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National Evaluation of the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3): Summary of the Evaluation's Reports and Findings

About one in nine American teens and young adults are considered disconnected youth, meaning they are neither working nor in school (Social Science Research Council 2020). Connecting these youth to education or work opportunities is an important step to helping disconnected youth successfully transition to adulthood (Loprest et al. 2019). However, the patchwork of programs for disconnected youth across Federal agencies has created challenges for local systems serving youth (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2008). In an effort to address this fragmentation and to improve the outcomes of disconnected youth, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (the 2014 Act) initially authorized the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3); it has been reauthorized in each subsequent fiscal year. As a performance partnership model, P3 offers the flexibility "for States, localities, and Tribes to pool funds and obtain waivers of certain programmatic requirements [to] help them overcome some of the significant hurdles they may face in improving outcomes for disconnected youth" (U.S. Government 2014). The Federal agencies participating in P3 include the U.S. Department of Education (ED), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Corporation for National and Community Services (CNCS), Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Office of Management and Budget, which served in a convener role.

Overview of P3

Using the established performance partnership model, P3 sought to facilitate improvements in how local youth-serving agencies worked together through supporting changes in their government structures, communication practices, and data-sharing approaches to better meet the needs of disconnected youth. The model, used previously by the National Environmental Performance Partnership System administered by the Environmental Protection Agency, offers state and local agencies the flexibility to integrate separate funding streams and to streamline the administrative requirements of the grants. In exchange, participating agencies face heightened accountability for achieving negotiated performance goals (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017).[1]

To implement P3, ED, on behalf of the Federal agencies participating in P3, published notices inviting applications for the fiscal year 2014, 2015, and 2016

authorizations and reviewed applications to award pilots.[2] The published notices presented the Federal vision of the key elements of P3:

- Foster collaboration among local youth-serving agencies across domains—such as education providers, workforce agencies, community-based organizations, and justice-related organizations—to develop coordinated service delivery systems.

- Facilitate collaborative work among these partners to design and implement an approach intended to improve systems serving disconnected youth in their community.

- Harness flexibilities authorized by the acts to support this approach by allowing pilots to blend or braid existing program funds from Federal agencies participating in P3 to fund their approach.[3] Pilots could also request waivers from these funding sources' programmatic requirements—such as allowable activities and reporting requirements—to further support the approach to improve systems serving disconnected youth.[4]

- Improve youth outcomes and expand the knowledge base of approaches that work. P3 required pilots to have the capability to share and use data to help assess performance and improve

upon their strategies and also encouraged pilots to conduct rigorous evaluations of their services.

Since its authorization, the Federal agencies participating in P3 have awarded grants to 14 pilots across the country—nine in the first cohort of pilots authorized by the 2014 Act (Cohort 1 pilots) and five authorized by the 2015 and 2016 Acts (Figure 1).[5] Given the small number of Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 pilots, we refer to these pilots as "Cohort 2/3" pilots. Pilots received start-up funds to offset the anticipated costs of additional partner collaboration, governance, evaluation, and data integration activities associated with P3.[6] However, P3 was not a traditional grant program focused on providing resources, but an approach focused instead on facilitating the use and coordination of existing funding streams. In each pilot, one grantee entity was awarded the P3 grant on behalf of all the local pilot partners. Ten grantees were city, county, or regional government agencies, including four workforce development agencies, a human services agency, a police department, and a public housing agency. Three grantees were state-level agencies, including a human services agency, a state department of education, and a public state university. One grantee was a tribal government.

Figure 1. Location of P3 pilots

Source: Stanczyk et al. (2020).

Overview of the national evaluation

To assess P3, the Federal partners awarded Mathematica and its partner for this project, Social Policy Research Associates, a five-year evaluation. The evaluation included three components: (1) administrative data collection to document the work of the nine Cohort 1 pilots, (2) an implementation study to examine the Federal partners' work to realize P3 and 14 pilots' efforts to change systems and provide services to youth, and (3) the provision of evaluation technical assistance to help strengthen the designs and reporting of 12 pilots' local evaluations. Over the course of the five-year evaluation period, the national evaluation produced reports documenting the pilots' efforts to realize the P3 authority, to provide services to disconnected youth, and to evaluate their initiatives. The national evaluation also produced a special topic paper on how COVID-19 affected youth services.

