

February 2011

PUSHED OUT

Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis
in Philadelphia







Youth United for Change (YUC)

is an organization made up of youth of color and youth from working class communities acting on their own behalf to improve the quality of public education. YUC is building a youth-based, democratic organization with the power to hold school officials and government accountable to meet the educational needs of Philadelphia public school students. This is done through a process of school-based community organizing where a diverse group of youth come together, identify common concerns and act collectively on their own behalf. YUC believes that every young person deserves a quality public education that prepares him or her for success at a 4-year university, for a living wage job and for active participation in civic life.

About this study

Pushed Out: Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis in Philadelphia is a Participatory Action Research report on the pushout crisis in Philadelphia. The research and writing of this report were completed by members of Youth United for Change's Pushout Chapter, a group of out-of-school youth and students in alternative schools and programs. *Pushed Out* is supported with lead funding from Project U-Turn.

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By Youth United for Change
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INTRODUCTION

About the Authors: the Pushout Chapter

The Pushout Chapter is a group of Youth United for Change (YUC) members who are either out-of-school or are students at alternative schools and programs. We are working to improve the school system for current and future students so that they do not get pushed out of school like we did. There are several types of alternative schools and programs in Philadelphia. Within the School District, there are transition (disciplinary) schools, Educational Option Programs (EOPs or twilight schools) and accelerated high schools. Outside of the District are several GED programs and some charter schools for pushed out youth. The Pushout Chapter is open to out-of-school youth and students at any of these alternative schools and programs.

“Pushout”

We chose the name “Pushout” because of the youth we recruited into the chapter. The term that we had originally planned to use to describe the chapter, “out-of-school youth,” was unfit because not all of the members are out-of-school; some are re-engaged in alternative schools or GED programs. We decided not to use the term “dropout” because some of our members have been kicked out of school and do not consider themselves dropouts. They had no choice about whether they could stay or not; they were forced to leave.

In addition to these reasons, the term “dropout” points the finger at the individual in a negative way. The term “dropout” suggests that people leave school because of individual mistakes and poor decisions; the term neglects the larger, systemic problems that lead to young people leaving school. We chose the term “pushout” because it focuses on the school-based factors that lead to young people leaving school. For example, if a student is new to a school district and is unable to transfer credits from his old district, he may find himself with limited educational options and unable to acquire enough credits to graduate. Or if a student is struggling to understand the curriculum but she does not receive the help that she needs, she may become so frustrated that she stops attending school. Schools not having enough books or other supplies or having too many students in one class are other examples of school-based problems that contribute to young people being pushed out. Scenarios like these happen every day and cause students to feel distant and alienated.



The Pushout Crisis in Philadelphia

Young people are being pushed out of school at an alarming rate. Nationally, 3 out of every 10 high school students do not graduate on time and 5 out of every 10 black and Latino students fail to acquire a diploma within 4 years.¹

Philadelphia's graduation rate is lower than the national average. Only 57% of Philadelphia high school students graduate in 4 years and only 63% graduate within 6 years.² Black and Latino males have 4-year graduation rates of 45% and 43% and 6-year graduation rates of 57% and 49% respectively.³ Certain special populations also have particularly high pushout rates. Only about 32% of female students who give birth within 4 years of starting high school graduate and 27% of young people with a substantiated case of abuse or neglect receive a high school diploma. Youth in foster care and adjudicated youth returning from juvenile justice placements have graduation rates of 25% and 10% respectively.⁴

The fact of school pushouts has serious long-term effects on both the individuals who leave school as well as the communities in which they live. High school graduates earn almost twice as much over the course of their life as those who do not complete high school; however the effects of school pushouts do not stop there. A disproportionate amount of local, state and federal tax revenue is spent on pushouts as they are more likely to enroll in welfare programs or collect some type of government subsidy (e.g. unemployment, food stamps, Medicare, subsidized housing, etc...) and are more likely to be incarcerated and, therefore, supported by tax dollars. People who have not received their high school diploma are less likely to own property and have less taxable income and, thus, contribute less in tax dollars than high school graduates. "Each high school dropout in Philadelphia city is estimated to impose a lifetime cost (net fiscal impact) of \$319,000 due to their smaller tax payments, higher government transfers and institutionalization costs [while] each high school graduate (without any college education) is expected to make a net positive fiscal contribution of \$261,000 over their working lives."⁵

The School District of Philadelphia has responded to the crisis in a number of ways but with limited success. While Philadelphia's 6-year graduation rate has slowly increased over the last few years⁶ there is still much room for improvement.

While much has been done to address this crisis, the voices of young people who have been pushed out of school are largely missing. YUC undertook this project to inject the voices of pushed out youth into the Philadelphia school reform conversation. *Pushed Out: Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis in Philadelphia*, offers the perspectives of pushed out youth on why young people leave school and what can be done to improve the problem.

