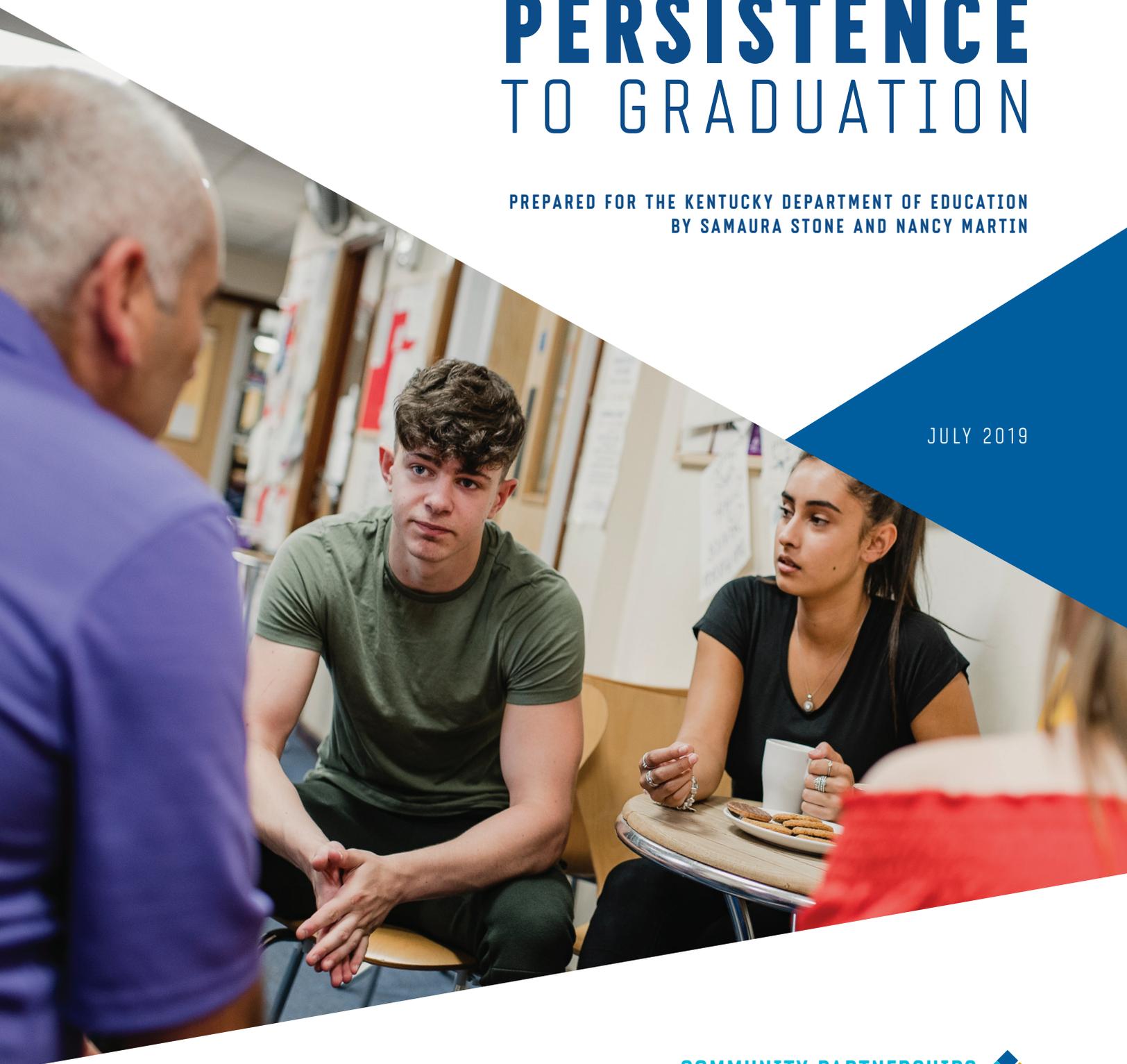




# PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION

PREPARED FOR THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## OVERVIEW

As schools and districts assess the multiple factors that impact academic achievement and high school graduation rates, many have begun offering more holistic and integrated supports for students and their families in the areas of mental and physical health, nutrition, employment or college/career readiness services, emergency assistance, family counseling, and afterschool programs. The growth and success of community schools, federally funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, and Integrated Student Supports have led many schools to build and sustain strong partnerships with community-based organizations and service providers. Moore & Emig (2014) define Integrated Student Supports (ISS) as a school-based approach to promoting students' academic success by developing or securing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement. Such resources can range from traditional tutoring and mentoring to a broader set of social and emotional supports.

According to the National Center for Community Schools, having community-school partnerships increases academic performance, attendance, school climate, and parent and family engagement, and promotes positive youth development and school readiness (2009).

Integrated Student Supports executed through school partnerships serve more than 1.5 million students in nearly 3,000 elementary and high schools across the country (Somers & Haider, 2017). A report by Child Trends concludes emerging evidence gathered from quasi-experimental studies indicates ISS can contribute to student academic progress as measured by decreases in grade retention and dropping out and increases in attendance, math achievement, reading and ELA achievement, and overall GPA. Additionally, the return on investment for these programs ranges between \$4 and \$15 dollars for every dollar spent. Hispanic and Black students account for more than 75 percent of students enrolled in such programs, which can positively help narrow the opportunity gap (Moore & Emig, 2014).

Community-based partnerships can help transform learning, provide social supports, expose students to future career paths, and lead to long-term connections and provide structured support and reassurance for students who might have lacked confidence. In Kentucky, community partnerships effectively help students who are struggling find the guidance and motivation they need to realize the importance of planning for their next steps in education and careers.

## KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Kentucky schools and districts are working hard to continuously improve community partnerships to better serve students and families. Two programs, *Adair Youth Development Center* and *Estill County Middle School Youth Service Center* that are featured in this brief, speak to the diversity of community partnerships and supports in different settings, proving that

partnerships and collaborations with outside organizations are a vital component of student success. We document three key strategies and the associated practices in place for schools across the Commonwealth. Schools and programs that have strategically created partnerships to promote learning all share the following:

### STRATEGY 1: STRONG EFFORT TO FILL GAPS AND RESPOND TO SPECIFIC STUDENT NEEDS

Having a strong understanding of the community, current resources, and student needs are essential for developing partnerships. These are a few practices to keep in mind:

- ❑ Conduct needs assessments to address student health, social-emotional learning, and interests.
- ❑ Create partnerships to respond to student needs and enhance existing school-based services.

### STRATEGY 2: DESIGNATED PERSON TO COORDINATE SERVICES BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND PARTNER

Communication is critical between partners and schools. Having a liaison or team of people focused on working with key partners will help sustain key relationships. The following are good practices:

- ❑ Identify a staff member to become the main contact for partners. If that is not feasible, consider creating a committee or seeking out volunteers to help fulfill this role.
- ❑ Focus on establishing relationships with different types of partners and develop norms/agreements. For example, are partners expected to attend certain meetings at the school or program?

### STRATEGY 3: HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES AND ASSESSMENT

Depending on the school or program, all partnerships may not be formal and attached to specific youth development outcomes. However, for partnerships that are focused on academic achievement and specific skills development, having an evaluation process to measure the impact on students is important. Consider the following:

- ❑ Establish a common framework and goal between the schools and community partners focused on results or developing specific skills.
- ❑ Ensure that the skills being taught are high-quality and in alignment with best practices for youth development and learning.
- ❑ Conduct surveys with students and providers to assess learning, as well as specific milestones or progress.