This report details the research activities and highlights key findings from all components of the five-year evaluation. First, we describe the implementation study, and provide an overview of the study's findings. Then, we describe the evaluation technical assistance activities provided to grantees and their local evaluators and present findings from the synthesis of Cohort 1 pilots' local evaluation reports. Lastly, we offer brief considerations of how the lessons learned from P3 can inform future efforts.

Realization of the P3 authority: Implementation study findings

To realize the P3 authority, all pilots were required to use the flexibilities afforded to them under the performance partnership model to support an approach that would improve local youth-serving systems and improve youth outcomes. Therefore, the implementation study examined the work of the Federal, state, and local partners to assess their efforts to change systems and provide innovative services to youth and improve their outcomes. Specifically, the study addressed five key research questions:

1. How did the P3 pilots use Federal-, state-, and local-granted financial and programmatic flexibilities, including waivers and blended/braided funding, to

design and implement interventions with the goal of improving the outcomes of disconnected youth?

2. How and to what extent had each pilot leveraged the P3 flexibilities, including waivers and blended/braided funding, in an effort to enhance its partnerships and work across partners to provide effective and efficient services to disconnected youth?

3. What systems and programmatic changes resulted from P3 at the Federal and pilot levels (as reported by respondents)?

4. Who were the youth who participated in the P3 pilot and what services did they receive? What were the youth's outcomes, especially in the education and employment domains?

5. What do the pilots' implementation experiences suggest as lessons for developing and/or building upon the P3 integrated governance and service strategies to improve the outcomes of disconnected youth?

The data for the implementation study includes site visits to pilots, a partner survey, document collection and review, interviews with Federal agency staff, and administrative data. The evaluation team conducted two visits to Cohort 1 pilots—one from April through June 2017 and one from May through September 2018—and one round of site visits to Cohort 2/3 pilots between June and August 2019. The site visits included key-informant interviews with administrators, staff, and partners; focus groups with youth participating in services; and administration of a partner survey. The study was also informed by documents collected from the Federal agencies participating in P3 and the pilots, as well as interviews with staff from all of the Federal agencies participating in P3. The national evaluation team collected administrative data from the nine Cohort 1 pilots to define the population of youth who participated in P3, the services they received, and the employment and education outcomes they achieved.[7]

In this section, we summarize the overarching findings from the implementation study, drawing primarily from findings around the pilots' realization of the federal authority presented in the final implementation report (Stanczyk et al. 2020). For a summary and select findings from the other P3 implementation papers, see Box 1.

Box 1. Implementation study reports and papers

1. **Early Experiences of the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3): Cohort 1 Pilots (Rosenberg and Brown 2019)—**This paper reflects on the early experiences of the nine Cohort 1 pilots and details their efforts to provide outcomes-focused services to disconnected youth and to use the flexibilities afforded to them through P3. It also discusses the collaborations across the Federal agencies participating in P3 to invite and award pilots to grantees and their partners. Using data from interviews conducted in spring and summer 2017 with pilot administrators, staff, and partners, the paper found that in the first year most pilots focused on the traditional program activities of developing and providing outcome-focused services to disconnected youth. Although all partners brought together a diverse set of partners to coordinate youth services, few made systems change efforts a priority.

2. **Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3): Four Years After Initial Authorization (Hanno et al. 2020)—**This paper assesses P3 four years after its initial authorization and offers reflections from the pilots on their efforts and use of the flexibilities afforded to them. Using data from two rounds of site visits to the nine Cohort 1 pilots, conducted in 2017 and 2018, and interviews with staff of Federal agencies participating in P3, conducted in 2016 and 2018, this paper found that pilots' approved waivers enabled them to widen their eligibility requirements and to realize efficiencies in their administrative requirements. Pilots credited P3 with expanding their networks and allowing them to build new or enhanced relationships.

3. **Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3): Sustaining Systems Change Efforts and Coordinated Services for Youth (Brown 2020)—**This paper provides an overview of the nine Cohort 1 pilots followed by a discussion of their work to sustain their P3 efforts as of summer 2019, and case studies of the two pilots that sustained systems change. Using data from telephone interviews with eight pilots conducted in summer 2019, about a year after most pilots had concluded pilot activities, the paper places the eight pilots along a continuum of systems change efforts from facilitating systems change to no systems change.