We found 4 major themes that were recurrent contributors to the pushout crisis:

1. Boredom and Engagement

For a number of reasons, the rise in standardized testing being the most important, young people are not engaged in the learning experience. Both the material and the way that students are taught are alienating and disengaging. Keeping students interested and excited in the learning process would help keep young people in school.

Major Themes Contributing to the Pushout Crisis

Boredom & Engagement

Teaching & Classroom Learning

Discipline & Climate

Out-of-School Issues

2. Teaching and Classroom Learning

Many pushed out youth identified problems with teaching and classroom learning as major reasons for leaving school. The most recurrent problems were poor relationships with teachers and falling behind academically. In both of these instances, positive and productive relationships with teachers achieved through one-on-one and small group work would have made young people more likely to stay in school.

3. Discipline and Climate

Many young people never make the decision to leave school but are forced out instead. Many more get caught up in harsh disciplinary systems which limit their educational opportunities, make them feel unwelcome and push them out more gradually. Instituting a discipline policy that is restorative instead of punitive would help reduce the pushout rate.

4. Out-of-School Issues

Some students leave school because of problems that are rooted outside of school. Schools can, however, do more to meet the needs of their students and help them stay in school through hard personal times. We also found that, contrary to popular discourse, parents are an overwhelmingly positive influence. While unsupportive parents did contribute to people leaving school, problems at school were much more prevalent contributors to school pushout than neglectful parents.

Based on our research, YUC has developed local, state and federal policy recommendations to address the pushout crisis. Our recommendations are elaborated in full at the end of the report but some key strategies include:

1. Instituting Experiential Learning by incorporating:

- Small Group Work
- Project Based Learning
- Career and Technical Education
- Alternative Assessments
- Issues that are relevant to Philadelphia's youth incorporated into curriculum

2. Actively Building Positive Relationships in School by:

- Creating special spaces, times and events specifically for building relationships among members of the school community
- Incorporating interaction and relationship building into curriculum

3. Restorative Justice Practices

- Reduce punitive and exclusionary practices such as out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests
- Implementing Restorative Justice Practices

4. Professional Development

- Implement a district-wide training program on the adverse consequences of exclusion from school and effective classroom management techniques, relationship building, conflict resolution, restorative practices, other disciplinary alternatives, and student engagement through challenging and culturally relevant curricula

5. Providing additional educational and social supports to meet student needs such as:

- Academic Tutoring
- Counseling and Wraparound Services
- Childcare for parenting students

Participatory Action Research

Since school pushout is such an extensive problem, YUC decided that it would be best to ground the Pushout Chapter's work in a Participatory Action Research project. Participatory Action Research is research that is planned and conducted by people who are directly involved and affected by whatever issue is being researched. It is not done by outsiders or professional researchers who then pass on their findings to policy-makers. Pushed out youth involved in efforts to decrease the pushout rate in Philadelphia planned, designed and conducted this research project. Our aim is to inform both YUC's actions and the actions of others who are interested in reducing school pushout rates.

This is important because the voices of youth who have been pushed out of school are largely missing from the education reform conversation. We are tired of being pushed out of school. It is important to hear young people's perspectives on the pushout crisis. Pushed out youth provide a level of insight and expertise into the pushout crisis that nobody else can. We live the pushout crisis every day. Because of this, we were able to rely not only on our established research tools but on our own experiences as well to inform this report.

YUC partnered with Research for Action, a local education research organization that provided guidance and technical support throughout the research process.

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE)

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) is a coalition of youth groups in Chicago that work together to improve Chicago public schools. The groups come from all over Chicago, bringing students together from different areas and backgrounds. In 2008, VOYCE released a Participatory Action Research report on the dropout crisis in Chicago. This report was one of the things that inspired YUC to organize the pushout chapter and do a report of our own on the Philadelphia crisis.

In March, 2010, we traveled to Chicago to meet with members of the VOYCE coalition. We discussed our project in detail, what we had accomplished so far and next steps for our research. We asked them questions about the research steps and methods they used. While we were in Chicago we also visited Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, a high school that was started by community members for pushed out youth.

Surveys

Our primary research method was to survey other pushed out youth about why they left school. Our first step was to develop the actual survey. In order to do this, we participated in several trainings led by Research for Action. These trainings helped us understand what a survey is, the different types of questions that can be included in a survey and how to develop questions that would get the information that we needed. Through this process, we came up with a lot of ideas about what our survey should look like. Once we had a draft survey done, we piloted it with a few pushed out youth to see how things went. We finalized our survey and began administering it in April, 2010.

We surveyed a total of 273 pushed out youth. We surveyed both out-of-school youth and students in alternative schools. Unfortunately, some respondents did not indicate if they were out of school or enrolled in an alternative school so we are unable to give an exact number of respondents who were out-of-school versus those who were students at alternative schools.