# ADAIR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER

ADAIR COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | COLUMBIA, KENTUCKY

## KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

1  
2

**A**dair Youth Development Center<sup>1</sup> was recognized as a 2018 Kentucky Department of Education program of distinction for their work in alternative education. Adair is a maximum security, Level 5 Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) residential male and female facility that opened in 2000. Adair serves young people ages 12-21, with a focus on education and counseling services. There are two groups of students, some are in detention and the other are in the residential program. Leadership is explicit about not viewing the youth as inmates, but instead as residents and students. “A Youth Development Center is not a prison, we have youth workers and not guards,” said Wes Irvin, Administrator. There are counselors assigned to each unit and one-on-one counseling is offered every week. Students are offered credit recovery and blended learning, through the use of technology and the Odyssey online learning program. Students are able to earn credit at a faster rate and can also earn their GED while simultaneously working toward a diploma. One student that came to Adair with a half a credit was able to earn 15 credits within 6 months.

Young people are provided with multiple career options, as well as courses that include interviewing, budgeting, financing, and skill development for transitioning out of the facility. Within 24-48 hours of entering Adair, students take a vocational assessment test to better understand their interests, and the test is combined with their Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores. An individualized learning education plan is then put together for the student with a focus on vocational training that can be tailored to fit their career interests. The average stay for students is about 80 days. Similar to traditional schools, students are required to take six periods of instruction, Monday-Friday in four core academic areas, vocational course and physical exercise (PE). The vocational courses include the Computer Tech (C-TEC) Program and Building and Maintenance. C-TEC students are able to get certifications in Copper Cabling, Fiber Optic Cabling, Home Audio, Telecom, Telephone VoIP, Energy Management, and Exploring IT. Students can be placed on a national registry to get a job based on the credential they earn.

Adair teachers are all extremely energetic and passionate about the work and believe that, as one teacher explains, “the environment that’s created by taking away cell phones and screens creates a hunger to learn while here because it’s all they have to focus on.” Staff define their role as “providing hope,” as the students are only with them for a short

amount of time, and it is their intent that all students will leave with tangible skills, such as certifications and high school or college credits. Staff also assist youth with developing a resume, cover letter, and provide letters of recommendations for them. Adair students are equally as motivated to learn, and many of them stated that this is the “first time that they felt excited about learning.”

Students who are in secure facilities can often feel isolated due to their limited contact with the outside world. However, Adair makes it a priority to provide students with various ways to connect through the use of technology and work with community members by bringing them into the facility to speak with and mentor the youth during their time at Adair. Students hear from guest speakers every Friday about various career paths, ranging from engineering, to construction and small business. In addition to having the Odyssey program that allows students

to complete coursework at their own pace, Saylor Academy allows students to complete college courses and take college exams. If they pass the course, they are eligible to receive college credit.

Through a partnership with World Possible, an organization based in Oregon, students at Adair can participate in a pilot program called Endless OS, which the Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning (RACHEL) is built into. Prison education programs are now using RACHEL to give their students access to online courses, research, and materials without the hazards and distractions of the full internet. Currently, RACHEL is used by secure facilities in 14 states and Kentucky is the first juvenile facility to pilot the Endless OS.

Adair also collaborates with the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) to provide a college road show bus. Through the road show, students can learn about the FAFSA and college entry process.

<b>TYPE OF PROGRAM</b>	Maximum Security, Level 5 Juvenile Justice Detention and Residential Facility
<b>POPULATION SERVED</b>	Young people ages 12-21
<b>BENEFITS TO DISTRICT</b>	Adair Youth Development Center is successful at working with students that were not thriving or fell behind at their previous schools. The students are able to enhance their academic performance and behavior and strengthen their motivation to learn. Additionally, students are able to gain a credential that can be used when they return to their community or gain enough credits to graduate high school.
<b>FUNDING SOURCE/S</b>	Adair Youth Development Center is classified as an A6 facility that is funded through the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC), and Title I Funds.
<b>CHALLENGES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The teachers are the drivers for learning and have to adapt to a much quicker pace than a traditional high school, as they have the students for as little as 2 weeks and a maximum of 6 months.</li> <li>▪ Many of the students have learning disabilities and/or mental health challenges, and need more time to make progress.</li> </ul>

# ESTILL COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH SERVICES CENTER

ESTILL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | IRVINE, KENTUCKY

## KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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3

**F**amily Resource and Youth Services Centers<sup>2</sup> (FRYSC) were established as a component of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. The mission of these school-based centers is to help academically at-risk students succeed in school by helping to minimize or eliminate non-cognitive barriers to learning and enhance student academic success. The centers offer an array of services and programs that are solely driven by the determined needs of each population being served, available resources, location, and other local characteristics. The centers have established a history of achievement based on improved student performance in class work, homework, and peer relations. Parental involvement is also a critical part of the services that are designed, as there is a direct link between the impacts of family trauma on student achievement.

