Recover and Re-engage Youth

Youth Voice

Why is this an Important Issue for Minnesota Children and Young People?

GradMinnesota believes in the power of young people to create their own bright futures. By listening to their voices, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and choices they face. Thus it is important to empower and mobilize youth to share their experiences, bring their perspectives, and give recommendations on issues that affect them. When young people are actively engaged in the decision-making process, programs are more likely to meet their needs and create the changes they desire. While identifying the priority recommendations for GradMinnesota, the GradMinnesota Advisory Council and staff listened carefully to the voices of young people and incorporated their input.

The following quotes from young people on recovery and re-engagement policies and practices were compiled from several sources.

Young People disengage and leave school due to...

Financial and Family Responsibilities
 "Well, my mom's laid up in bed, can't pay the bills. And I turned sixteen and I started roofing [working construction]. I eventually dropped out just 'cause the bills weren't getting paid and I knew I could pay the bills, step up. I never took on responsibility like that before in my life..." — Aaron[1]

High Mobility
"I've been in foster care since my twelfth birthday. So, I moved around a lot and I've never been consistent with school. Back to childhood, I've missed like months at a time and things like that. The biggest issue for me was when I went to high school was the teachers not understanding how to deal with kids like me. They eventually ended up writing me off. I was moving around foster homes a lot so it's like you didn't get any support anywhere. After a while I just stopped going to class, stopped doing homework, skipped school and got into doing drugs and things like that." — Denise[1]

Difficulties with Credit Tracking and Recovery
"Even though I was taking extra credit classes and doing after school work, they didn't give me any of my extra credits or any credits from the credit recovery program. So, then I just kind of fell off, I figured there was no point in trying. There was no way I could win. No matter what I said about my lost grades, they just had the same excuse." — Donald[1]

"The staff called me into the office and said they gotta hold me back for two years because my old school that I went to back from ninth and tenth grade, they said they lost my credits and I wasn't in their system no more. So I told them I wasn't staying. I rather just drop out and do what I do." — Marcus[2]

Negative Relationships and Unmet Needs
"I don't like being here. I don't like the teachers. It's like me against everybody" — Kim[4]

[XX] enjoys the attention and support she deserves and needs. She realizes how little attention she had gotten at her old school, which had a much higher student to teacher ratio. She reflected, "If you raise your hand, the teachers come right away. At my old school I didn't get any attention". [XX] feels much more welcome to open up in the smaller class-size atmosphere. She's empowered to ask questions, support her classmates, form relationships, be herself, and get excited about her education. – Anonymous Student[3]

Young people re-engage in education due to...

Caring and Supportive Adults

"I started going here because I was still talking to my counselor, he was a really cool counselor ... probably saved my life. He was getting me into all these different programs that were not working at all, and then he told me this is your last resort if you want a high school diploma." — Kayti[1]

"There's two people...They've been there for me for a long time. They've been pushing, helping me. Even through all my flaws they still help me get through it...they'll stay here with me and make sure I complete my school work. They'll come check with me on the weekend, take me out to go play basketball, check daily basis status to see if everything's okay, if I'm doing alright. Make sure I get to school on time. Pick me up if I need to." —Terrence[2]

Services that are Responsive to Student Situations

"I guess if I have people that help me out and make me feel comfortable, it will make me want to come to [this program] and I didn't have that when I went to high school...Like [at this program] they asking me what are my goals and how am I going to achieve them and helping me to reach my goals and they have a lot of support in other places, like if you need help. Like if you need help to get a job, they can help you get a job. And if you don't have money they can pay for your GED testing. Yeah, it's really nice."- Tina[2]

"We need someone to say, 'I have a spare 30 minutes. Let's check up on this family and see how they're doing.'...Don't judge a kid. You don't know what they're going through." - Anonymous Mother of Disengaged Student[3]

Findings from Research Utilizing Youth Voice

A 2009 study from **The Konopka Institute** and a 2012 study by the **Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy** identified similar factors in students being *pushed* or *pulled* out of school[5,6]. Factors influencing disengagement included students attending to family responsibilities, experiencing significant life events, and school environments that were perceived as unwelcoming or not supportive. Systemic factors that contribute to disengagement include laws allowing students to drop out before the age of 18; challenges accommodating immigrant youth who have yet to receive citizenship; and limited interventions and staff to address truancy. This research suggests a crucial need for educational and community environments collaborate in recognizing and addressing students as individuals with varied—and very human—needs.

References

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