Focus Groups

The surveys provided a lot of interesting information about the pushout crisis in Philadelphia but they also raised some new questions. We conducted focus groups to answer some of these new questions.

As with the survey, we went through several workshops led by Research for Action to prepare for the focus groups. We went through trainings and workshops to determine with whom we would hold focus groups, to develop interview protocols for each group and finally to learn how to facilitate a focus group.

We held focus groups and conducted one-on-one interviews with out-of-school youth, students in alternative schools, teachers in traditional schools and alternative education administrators. A total of 18 people participated in focus groups, individual interviews or filled out an online survey that contained the focus group questions.

FINDINGS

Young People Leave School for Multiple Reasons

The first question on our survey was a multiple choice question which provided respondents with a list of 33 reasons for leaving school and instructed them to mark all of the factors that contributed to their being pushed out of school. We also provided a box under the list where respondents could write in answers that we did not provide in our list. Responses are shown in Charts 1 and 2.

“I do not currently attend a regular high school because. . .”



Chart 1
Source: YUC Survey
 267 respondents

Note: This bar graph shows the percentage of all respondents that selected each reason for not being in a regular high school. Respondents could select more than one reason so the percentages total more than 100%

“I do not currently attend a regular high school because. . .”



Chart 2
Source: YUC Survey
241 respondents

Note: This bar graph shows the percentage of male and female respondents that selected each reason for not being in a regular school. It does not include 26 who did not specify a gender and 1 who identified as “other.” Respondents could select more than one reason so the percentages total more than 100%.

FINDINGS

Our first and most obvious finding was that young people leave school for multiple reasons. 89% of survey respondents identified more than one reason for leaving school. These reasons are often connected with each other and one problem can lead to many. Problems with teaching and learning can lead to problems with boredom and engagement which can lead to disciplinary problems.

For example, some pushouts expressed feeling that some of their teachers just showed up to get a paycheck and did not really care about the students, others indicated that their teachers were inexperienced and some felt that their teachers were willing to teach and cared about the students but they were not well trained educators. For any of these reasons, many students do not engage in what is going on in the classroom. Others do not engage because the work does not relate to the problems they are facing in their lives outside of school. Students can then lose focus and may start to act out because they are bored or it is their way of calling out for attention. At this point, the teacher can only do so much; especially when he or she has little experience and is dealing with an overcrowded classroom. Given the District's current disciplinary policies, a teacher in this situation may feel that he or she has little choice but to send the student that is acting out to face disciplinary actions.

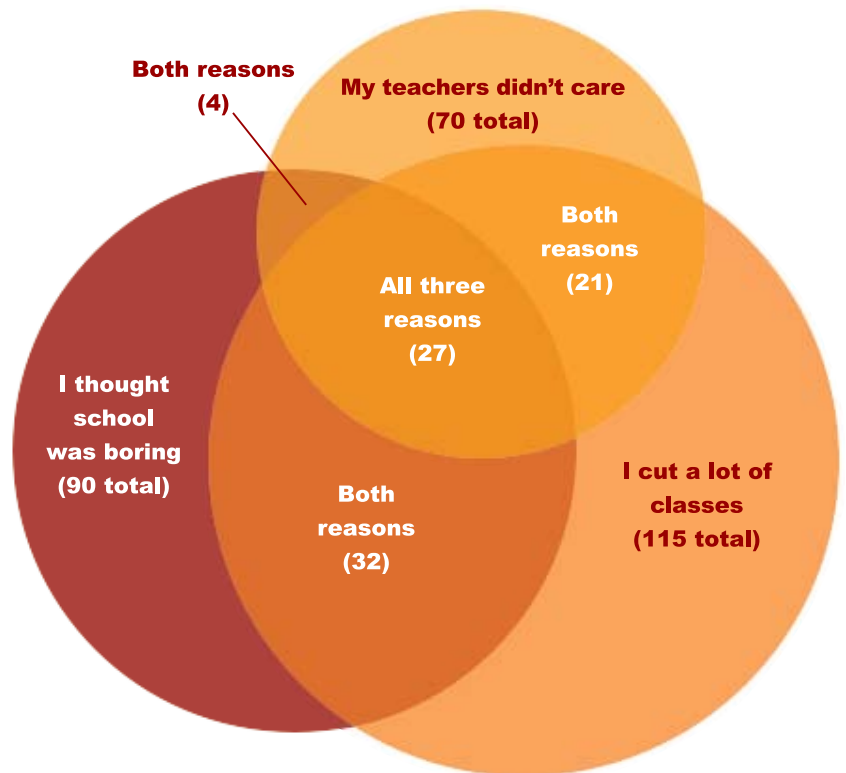


Chart 3
Source: YUC Survey
267 respondents

The above is just an example of what happens every day in our schools. Pushout factors can overlap in many different ways. For example, as is shown in Chart 3, respondents who left school because they thought that school was boring were also likely to say that they left because their teachers did not care and because they cut a lot of classes. Sometimes one problem can cause another and other times there are simply several different processes playing out at the same time. The point is that it is rare for *one* issue or incident to push a young person out of school. It is more often an accumulation of several things.