4. **Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3): Implementation Study Findings of the Pilots' Experiences (Stanczyk et al. 2020)—**This report assesses the 14 pilots' implementation of the Federal vision for P3. It updates and expands the findings from two prior implementation study papers that examined the experiences of the first cohort of pilots. Using data from site visits to the pilots, including two rounds of visits to Cohort 1 pilots in 2017 and 2018 and one round to Cohort 2/3 pilots in 2019, this paper found that pilots took a variety of approaches, which commonly included new or enhanced services, to try to improve youth outcomes. To implement these approaches, all pilots formed partnerships across local youth-serving agencies, and three focused on broader systems change efforts such as shared governance or data systems.

5. **Operating a Youth Homelessness Prevention Program: A Case Study from the P3 Pilot in Sacramento, California (Grey and Mack 2020)—**This case study explores the Sacramento P3 pilot, which was awarded a grant as part of Cohort 2/3. Through the pilot, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA), the grantee, set aside housing vouchers for youth experiencing homelessness and worked with three youth-serving partner agencies to help youth locate housing using the vouchers. Using data collected during a two-day site visit in August 2019—which included interviews of program staff and a youth focus group—and follow-up interviews in March 2020 with SHRA and partner program staff, the paper identifies lessons learned and considerations for youth homelessness prevention and intervention programs, such as the importance of providing intensive case management to youth and educating landlords about youth's needs.

6. **Supporting Disconnected Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Experiences from the Field (Shenbanjo and Mack 2021)—**This supplemental study examined how providers in three P3 communities continued supporting disconnected youth during the COVID-19 pandemic and focuses on (1) adaptations in how providers provided supports, with help from government agencies; (2) challenges serving youth during the pandemic; and (3) lessons learned and promising strategies for adapting services. Using data obtained from semi-structured interviews with five staff from youth-serving providers and three staff from state and local government agencies, this paper found that perceived relationship building, access to technology, flexibility with staff and youth's needs, data monitoring, and creativity were key inputs for implementing and sustaining virtual services. ◢

Overview of findings

All pilots brought together multiple partners across different youth-serving agencies.

Federal agencies participating in P3 encouraged pilots to foster collaboration among their partners across domains, to develop coordinated service delivery systems. Pilot leadership and partners across all pilots reported that P3 resulted in new partnerships between local agencies serving disconnected youth. Figure 2 shows the core partnerships that supported pilots' efforts. As employment and educational outcomes were the primary focus for pilots, workforce agencies and education providers were core partners for 10 and 9 pilots, respectively.

The pilots also partnered with organizations and agencies across other relevant domains. For example, one pilot serving homeless youth developed partnerships with three agencies serving youth to implement a process that enabled disconnected youth ages 18 to 24 experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity to access Housing Choice Vouchers and case management to support housing placement and retention (Grey and Mack 2020).

Figure 2. Core P3 pilot partner agency types

Number of pilots
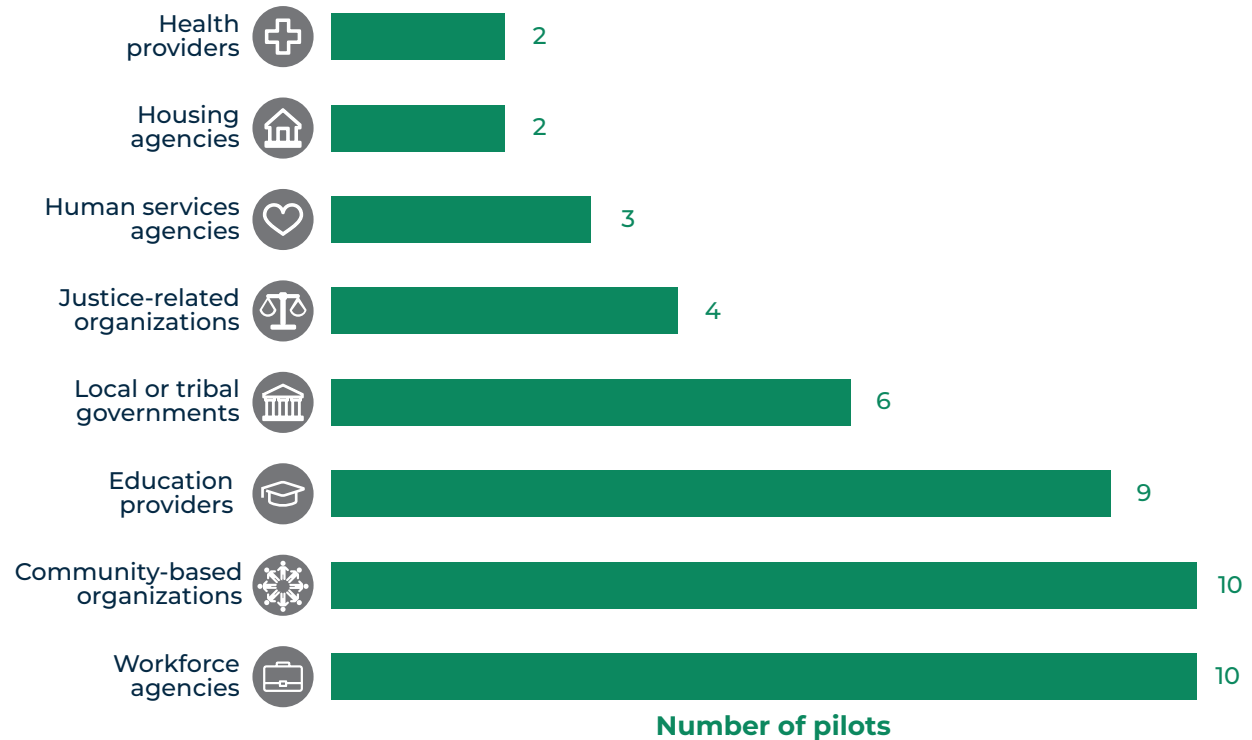
Source: Site visits to P3 pilots and document review. Stanczyk et al. (2020).

