

Handout for Ron Ferguson's Comments

Conference on Developing Pathways to Employment

Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

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All They Said Was Graduate

"Vacant Jobs!" the big sign says.
But nowhere do I see
A way to get myself prepared
So they can hire me.

They told me if I did the work
To graduate high school
I'd be prepared to have success
And life would be real cool.

I wonder why they lied to me.
It really wasn't fair!
Now here I am alone and broke
And no one seems to care.

All they said was graduate
And that's just what I did.
I did enough to pass each class
I was a real good kid.

No one ever told me
That I needed to get skills --
That what I learned in school
Could someday help me pay my bills.

All they said was graduate
I thought that was enough.
So now I sit here clueless
Worried 'bout all kinds of stuff.

If only they had told me
That high school was preparation --
A place to get the skills I'd need
To find a good vocation.

If only they had told me
That I actually need to learn
That mastery, not just passing,
Should have been my main concern.

Maybe if some classes
Were more closely linked to working
I'd have spent more time on task
And less time goofing off or shirking.

And I know that lots of teachers
Said that I should go to college
But they never made it clear
That to do that I needed knowledge.

As kids, we count on grownups
To help us find our way.
When they fall down on that job
We sometimes tend to go astray.

At this point in my life
I look for hope (reject despair).
But it would help me quite a bit
If I could know you really care.

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SEARCHING FOR THE STAIRS

I grew up pretty sure
That someday I would go to college.
But I tried and college didn't work for me.

I tried to make it work,
But did so poorly in my studies
That I had to leave the university.

Now I don't know what to do
And time is passing by so quickly
I despair to contemplate my destiny.

What am I supposed to do
When everybody in my family
Went to college and has got a big degree?

What am I supposed to do
When everybody says that college
Is the only way to get where I should be?

I'm asking you these things
Because I really need to know
If there's some hope that I can find my own career.

I'm asking you these things
Because they say that you're somebody
Who can help me push myself and persevere.

Please help me find a way
To keep believing I'm somebody
Other people can respect [pause] instead of fear.

Please help me find a way
To get invited to the party [pause]
Instead of being told to disappear.

I thank you in advance
For helping me to find a pathway
People say that you're someone who really cares.

I thank you in advance
For letting people in high places know
That kids like me are searching for the stairs.

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HARDSHIPS AND DISTRACTIONS

*I'm going to have my dinner
At my grandma's house today.
My mom is stayin' late for work
To make some extra pay.*

*I've got a lot' a homework
But I'm worried 'bout my mom.
So that makes it hard to concentrate.
My mind feels like a bomb!*

*I've also got to make sure
That I wash some clothes to wear
And I've got to get the stuff I need
To tame my crazy hair.*

*And while I'm doin' that,
I'll use the phone to make some calls
To tell my friends the time and place
For Friday at the mall.*

*And sometime between now and then
I've got to get some dough(\$).
'Cause I ain't going to the mall
All destitute and po'.*

*I know that I should focus
On that test I've got in math,
But my English paper's due soon too.
I need some help real bad!*

*Some teachers think I just don't care
And some think I'm not tryin'.
I think I'm caught in a trap –
Sometimes I just start cryin'.*

*But no one ever sees my tears.
'Cause I just show the tough side.
I like to seem real in control –
If not book-smart, then street-wise.*

*I wish my teachers understood
What it's like to be me.
To see my life the way I do –
The whole complexity.*

*They'd see how hard it is to keep
So many things in focus.
They'd see how blurry things can get –
How stuff can seem so hopeless.*

*My teacher said I best be ready
When I take that test in math.
But I ain't got no help at home.
I never knew my dad.*

*I want to go to college.
But for that I need good grades,
Based on what my grades are now,
There may not be a way.*

*I don't know what I'm gonna do.
I need someone who's wise
To help me figure out which way to turn –
To empathize.*

*But let me stop daydreamin',
'Cause I got a lot to do.
If I don't start my homework soon,
I never will get through.*

*If I try and still can't do it
Then I just won't hand it in.
But if I don't try, I'll never know.
So here goes, I'll begin.*

*Everyday I pray
To find someone to guide me and to care.
Is there any chance that you could be
An answer to my prayer?*

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On Us They Can Depend

As children we were fortunate
When every day we found
That the grownups had the answers
And they always seemed so sound.

When our problems over whelmed us
Down on childhood boulevard
Our small world was still coherent
Cause the grownups were in charge.

Now that we've become the grownups
Will the world just fall apart?
Will our kids at last discover
That we just don't have the heart?

No, instead will they be reassured
As we were way back then –
That the grownups have it covered
That on us they can depend.

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Pathways-to-Prosperty Call to Action

CULTIVATE COMMITMENT: Cultivate and Promote a *National Pathways-to-Prosperty Civic Culture* that Embodies a Long-term Commitment to Excellence with Equity in School, Career and Life

- **Excellence:** We commit to establish and maintain supports and accountability for high quality in all aspects of the Pathways System
- **Demographic equity:** We commit to high-quality supports for young people from every background and we explicitly reject any practice or process that might restrict opportunity based on racial, ethnic or social class origins
- **Career equity:** We commit to enable each young person to explore a range of careers and we will respect and support them in any career pathway that they choose, including careers that usually require four-year college degrees *AND* those that do not

BUILD CAPACITY: Build Stronger Institutional Systems and Leadership Infrastructure to Realize the Pathways Vision at the Regional, State and National levels

- **Public Policy Makers:** Public officials will be well informed about the movement and will prioritize key policy supports and authorizations upon which the pathways system depends
- **Intermediaries:** A national network of local, regional and state intermediaries will serve as engines to drive and monitor progress and help define and sustain collective commitments
- **Employers:** Employers will collaborate routinely with educators to support career preparation activities and thereby build stronger foundations for shared prosperity
- **Educational Institutions:** Public and private school systems, out-of-school-time programs, colleges and other career preparation organizations will develop capacity to support excellence across a diversified curricular menu in support of multiple pathways
- **Research Organizations:** A national research and communication infrastructure will study, inform, improve and inspire the Pathways Movement

SUPPLY OPPORTUNITY: Supply High Quality Developmental Supports and Experiences along Multiple Opportunity Pathways. Young people from every racial, ethnic and socio-economic background will experience high quality along any opportunity pathways they select.

- **Teachers:** We will have well-prepared **teachers** for every important topic along every pathway
- **Supervisors:** We will have early career **supervisors** that nurture excellence and value every young person
- **Counselors:** There will be high quality career and life **guidance** in school and beyond
- **Youth Leaders:** Young people will mobilize to establish strong peer supports and to advise adults and hold them accountable for following through on the Pathways vision
- **Linkages:** Institutional **linkages** (instead of disconnected silos) will foster alignment between institutions and this will enable smooth transitions from high school to post-secondary institutions and from education to work. Linkages will also enable transitions from one opportunity pathway to another for those who decide to change direction
- **Community supports:** Families, friends and associates will value and respect each young person as an individual; they will appreciate that every young person has a distinct way of fitting into the world and needs to find his or her own Opportunity Pathway