Please keep this in mind as you read our findings. When we started our research we decided to focus on six themes that we anticipated would be important in learning why young people leave school. Those six were:

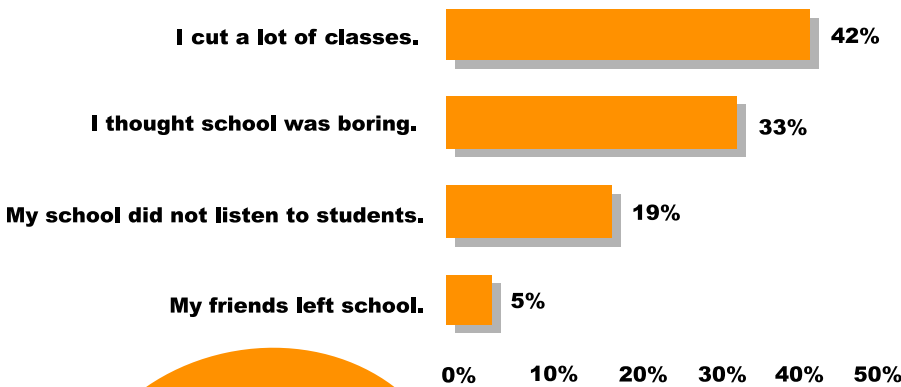
- Boredom and Engagement
- Teaching and Classroom Learning
- Discipline and Climate
- Safety and Violence
- Motivation
- Out of School Factors

However, two of the themes that we expected to be major issues, Motivation and Safety and Violence, did not turn out to be major contributors to the pushout crisis. Very few respondents, only about 12%, identified issues with Safety and Violence as contributing to their being pushed out of school. Motivation was a more prevalent theme as 38% of respondents identified problems with motivation as contributing to school pushout. However, after further analysis, many of the variables that we originally coded as being matters of individual motivation tended to be rooted in problems with Teaching and Learning or Boredom and Engagement. For these reasons, we do not elaborate on these two themes as their own separate categories but we will touch on them throughout the report.

While we have organized our findings under four major headings it is important to keep in mind that these categories are fundamentally connected and overlapping.

Boredom and Engagement

Boredom and Engagement was the most prevalent theme to emerge from our investigation into the pushout crisis. 59% of survey respondents indicated that issues with Boredom and Engagement contributed to their being pushed out of school.



59%

gave at least one reason related to

Boredom and Engagement

Chart 4
Source: YUC Survey
267 respondents

“ You’ve got poverty, and then you’ve got not two parents in the home, and then you’ve got a not great middle school and then the reading skills get behind, and if the reading skills are getting behind, then you can just forget math because you can’t read the questions. ”

– Alternative Education Administrator



Q: Based on your experiences, what are some of the reasons that students leave school?

A: They miss days for various reasons, and the more they are out, the less relevant school seems to them... Teachers do not seem to care when they miss school, do not seem to want to help them when they do return.

– High School Teacher

FINDINGS: Boredom & Engagement

Cutting Class

Other than “I stopped going to school,” cutting a lot of classes was the most common reason why respondents were no longer attending a regular school. 42% of respondents identified cutting as a factor that contributed to their leaving school.

Our data suggests that cutting classes is most related to feeling disengaged in the classroom as 52% of those who said they cut a lot of classes also said that they thought school was boring. Those who cited cutting classes as a reason why they left school were also likely to say “my teachers didn’t care,” “I was involved in drugs,” “I needed to make money,” “I had no reason to stay in school,” “I got suspended a lot” and “I got in trouble for fighting.” If young people are not engaged and interested in what is going on in the classroom, they will skip class. Poor relationships with teachers also contributes to the decision to cut class.

Cutting class is a slippery slope. Respondents from focus groups and interviews said that one cut could turn to two, two to three, and could continue snowballing until they were out of school altogether.

Boredom

A large proportion of survey respondents (33%), said that one of the reasons that they left school was that school was boring. We found three major causes for this boredom.

1. Classes are too big

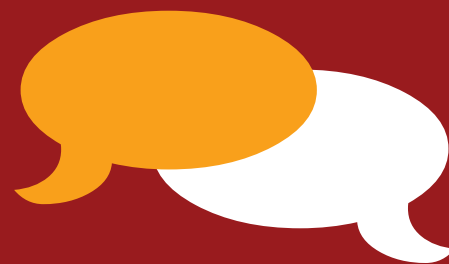
We heard this many times over the course of our research. There are too many students in each class for everyone to get the attention that they need from teachers. Students get confused in class or struggle with a certain concept but their problem is not adequately addressed by the teacher because there are too many students for the teacher to get to everybody, so they start to fall behind. After a little while they disengage from the class because they do not understand what is going on. This was usually not a criticism of the teachers but of the system. It is not the teachers’ fault that they have too many students in their classes. As shown in Chart 5, respondents also indicated that their schools did not offer enough tutoring and counseling services which provide one-on-one or small group attention.