Pilots generally used two methods to combine multiple funding streams.

All pilots used Federal discretionary funds; P3 start-up funds; and other sources such as state, local, and philanthropic funds to support their efforts to improve systems serving disconnected youth. All pilots were expected to combine funds through blending (where funds are pooled to support a common initiative or set of services and are not allocated or tracked separately) or braiding (where funding streams retain their initial programmatic and reporting requirements). The pilots generally combined these funds in one of two ways (Figure 3).

In Method A in Figure 3, which is closer to the Federal vision of blending and braiding resources to support services for youth, 9 of 14 pilots merged multiple funding sources across partner agencies to support a common set of youth services. This method is distinguished by different funding streams coming together to support a common set of youth services, which are generally different from business as usual. Of the nine pilots that used this model, two blended at least two of their multiple funding sources into a single pool of funds that could be disbursed to support the P3 approach.

In Method B, which is closer to business as usual, the remaining five pilots allocated funds across partner agencies to support their usual services and the funds retained their original identity. This method required coordinating across funding streams and partners. However, compared to Method A, it was more similar to business as usual. In the pilots that used this method, the activities each funding source supported were part of the P3 suite of services but were generally not merged to support new or common services.

Pilots most commonly used approved waivers to serve a broader population of youth, serve a focal population of youth flexibly, and to reduce administrative burden.

Of the 13 pilots with approved Federal waivers, 10 reported using at least one waiver in three general ways.

1. Serve a broader population of disconnected youth: Nine of the 14 pilots used a total of 15 approved waivers of funded programs to serve a broader population of youth. According to four pilots, waivers providing flexibility around eligibility requirements for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program allowed them to serve more youth with funds from this

Figure 3. Pilots' two general methods for using multiple funding streams
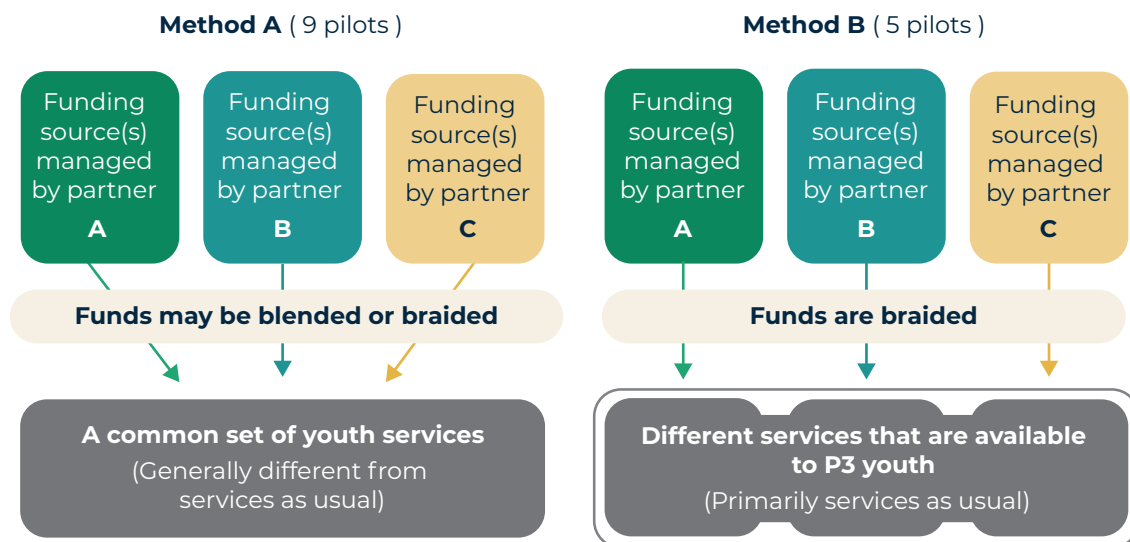
Source: Site visits to P3 pilots and document review. Stanczyk et al. (2020).

