

WHAT ARE READINESS TRAPS?

Readiness Traps are serious traps in systems and settings that affect some young people disproportionately, narrowing or cutting off their paths forward. They are often unintended. The most common traps occur when age, time, completion and access are used as proxies for young people's readiness or system performance. Readiness traps create and fuel readiness gaps.

Across the country, policymakers, practitioners, researchers and writers are naming and addressing these traps. Their strategies and solutions, although thoughtful, are often insufficient.



COMMON TRAPS

Age as Proxy for Stage

Most systems and settings assign a young person to a program, group or class based on age, not stage of learning, development or behavior. Two examples:

- **Social Promotion** – using age as the deciding factor for placing or passing a young person into a setting, such as academic grade.
- **Aging-Out** – denying young people services because they have reached the set age of adulthood, as defined by a system or setting.

Time as Proxy for Progress

Time spent in a system or setting often triggers when a young person moves on from that setting, or is used as a way to measure a young person's growth. Two examples:

- **Seat-Time** – when a young person earns course credit based on time spent in class.
- **Doing Time** – when a young person is held in a juvenile justice facility after a court hearing or judicial decision, or is issued a time-based sentence.

Completion as Proxy for Competence

Completing a program or earning a credential should signal a move from one setting and readiness for the next. Instead, many young people move to the next stage even if they are not ready; others are ready, but not able to complete the requirements to move ahead. Two examples:

- **Completing School** – a diploma means a young person has met one school's graduation requirements. It does not guarantee readiness for college or a job.
- **Completing Treatment** – finishing treatment for addictions or mental health struggles does not guarantee that a young person is or will remain sober, stable or healthy.

Access as Proxy for Quality

Too often, a young person's residence determines access to quality schooling, services and programs. Two examples:

- **Resources** – local systems and settings have resources, but that does not mean they are sufficient, stable, sustainable or used in the best ways.
- **Talent** – local systems and settings have staff, but that does not mean staff are sufficient, skilled, or working in the most effective and supportive ways.

WHAT ARE READINESS GAPS?

Readiness Gaps are harmful differences between young people in achievement, expectations, opportunities and skills.

Across the country, practitioners, policymakers, researchers and writers are recognizing and working to close these gaps. Their strategies and solutions, although thoughtful, are often fragmented and insufficient.



COMMON READINESS GAPS

Achievement Gap

Differences in academic standing between young people, often connected to race, class or gender.

Expectations Gap

Differences between what young people and their families expect will happen from investing time and resources into a system, and what actually results. Also, the differences in what we expect from certain groups of young people, particularly youth of color or living in poverty.

Opportunity Gap

Differences in the quality and quantity of opportunities and supports available to young people, often because of their families or where they live.

Skills Gap

Differences between what young people can do and the skills and mindsets they need to carry out a role or responsibility.

THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY READINESS GAPS

Some groups of young people are disproportionately impacted by readiness gaps. This includes young men and women of color, children and youth living in poverty and under-resourced communities, and young people connected to multiple public systems, such as child welfare and juvenile justice. Many youth fall into more than one – if not all – of these groups.