2. The way that students are taught is boring

Many young people described being taught through worksheets and lectures with very little variation or interaction with the material. This dry approach to instruction bored a lot of students and made many tune out.

“ There were too many people. How can one teacher control 25 students? Or even if everyone is under control, what if two people need help, like individual help? They’re not going to get it because there are other people that need help too. ”

– Pushed Out Youth



“ Every teacher I had used a standard format. They never really tried nothing new. They tried no new tactics. No new learning techniques. No new games to play with us. Everyone thinks that just because we’re in high school we can’t play games. I love to play games! ”

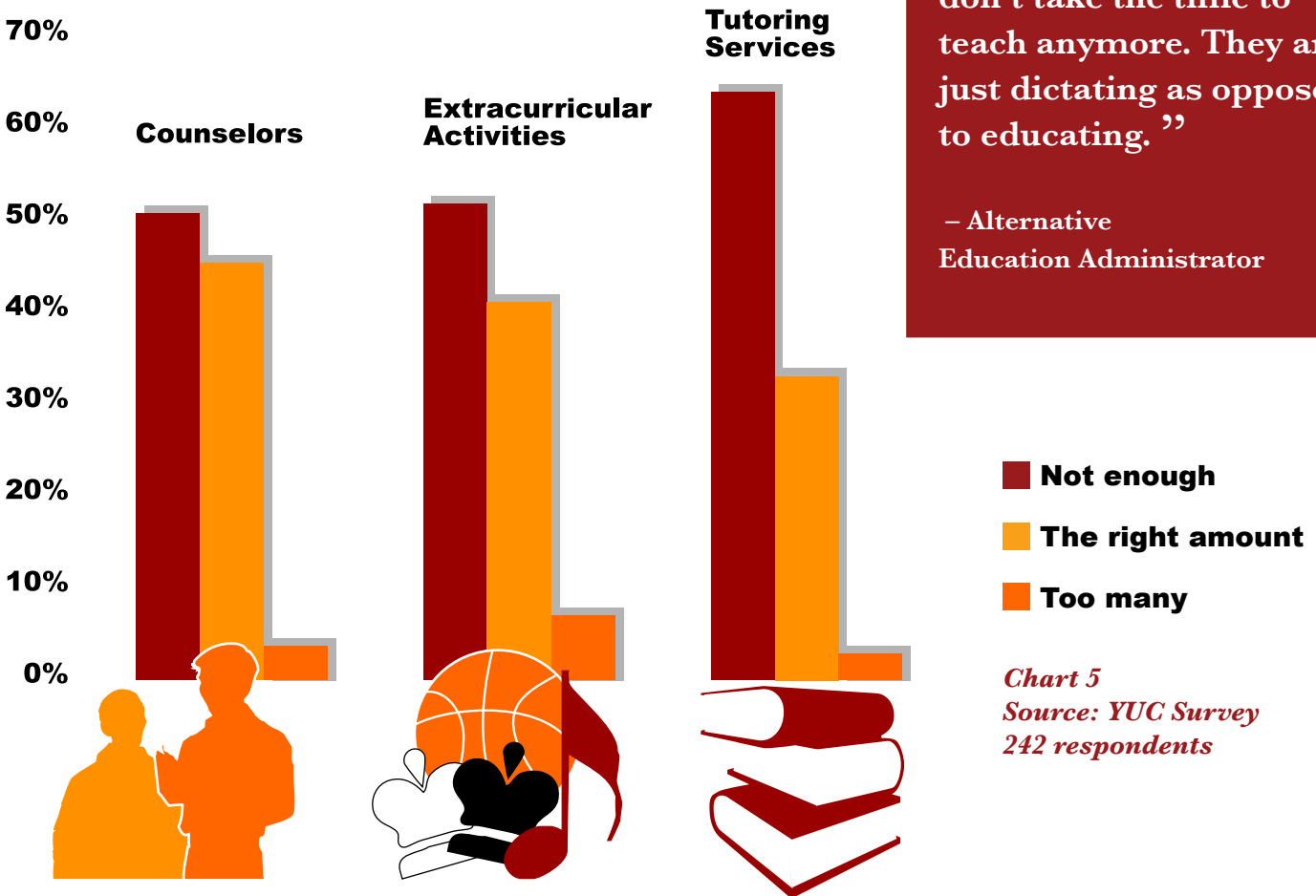
– Pushed Out Youth

3. The content is disengaging

Some pushouts indicated that the content of the curriculum caused them to disengage. Respondents complained that the curriculum generally lacked relevance or connection to their daily lives and interests.

