

Opening Remarks for New Directions in Youth Policy

Fred Davie, President, Public/Private Ventures

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Welcome to all of you. Thanks to you, Loren, and your many colleagues at the Ford Foundation for graciously hosting this morning's discussion. I would like to extend special thanks to each of our speakers: Andy Sum, our keynote; Brent Staples, our moderator; and panelists, Michele Cahill, Jacquelynne Eccles, Jean Grossman, Stacy Holland, Brent Orrell and Sudhir Venkatesh. All will shortly be introduced more expansively. I also want to acknowledge the members of the Public/Private Ventures' board of directors and staff.

My job this morning is to provide some opening context for today's discussion. With the presidential election just a month away, our goal is to identify a set of policy priorities that stand to better prepare all of our nation's older youth for economic success in the 21st Century—and clearly we do this in the midst of some very challenging economic times. To get us started, I thought it might be useful to reflect on how far we have come in 30 years, since P/PV's founding, and briefly highlight some of the lessons we have learned. I will also say just a bit about the work that is yet to be accomplished if we are to succeed at mainstreaming and creating opportunities for large swaths of young people, especially youth of color.

P/PV—together with our partners and colleagues—has learned valuable lessons about policies and programs designed to serve our nation's older youth. During the course of the morning, we will discuss many of these lessons in more detail, but let me highlight just a few now.

- First, on **how we invest** our resources:

By and large, short-term programs cannot be expected to permanently alter the course of a young person's life: long-term interventions and systems of support are needed to produce major change. Similarly, short-term investments in programs for youth and young adults cannot be expected to produce long-term results. In other words, a few years of investment followed by a pull-out is almost a guarantee for limited progress in resolving the targeted problem.

- Second, on **evaluation**:

In today's evidence-based culture, we are now feverish for metrics and data and results—which are, of course, critically important. But evaluating a program before it is ready is not a true test of the model. Programs should be evaluated only after they are well implemented and the issues that emerge in early start-up have been addressed. During those early years, data can and should be used to help strengthen programs. But rigorous “make or break” evaluations should wait until a program is well established.

- Another real drive of our age is **replication and expansion**:

P/PV's experience, though, strongly suggests that resources only be invested in replication when there is solid evidence of a program's effectiveness. That being said, we must recognize that the problems we face are pressing, and we all feel pressured to attempt to grow a program when it "looks good." At P/PV, the crux of our work is to negotiate this tension and offer guidance on how to take implementation challenges seriously, to support sustained fidelity to a model and to conduct high-quality research before launching a full-scale replication.

- In terms of **specific program strategies**:

We have clearly come to understand the importance of responsible and caring adults who have the time and interest to engage in supportive relationships with young people. We have seen positive results from these relationships through our mentoring and out-of-school-time programs, employment programs and programs designed for the successful re-integration of young people into their communities after detention or incarcerated.

- Finally, on **engaging community and faith-based organizations** to implement programs for young people:

These organizations bring tremendous assets to this work. Those that are close to the ground, with real credibility in poor neighborhoods and with easy access to staff and a willing pool of volunteers, can provide high-quality and effective services with the appropriate types of support.

These are just a few of the lessons that strike me as critical to keep in mind during today's discussions. I am eager to hear our panelists' thoughts on the most promising strategies for older youth, as we have all clearly made great advances and learned many valuable lessons over the last 30 years. Yet, we find ourselves still wrestling with enormous challenges facing youth and young adults and challenges with trying to reform the systems and the structures that address these issues. Here is today's reality:

- In 2005, almost one third of all high school students—and nearly half of all African American, Hispanic, and Native American students—had failed to graduate high school in four years.
- Each year for the last several years, 750,000 men, women and teens returned from state and federal facilities—and many more from city and county jails nationwide—and most to already fragile communities, with few social supports, job leads or marketable skills.
- In 2003, the unemployment rate for males age 16 to 19 was 17 percent for whites; 22 percent for Latinos; and 36 percent for African Americans, just about the same as it was for juvenile African American males in 1978.

As we will hear this morning, there are real faces behind these numbers, and they deserve much more attention than we have been able to give them during the past decade. When we allow so

many of our youth to slip through the cracks, the economic reality is that we, as a nation, pay an increasingly high price.

But there is hope. The statistics that I've just shared lie in stark contrast to the important progress that was made between 1980 and the mid-1990s, when we observed steady improvements for African American youth and young adults. In the early 1980s, only 51 percent of African Americans age 25 and older had a high school diploma but, by 1994, this proportion had increase to 73 percent. During this period, the number of African Americans with a bachelor's degree grew from 8 to 13 percent. In 1996, a survey by the Illinois Department of Higher Education found that 81 percent of blacks who had graduated from state universities in 1994 found full-time jobs within one year of graduation. It was also a time when we saw a rise in the black middle class, increases in black-owned businesses and some very public successes of African American and Hispanic leaders and other people of color. Collectively, the evidence gives me great confidence that much can be done to regain lost ground and ensure young people's success.

This morning we will hear further analysis of these pressing issues and evidence of emerging promising practices and strategies for improving the life chances of the disconnected youth and young adults in American society.

We will discuss youth employment, particularly reviewing how advances in technology, automation and globalization have undercut the manufacturing base in the United States and led to dramatic declines in youth employment rates. With this reality in mind, we will examine ways to create opportunities to improve the skills and credentials of youth with limited education and limited access to the labor market.

We will engage the issue of crime and incarceration, zeroing in on the enormous downside of the "get tough on crime" policies that have led to skyrocketing incarceration rates for juveniles and young adults, a trend that has transformed juvenile pranks and low-level drug possession into long periods of incarceration or sentences to life-time imprisonment.

We will pursue the of role culture and values, striving to understand how people's life choices are influenced by prevalent perceptions of what is acceptable and consistent with their sense a sense of self and world view.

Finally, we will grapple with the issue of educating the nation's most troubled youth. P/PV's recent report for JobsFirst NYC, authored by Wendy McClanahan and her colleagues, notes that Hispanic and African American males in New York City were the demographic groups least likely to earn diplomas in 2000, with both of these groups bearing graduation rates below 50 percent. It behooves us all to grapple with, and more effectively address, the underlying causes driving such stark inequities.

Our task for the next 30 years, in partnership with many of you, is to recover the gains that were made between the late '70s to the mid-'90s, and to reverse the subsequent 15-year downward spiral experienced by a significant swath of youth and young adults. By laying the groundwork for a strong policy agenda, we will seek to promote and bring to scale programs and the policies that support all of our nation's young people.