for these people on the phone to know as they run programs like YouthBuild, about how to help students move into a career and move into postsecondary education?

MS. SPRIGGS: Yeah, well, with the first question, they did do the follow-up. And I would call several times and ask silly questions but they answered them.

For the second, if you're trying to help the student for more higher education, as long as you're not trying to push them into getting more education or go into a career, they're most likely going to do it. And you have to show them that you do care, even a little bit how they end up in life and where they – where they're going to be later on. And to get them to go to higher education, it'd probably be good to help them figure out their effective learning – how they learn in their own special way.

MS. GROBE: Yeah. Yeah. Good. And then they could put those strengths to use when they're out on their own a little bit more, right?

MS. SPRIGGS: Yes.

MS. GROBE: Yeah. I think that's really good. That's a really good point. Terrific. Well, thanks, everybody, for those really quick but very rich discussions.

Again I'm going to turn it over to Christina to summarize the participant ideas and feedback in this discussion area.

MS. WEETER: Great. Thanks again, Terry, and for all of our presenters. One of the first things that we saw mentioned, which was echoed by a few people, was transportation is one of the services that can really help with those transitions, particularly if community colleges or other places that might – that students might want to visit are some distance away and students don't have their own method of transportation. That can be really powerful.

And what goes along with that I think is what someone else mentioned related to college tours and pairing that with employment – or employer tours. I think that's a great idea for really making those connections between the postsecondary education piece and what it can lead to ultimately, which is what we want is a job that pays a living wage.

And then also giving students some kind of physical reminder of what the goal is, such as a college pennant or a tee-shirt or something from that college. I think that can be something that helps students keep their eye on the prize to an extent, even after the visit ends.

Someone else mentioned hosting postsecondary transition clinics. And I think we've seen this in the field, particularly with our High School Graduation Initiative grantees, where they sit down with students and provide some sort of map or a plan for whatever their next step is going to be.

And then mentors was another thing that was mentioned and I think that that really goes to what we know about students and the importance of relationships with a caring adult, or even peers. And I think Kera said it best when she mentioned that we need to show students that you really care about where they end up. And so I think that that really is the best place to end on this conversation is how important those relationships can be.

So at this point we're going to go on to the next and final bit of our time with you today. We are going to wrap up our conversation. I hope you found it enriching. I want to thank the presenters and all of you participants for joining us. We hope you found the webinar and this series overall useful and will be able to take actionable changes in your community to enhance opportunities for young people to graduate with a diploma.

If you weren't able to join us for the first few webinars in this series, you can access recordings of the presentations and download resources using the link that appears on the screen here. That's where this webinar will also be archived. So if you have colleagues that weren't able to join us today but you think they would find it valuable, you can pass along this link to them and they will be able to access any of the recordings and all of the resources for each of the three parts of the series.

And I'm so pleased to see how rich the discussion has been in the chat boxes. So if you haven't already joined the school turnaround learning community, I would encourage you to do that, particularly joining the rural schools group or the secondary schools group. We have already set up some discussion boards there on these specific topics of transitions, curriculum and partners. So we encourage you to continue sharing all of these great ideas that you put forth today and any more that you have through that discussion board. You can go back to it at any point in time. You do have to log in, but that's a very easy process.

And I just want to remind you that this community of practice is really an opportunity for you to connect with educators and administrators all across the country who are addressing the same challenges you are, and an opportunity to share strategies that you've found to be successful. So we really hope you'll take advantage of this resource.

I do want to ask folks to stay online and complete a survey when it pops up on their screen. We want to let you know that you can add more to the chat boxes on any of these three topics and we'll keep those open on the screen even after this webinar ends – or the call ends.

And here's another copy of the link that I mentioned before to access all the resources and recordings.

And I'm going to turn it back over to Brian to bring us to conclusion.

(END)