program. For example, three of the nine pilots reported that approved waivers expanded their pool of youth that were eligible as out-of-school youth in the WIOA Youth Program. Six pilots drew on waivers expanding youth eligibility requirements of other programs. For example, one pilot used an approved waiver of an income recertification requirement for the Head Start program to ensure that all participating youth would maintain eligibility throughout the pilot's two-year intervention.

2. Serve the focal population flexibly: Four pilots used a total of nine approved waivers to employ identified Federal discretionary program funds to more flexibly serve their focal youth population. Three pilots used waivers for programs other than the WIOA Youth to expand when, where, or how services were provided. For example, an approved waiver to the requirement that ED 21st Century Community Learning Centers program funds be used during non-school hours allowed one pilot to offer service throughout the day to youth who had dropped out of school. Other approved waivers allowed two of these pilots and plus one other to use ED funds to subcontract with direct-service providers whom they considered most able to work with the focal youth population.

3. Reduce administrative burden: Three pilots used approved waivers to reduce their administrative burden. For one pilot, waivers related to WIOA Youth eligibility requirements and performance measures reduced their burden around determining youth eligibility and performance reporting for this program. For another pilot, a waiver of the fiscal match requirement for the CNCS AmeriCorps program eased the reporting burden on the pilot. For the third pilot, a waiver of WIOA Youth Program eligibility requirements eased the burden of eligibility determination.

Three key factors appeared to influence pilots' use of flexibilities afforded to them through P3.

P3 provided communities the opportunity to work across organizations, such as between education providers and workforce agencies—rather than operate in isolation from one another—in an effort to better meet the needs of their youth. The implementation study identified the following factors that may have shaped pilots' use of the flexibilities afforded to them through P3.

Understanding. Pilots' understanding of the flexibilities available under P3 was important to their ability to fully use these flexibilities. Interviews revealed that leaders in four of the 14 pilots lacked a clear understanding of the difference between blending and braiding funding approaches and which approach the pilot had used. Pilots' understanding of waivers and how they could be implemented also varied. For example, leadership in one pilot reported minimal understanding of which waivers had been approved and whether and how service providers were using those waivers. Additionally, two pilots requested waivers that were not permitted under P3 authorizing legislation or that were not required to implement the flexibility they sought.

Trust and buy-in. Leadership in five pilots noted that they were unable to secure enough trust and buy-in from their state and local partners to implement their planned approaches. For example, respondents from one pilot reported a lack of trust among key partners that the flexibilities were "real" (that is, that partners would not be penalized by the relevant Federal agency for blending funds), which caused the pilot to braid rather than blend funds.

No need identified. Three pilots reported that they did not need their granted waivers to implement their services. Two of these pilots did not use approved WIOA waivers because the pilots connected either very few or no youth with WIOA Youth services.

Pilots used P3 to implement three distinct approaches for serving youth.

All pilots used P3 as an opportunity to provide enhanced services to a focal population of disconnected youth. The implementation study identified three distinct P3 service approaches (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Approaches to serving youth

Case management (6 pilots)	Youth received individualized case management to help them navigate and connect to community resources, including available employment- and education-related programs and supportive services.
Case management plus services (6 pilots)	Youth received individualized case management and participated in or received the same set of services designed for P3 youth.
Program service model (2 pilots)	Youth participated in or received the same set of activities specific to P3 to achieve a common educational- or employment-related goal. Minimal case management services were available to youth.