Estill County Middle School Youth Services Center (YSC) is one of 853 centers across Kentucky. There are 442 Family Resource Centers that serve elementary age students, 296 YSCs serving middle and high school, and 116 combined centers that serve elementary through high school students. The Youth Services Center at Estill County Middle School focuses on the following: Drug and alcohol counseling and referrals, social service and health referrals, employment counseling, and a family crisis and mental health counselor. Estill County is relatively small and rural, so identifying needed resources and supports can be challenging simply because of a lack of businesses and community-based organizations within the area. The population is approximately 14,672. For a community like Estill County, a Youth Services Center can be one of the closest and most reliable resources for students and families to access.

Center staff are devoted to serving the needs of all students and families, balancing multiple tasks each day. There is not a typical day, as the role can change based on the requests that are received from students and families. One day could be focused on providing supplies to students, whereas another day could be devoted to gathering food items from a pantry through the school Backpack Program, so the students will have enough food for the weekend. For bullying prevention month, the YSC staff work with teachers and students to create awareness events, and they also plan parent nights and various celebrations throughout the year. There is also a focus on safety,

so cyber bullying prevention and similar topics are discussed with students, and programs are created within the school to promote school safety.

There are also about 30 young people on their council. Students receive leadership training and help to plan various events that are supported through the Youth Services Center. For example, the student council plans events such as Red Ribbon Week and other drug and alcohol abuse prevention and awareness programs. They participate in a host of community service projects, such as providing holiday parties for an adult daycare, helping as servers at local Hospice Fundraising events, and reading partners for the local preschool center. They also plan and implement transition programs for students transitioning from elementary to middle and middle to high school.

Through a partnership with A Lasting Word, Inc., an environmental summer camp for students was created. A Lasting Word, Inc. raises approximately \$26,000 per year to allow students to attend this camp for free. The students in the environmental camp will have the opportunity to learn about

science and be introduced to activities, such as team building and archery. Another partnership was established with West Care, a nonprofit that provides substance abuse treatment services in eastern and central Kentucky through Estill County’s Sober Living Housing and Second Chance House Residential Program. The partnership includes a program for students with parents who are struggling with substance abuse. Students are able to attend a camp that provides students with resources and skills on how to cope and also connects them with mentors to gain support and participate in activities.

The YSC has several community-based health partnerships. Kids First Dental Care mobile dental clinic provides free teeth cleanings, sealants, and restorative care for students who do not have dental insurance. Quality Care for Kids provides hearing and vision screenings. Students are given two pairs of eyeglasses, so they can take one pair home and keep one at school. There are regular Health Fairs for students through a collaboration with a local pregnancy center, health department, local hospital, and the YSC.

<b>TYPE OF PROGRAM</b>	School-Based Support Services
<b>POPULATION SERVED</b>	500 middle school students each year, grades 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> and their families
<b>BENEFITS TO DISTRICT</b>	Estill County Youth Services Center benefits the district because of their focus on developing activities, supports, and resources that help to remove barriers that can lead to students not completing high school.
<b>FUNDING SOURCE/S</b>	Funding is allocated by the Kentucky Department of Education and sent to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) to administer FRYSCs according to the number of students who are currently in school and based on the per free meal eligibility per student. Once the funds are received, the FRYSCs are required by law to serve every student.