As shown in Chart 5, respondents indicated a desire for extracurricular activities that offer subject material such as art and music that is increasingly ignored as the emphasis on math and English standardized testing increases. Respondents were particularly interested in learning about various cultures, poetry, and theater. They also expressed interest in practical or vocational training that would translate directly into their everyday life or a career.

“In my opinion, my school had. . .”



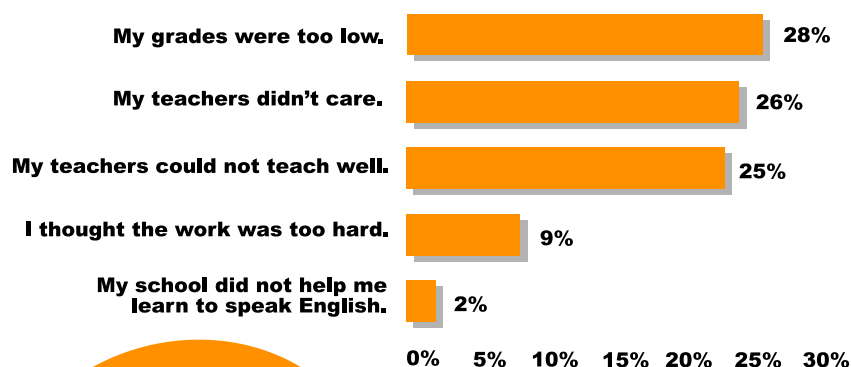
“ We get a lot of young people who mention they are bored when they are in school. That it is overcrowded in classrooms. Teachers don’t take the time to teach anymore. They are just dictating as opposed to educating. ”

– Alternative Education Administrator



Teaching and Classroom Learning

Teaching and Learning was also a major theme in our research. 52% of respondents indicated that Teaching and Learning problems contributed to their being pushed out of school.



52%

gave at least one reason related to
Teaching and Classroom Learning

Chart 6
Source: YUC Survey
267 respondents

Student-Teacher Relationships

As shown in Chart 7, almost half (45.5%) of survey respondents said that they would have stayed in school longer if they had had better relationships with the teachers in their schools. While a large number of factors pushed young people out of school, better relationships between students and teachers stands out as the number one change that could have kept them in school.

26% of survey respondents indicated that one of the reasons that they left school was that their teachers did not care. Those who said that their teachers did not care were more likely than others to say that they left school because their teachers could not teach well, their school did not listen to students and they cut a lot of classes. These young people were also more likely to have left school for disciplinary issues such as getting in trouble for fighting and frequent suspensions. This suggests that better student-teacher relationships would do a lot to improve disciplinary issues in addition to problems with teaching and learning.

“ I think the teachers care; I just think they don’t have any guidance. For me it’s been a choice. You hit the wall and you can go two directions – get pulled down in the undertow or you can forge your own path. I’ve chosen to forge my own path...I may have the nicest cell in the prison but at the end of the day I’m still in prison, but if that’s the best I can do at [my school], then that’s what I’ll do. ”

– High School Teacher

Q: So what motivates you the most?

A: Respondent 1: Knowing that somebody cares about you and that you’re going into a happy environment every day and feeling accepted.

Respondent 2: Yeah. If no one wants you there, then you’re not going to go to school.

– Pushed Out Youth

“I would have stayed in school longer if my school had. . .”