Sources: Site visits to P3 pilots, document review, and Cohort 1 pilots' local evaluation reports. Stanczyk et al. (2020).

Case management. At six of the 14 pilots, the grantees and their partners implemented a case management service approach to serving their youth. Usually, instead of providing a new set of services specific to youth served by the pilot, the pilot partners coordinated existing funding streams to connect youth to available services in their communities. At four of these six pilots, the case management services were specific to P3 youth, and pilot partners made their typical suite of services available to youth as part of their P3 program (see Method B in Figure 3). For example, in one pilot, partners braided multiple funding streams to provide an intensive case management approach to justice-involved youth. The intensive case management services were specific to youth receiving services through the pilot and case managers were tasked with directly assisting youth to navigate the reconnection process and addressing related barriers by identifying relevant supportive services.

Case management plus services. At another six pilots, partners provided youth with case management along with a common set of services available only to those youth receiving services through the pilot. These pilots generally relied on blending or braiding funds to provide a set of services to youth participating in P3 (see Method A in Figure 3). For example, for one Cohort

2/3 pilot, a pilot partner that provided high school equivalency and job training services to youth developed a separate program for young parents. The program provided one-on-one case management services and connections to child care services (if needed) while they completed their high school equivalency preparation and work readiness training. The pilot used WIOA Youth funds that it managed and general city funds from the city human services agency to fund the case manager positions for P3 (Stanczyk et al. 2020).

Program service model. Two Cohort 1 pilots implemented a program service model designed for P3 that contained a common set of services that did not include case management as a core component. At one pilot, P3 allowed the pilot partners to expand a subsidized work experience and mentoring for young mothers of children in Head Start or Early Head Start. The other pilot provided youth with a cultural engagement program about their native culture and connected them to services offered by the tribe (Rosenberg and Brown 2019).

Three pilots made systems change a central component of their efforts; other pilots prioritized enhanced youth services over systems change.

P3 sought to facilitate change in how local youth-serving agencies worked together through their

government structures, communication practices, and data-sharing approaches to better meet the needs of disconnected youth. Of the 14 pilots, three—two from Cohort 1 and one from Cohort 2/3—made systems change activities a central component of their efforts. One of these pilots used the P3 authority to systematically evaluate and strengthen the city-wide system for serving disconnected youth (Brown 2020). The pilot brought together over 40 partner agencies to participate in work groups focused on improving service delivery systems; fostering communication among local youth-serving government agencies; identifying waivers that might support systems improvements; and using data, evaluation, and research to support efforts to improve services. Another pilot used P3 as an opportunity to realize a shared data system across local youth-serving agencies (Brown 2020). In an interview in 2019, the pilot shared that the integrated data system was expected to launch that summer and would allow youth to receive better coordinated services, as the system would include service receipt and referral information for all the partners included in the data system.

The remaining 11 pilots focused on expending their Federal discretionary program funds, implementing the youth services they planned in their application, and meeting the performance measures negotiated in their performance agreement rather than broader systems change efforts. The pilots that had not been considering larger systems change efforts before applying tended to plan more modest systems change efforts and to prioritize service delivery over systems change.

Two of the nine Cohort 1 pilots reported sustained systems change, while others reported little or no progress toward systems change.

The evaluation team assessed the extent to which the systems change efforts of the Cohort 1 pilots were sustained.[8] The systems change efforts of the Cohort 1 pilots ranged from no systems change to sustained systems change (Brown 2020).

Sustained systems change. The two pilots that experienced sustained systems change approached P3 with the goal of forming a catalyst for systems

change in their communities and continuing to sustain these efforts. Staff from these two pilots reported that their systems change efforts were being sustained beyond the pilot. These pilots also reported sustaining youth services.

Steps toward systems change. One pilot had taken steps toward systems change; these changes were at the beginning stage as the P3 grant was ending.

Strengthened partnerships. Two pilots reported that through P3 they had strengthened partnerships but that the systems for serving disconnected youth did not experience much change as a result of P3.

No systems change. Staff at three pilots reported that no systems change work occurred as part of their participation in P3.

Lessons learned

The implementation evaluation team's analysis of the data identified lessons learned from these efforts that can inform future rounds of P3 and other initiatives using the performance partnership model. These lessons included the following.