<b>CHALLENGES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eastern Kentucky does not have the same resources as larger districts. For example, there are many students who could benefit from mental health services, but because of the location and the small number of students (about 10 who could be referred), usually it is not worth the commute for a licensed professional to serve those students. Lexington, at 45 minutes away, is the closest city, and most parents are very low-income and not able to drive to those services.</li> <li>▪ Many grandparents are raising their grandchildren, and because many are older, they do not know much about technology or filling out some of the forms.</li> </ul>
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## CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions provide examples of the many strategies programs and schools deploy to meet the varied needs of students. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students through community partnerships.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the three strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

### STRATEGY 1: STRONG EFFORT TO FILL GAPS AND RESPOND TO SPECIFIC STUDENT NEEDS

#### FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- Are school or district partnerships created based on needs assessments or to address student health, social-emotional learning, and student interests?
- What are some of the existing school-based services within your school or district and where do you see the gaps?

#### FOR EDUCATORS:

- Are there important student needs that go beyond the scope of your work that you think could be fulfilled through a partner? If so, what do you need to help establish this partnership?
- Are there additional services that you think students and families need that would complement or strengthen a school-based service that is already in place?

## STRATEGY 2: DESIGNATE A PERSON TO COORDINATE SERVICES BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND PARTNER

### FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ❑ Is there an identified staff member in your district or school with the primary role of managing school partnerships and communicating with outside organizations?
- ❑ Are the partners in your district or school comprised of various sectors and areas? If not, what do you think is needed to create additional cross-sector partnerships?

### FOR EDUCATORS:

- ❑ Are you aware of the partnerships in your schools and the staff responsible for maintaining partnerships? If so, are you able to communicate the needs of your students and/or make suggestions about programming?
- ❑ Based on the partnerships you are aware of within your school, what areas do you think are missing?

## STRATEGY 3: HIGH QUALITY SERVICES AND ASSESSMENTS

### FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

- ❑ Does your district or school use a framework and set goals when developing partnerships?
- ❑ How does your district or school measure the quality of services from outside partnerships and providers?
- ❑ Does your district or school conduct surveys to assess student achievement and progress if partners are providing academic or structured learning opportunities?

### FOR EDUCATORS:

- ❑ If your school uses a framework or sets goals for their outside partnerships, are those goals communicated to you?
- ❑ Does your school have quality standards for outside partners and service providers?
- ❑ Does your school conduct surveys to assess learning from partner organizations? If so, are the goals in alignment with student learning in the classroom?

## REFERENCES

Moore, K., & Emig, C. (2014). *Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

National Center for Community Schools. (2009) *Results to Date*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nccs.org/results-date>

Somer, M.A., & Haider (2017). *A Quasi-experimental evaluation of communities in school*. Washington, DC: MDRC.



# ENDNOTES

- 1 Information for this case example obtained from a telephone interview with Irvin, Wes. (2018, September 4) and site visit to Adair Youth Development Center. (2018, October 5).
- 2 Information for this case example obtained from a telephone interview with Flynn, Michael. (2018, September 14) and site visit to Adair Youth Development Center. (2018, November 13).



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Samaura Stone** is a Senior Policy Associate at the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) in Washington, DC. She oversees AYPF's work focused on informing policymakers on ways to increase education and workforce outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems. Previously, Samaura was a Policy Analyst at the Aspen Institute where she worked with states on implementing a coordinated, systems-level approach to increase economic security for youth and families. She has also worked on education and youth policies for two U.S. Senators and with Portland Public Schools. Samaura brings more than a decade of passion and experience in the non-profit and government sectors, with a keen focus on elevating youth voice, improving equity, and aligning policy with practice

**Nancy Martin** draws on more than 20 years of experience in education and workforce development to help organizations document, perfect, and share their efforts to improve young people's lives. Nancy's specialties include building organizational and system capacity, facilitating learning across communities and systems for youth program quality improvement, documenting alternative pathways to high school graduation and postsecondary success, and conducting insightful and sensitive site visits. Previously, Nancy was Director of Capacity Building Initiatives at the National Youth Employment Coalition, where she oversaw NYEC's education and PEPNet quality standard initiatives to expand high-quality education and employment options for youth.





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