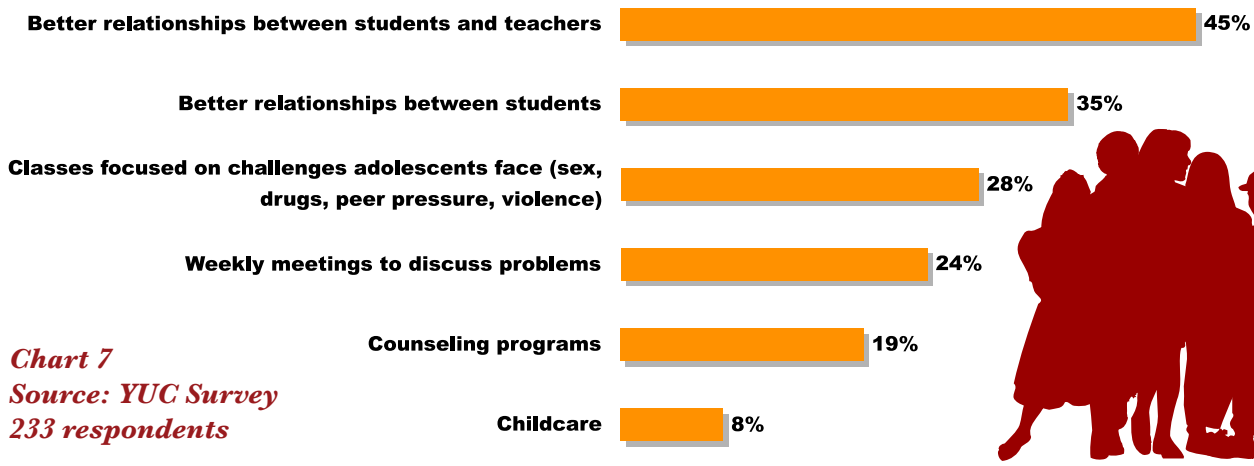


Chart 7
Source: YUC Survey
233 respondents



Interviews and focus groups supported the claim that there is a real disconnect between students and teachers. Good relationships between students and teachers are extremely important in the learning process. Without a positive relationship between teachers and students, teachers will inevitably waste their time trying to reach students who do not trust or respect them.

Low Grades and Being Behind in Credits

“They say they try their hardest to help a student but some teachers really just don’t. There’s teachers out there that don’t help you and that’s some of the problem.” – Pushed Out Youth

Many young people leave school after falling behind. 28% of survey respondents said that they left school because their grades were too low. 16% said that they left school because they did not think that they could graduate and, based on qualitative responses, it is likely that many of these young people did not believe that they would have time to graduate because they were behind in credits. Other pushouts indicated problems transferring credits from other schools, districts, states or countries and were thus forced to start farther back than they should have.

As shown in Chart 5 (see page 11), over 60% of survey respondents indicated that their schools did not have enough tutoring services and over 50% said they did not have enough counselors. These young people were more likely to say that their teachers did not care. Students who struggle or fall behind feel a desire for one-on-one support that they are unable to find in a traditional setting.

“ There’s very little actual learning going on. There’s sit down and be quiet and copy this off the board. That’s a big thing with the boredom. You could get straight As at [my school] and not get prepared for college. Grades are mostly based on if you sit there and be quiet, not what you learn. ”

– High School Teacher

Q: Based on your experiences, what are some of the reasons that students leave school?

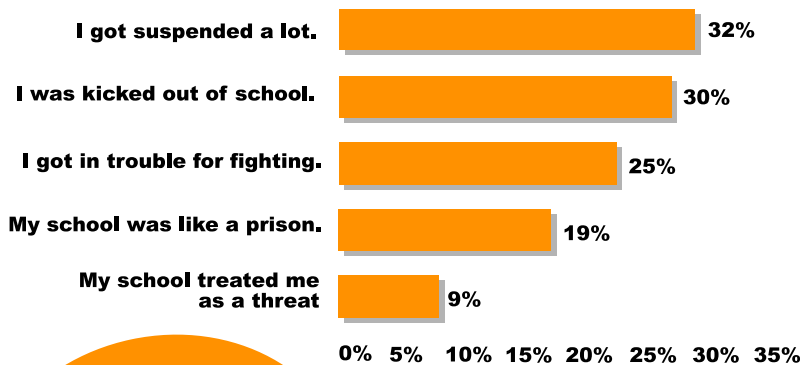
A: Some teachers have wrong attitudes towards children and say the wrong things. They say you’re never going to get anywhere, you’re never going to become anything.

– High School Teacher

Discipline and Climate

Punitive Discipline

Disciplinary policies and practices were significant contributors to school pushout. 57% of respondents identified reasons related to their schools' disciplinary climate as reasons why they left school. The most common discipline related reasons for leaving school were being suspended a lot (32%), being kicked out of school (30%), and getting in trouble for fighting (25%). 19% of respondents said that their school was like a prison. 9% of respondents said that their school was like a threat.



57%

gave at least one reason related to **School Discipline**

Chart 8
Source: YUC Survey
267 respondents

A recent study by YUC and the Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization, found that “[there] may be no other large, urban school system that matches the District in its promotion of zero tolerance and in the heavy use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests.”⁷

The District’s disciplinary practices disproportionately affect males and students of color. 63% of surveyed males identified one or more disciplinary reason for leaving school as opposed to 53% of females. 56% of Latino males, 64% of black males, and 80% of biracial males said that their school’s disciplinary environment contributed to their being pushed out of school.

District data supports this finding. In the 2008-09 school year, black students were over two-and-a-half times more likely to be suspended than white students and Latino students were over one-and-a-half times more likely to be suspended than their white peers. Blacks and Latinos were also more likely than their white peers to be transferred to a disciplinary school (see Chart 9).⁸

Q: What do you think schools could do better to keep students in school?

A: Try not making it so much like a prison...The police presence, security presence. Zero tolerance. In terms of facilities, I think prisons actually have better materials, better books. Just the herding, if you’re in the hall without a pass you’re suspended or swept up in a hall sweep. Not treating kids like inmates, like they’ve already done something wrong before they’ve done something wrong.