Dedicated planning time could support accomplishing foundational work for systems change. The pilots that put systems change at the center of their approaches had already spent years—before they applied for P3—building collaborations across local youth-serving agencies to identify and address systems-level issues. For communities that have not already begun a systems change process, dedicated planning time could allow community organizations and agencies to come together to assess opportunities for and work toward systems change.

Additional guidance and technical assistance in focused areas could support efforts to capitalize on allowed flexibilities and prepare for systems change. The experiences of the pilots indicated that their planning period would have benefited from additional supports and technical expertise in four areas, including (1) assessing regulatory barriers to Federal discretionary programs and identifying waivers to

help overcome them; (2) increasing understanding of the different approaches to coordinating the funding of different Federal programs and their advantages; (3) working with their Federal, state, and local partners to increase awareness of and buy-in to the model; and (4) identifying the need for and implementing changes in the system for serving disconnected youth.

Devoting resources and time to identify and remove potential barriers to local data sharing. The two pilots that reported major strides in data sharing among partners described dedicating resources, negotiations, and time to overcome what research suggests are common data-sharing barriers. These barriers can include protocols for protecting privacy, the use of multiple data systems, and agencies' overlapping data-reporting requirements (Freedman Consulting, LLC 2014). The seven pilots that planned data-sharing efforts faced these types of challenges, and those that did not plan data sharing noted that these challenges contributed to their decision. Also, peer learning might be especially helpful as communities work to anticipate and resolve data-sharing challenges (Brown 2020).

Developing metrics for monitoring communities' work toward systems change. The P3 pilots may have focused on youth services rather than systems change efforts at least partly because the P3 performance measures focused on youth outcomes. Developing and implementing performance metrics focused on systems change goals could incentivize future pilots to make systems change a central focus. Metrics such as policy change, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional practices could provide an understanding of factors that support systems change (Gopal and Kania 2015). Additionally, some immediate metrics such as increased awareness of an issue, policy changes, and collaboration among partners could lead to longer-term systems changes (Lynn et al. 2018).

Local evaluations: Provision of technical assistance and synthesis of findings

As part of the P3 evaluation, Mathematica provided evaluation technical assistance (TA) to pilots and their local evaluators and then synthesized the findings presented in the Cohort 1 pilots' reports.

The evaluation TA sought to strengthen the local evaluations. For those pilots that conducted an evaluation, the grantee and its third-party local evaluator worked with their evaluation TA liaisons to discuss the planned local evaluation, troubleshoot challenges with programming and evaluation activities, and support analysis and reporting.[9] The evaluation TA team relied on design standards available from federally funded clearinghouses, such as the DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) and ED's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), to guide evaluation TA. The synthesis of the Cohort 1 pilots' local evaluation reports[10] (Maxwell and Yañez 2020) examined the extent to which local evaluations established a causal relationship between the studied intervention and participant outcomes. For interventions that had such evidence, the synthesis assessed whether this evidence indicated that the intervention had improved outcomes for youth.

Methods for providing evaluation TA and conducting the synthesis

Mathematica used multiple methods to provide evaluation TA, as reported in Gothro et al. (2020). The evaluation and programmatic TA providers held monthly calls with the pilots and their local evaluators. The focus of the calls was on pilot progress as well as questions about programmatic or evaluation issues. Evaluation TA liaisons held additional calls with pilots as needed and shared with pilots available resources such as review protocols from CLEAR and the WWC. The evaluation TA team also developed and delivered webinars for the pilots and their local evaluators; these webinars were recorded and made available to pilot staff throughout the pilot period. Additionally, Mathematica provided written guidance and templates to support pilots' reporting of their evaluation findings. Finally, evaluation TA liaisons provided feedback on the evaluation design, analytic plan, and final report written by each pilot's local evaluator.

The synthesis of the Cohort 1 pilots' local evaluation reports answered three key questions:

1. What interventions and outcomes are the focus of the local evaluations?

2. What is the level of rigor in the local evaluations?

3. Do the local evaluations find the expected impacts for their interventions with youth?

Mathematica followed a multi-step process to conduct the synthesis. These steps included (1) an assessment of the study design; (2) consideration of the level of detail provided about the intervention and the outcomes, including whether outcomes could be connected to the intervention; and (3) an assessment of whether local evaluations achieved expected impacts—that is, whether findings were statistically significant at the 5 percent level and in the desired direction.

Insights on the partnerships supporting local evaluations

The evaluation TA team produced two products that discussed the evaluation TA provided to P3 pilots. First, Gothro et al. (2020) discussed providing evaluation TA to pilots in their early stages and presented lessons learned from the Cohort 1 pilots and another effort similar to the evaluation TA provided as part of the P3 national evaluation. The authors found that successful evaluation TA depended heavily on the relationships developed between the TA providers and the pilots. Evaluation TA liaisons needed to be flexible, be good communicators, and able to think on their feet. Second, an issue brief discussed working with partnerships when supporting local evaluations with evaluation TA (Cattell and Bradley 2020). Based on their experiences, the evaluation TA team defined what traits characterized strong partnerships and discussed potential hurdles associated with the work and possible solutions.

Findings from the synthesis

The synthesis's review of the resulting local evaluation reports found that eight of the nine Cohort 1 pilots had local evaluations supporting causal evidence on how one or more aspects of their interventions affected education, employment, or other outcomes. Together, these eight evaluations covered six interventions: (1) case management (only), (2) case management and soft skill training, (3) case management and WIOA services,

(4) leadership training, (5) the Teen Outreach Program, and (6) a two-generation education and training program for young parents and their children. All interventions were assessed by at least one local evaluation, and case management (only) was the intervention assessed in three local evaluations.[11] The evaluations found that three of the six types of interventions demonstrated evidence of improving expected youth outcomes.

1. Case management plus WIOA services increased the probability of achieving education outcomes.

2. A program service intervention—a two-generation education and training program—showed evidence of increasing the probability that children attended a child care center and that their parents received benefits.

3. Case management without other services improved education-related outcomes, employment outcomes, family functioning, and increased participation in social services. However, two of the three local evaluations examining case management without other services also found evidence of negative outcomes with respect to education and employment.

Looking ahead

P3 presented an ambitious effort for rethinking how youth-serving agencies approach their efforts to both improve local youth-serving systems and youth outcomes. To realize the Federal P3 vision, pilots needed to develop partnerships and leverage P3 flexibilities in their efforts to both improve service systems for disconnected youth and provide services that strengthened youth's education- or employment-related outcomes. All 14 pilots in the first three cohorts used their grant awards as opportunities to develop partnerships across local youth-serving agencies and to provide enhanced services to disconnected youth in their communities. Although they faced challenges in realizing the vision, the P3 pilots' experiences revealed important lessons for future initiatives of the performance partnership model. These lessons can inform and strengthen future efforts that use this model in an effort to improve systems that serve disadvantaged populations.

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Endnotes

[1] For additional background about P3, see Stanczyk et al. (2020).

[2] Additional notices were published in subsequent authorizations but are not covered by this study.

[3] Both blending and braiding combine funds from two or more separate funding sources to support program services for a particular target population. With blending, funds are not allocated or tracked by the individual source; thus, the funding streams lose their separate identity and are pooled to meet the population's needs. With braiding, each funding stream retains its initial programmatic and reporting requirements, although some requirements might be waived (AGA Intergovernmental Partnership 2014).

[4] Waivers from Federal discretionary programs provide state and local service providers with the flexibility to organize their programs and systems to better meet the needs of their populations. Providers submit requests for waivers from programmatic requirements to the appropriate Federal agency for approval.

[5] Pilots are defined groups of local partner organizations and are led by a single organization, commonly the grantee agency. Pilots operationalized the P3 authority in their communities.

[6] Pilots could be awarded a maximum of $700,000 in the first cohort. Given availability of funding, this cap was reduced to $350,000 for the second cohort, and $250,000 for the third cohort (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017). Additionally, eight of the nine Cohort 1 pilots received supplemental funds, which ranged from $48,000 to $175,000.

[7] Administrative data was not collected from Cohort 2/3 pilots.

[8] One Cohort 1 pilot was not included in this analysis. Sustainability was not assessed for Cohort 2/3 pilots because their activities were still being implemented during the last round of data collection.

[9] The nine Cohort 1 pilots received evaluation TA in tandem with programmatic TA, which was provided by Jobs for the Future and its partners. Three of the five Cohort 2/3 pilots conducted local evaluations and received evaluation TA; programmatic TA was provided only in the very early stages of the Cohort 2/3 pilots. Mathematica staff providing evaluation TA worked in teams to support pilots over the course of their local evaluations.

[10] The Cohort 2/3 local evaluation reports were not available when the synthesis was conducted.

[11] The studied intervention was defined by the suite of services offered to the treatment group in the local evaluation report.