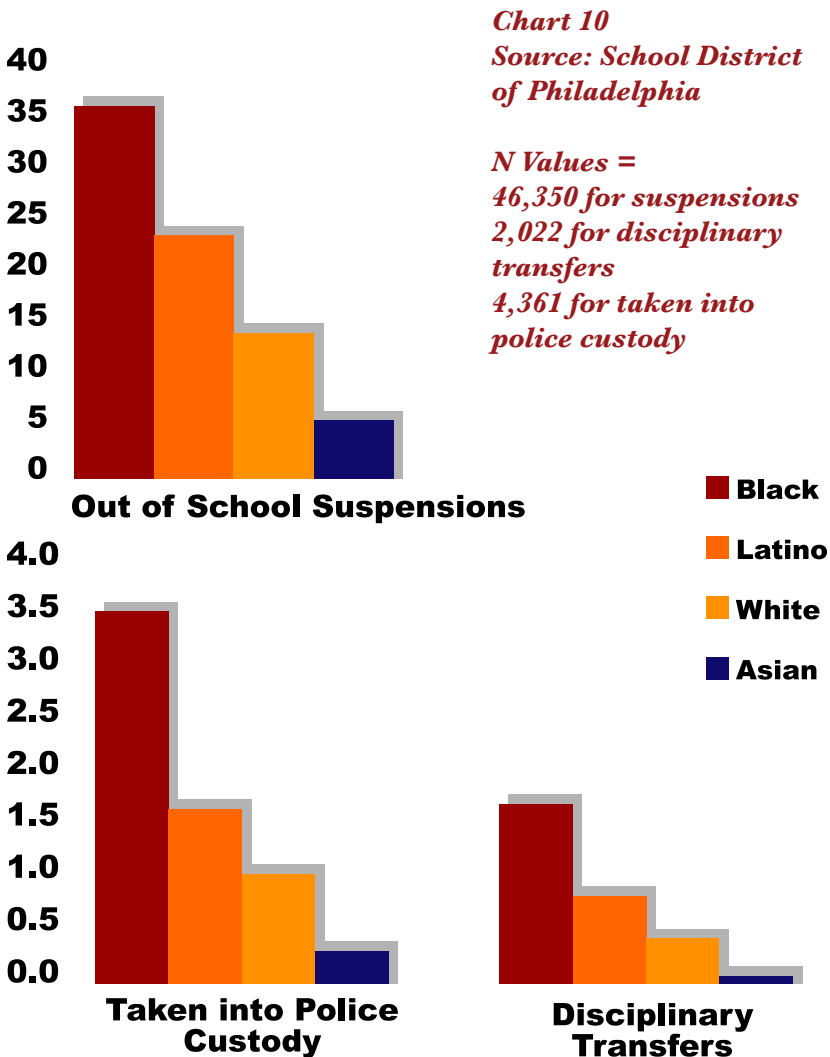
– High School Teacher



“ I was getting suspended for not being in class on time. I had to go from lunch in the basement up to class on the fifth floor and I couldn’t make it in 5 minutes. ”

– Pushed Out Youth

Out of School Suspensions, Arrests, and Disciplinary Transfers per 100 students 2008-09



The racial disparities in discipline were also evident with reference to arrest rates. In the 2007-08 school year, black students were nearly three-and-a-half times more likely to be taken into police custody in school than white students. Similarly, Latino students were over one-and-a-half times more likely to be taken into police custody than white students (see Chart 9).⁹ This is important because many young people identified being arrested as a cause that pushed them out of school. Unfortunately, we did not include questions about being arrested in our survey but it was a recurring theme in qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions and in focus groups. Other research supports our claim that being arrested is a significant contributor to school pushout.¹⁰

The recurring themes of police contact with students and frequent use of exclusionary disciplinary methods contribute to students' perception of school as a negative and punitive environment.

“ The approach to discipline and enforcing school rules the way it’s done currently helps push students out. There have been cases at my school where small incidents escalated between school police and students and ended with students being arrested and expelled. It could be a student having a bad day and comes to school angry. When an adult raises it a little bit in terms of confrontation it can cause a student to lose their temper. I’ve seen that a couple of times a year. I think that’s easily avoided; I think some school personnel don’t try to keep their temper and are sometimes even looking for a confrontation. ”

– High School Teacher



“ The focus is on getting rid of “problem” kids rather than figuring out what can be done to turn them around. Transfer should be a last resort. ”

– Former Middle School Teacher

FINDINGS: Discipline & Climate

Disciplinary Schools

While many students are able to return to their old school after a suspension, many others are transferred, either temporarily or permanently, to “transition” or “disciplinary” schools. For many of the pushed out youth that we encountered throughout our research process, a disciplinary school was the last school that they attended in the School District of Philadelphia. Stories of assaults, both by students and by staff, were common with reference to these schools. Pushed out youth also complained that they received little to no instruction while in disciplinary school.

For these and a number of other reasons, disciplinary schools have a particularly high pushout rate and have largely failed to help their students transition back into a traditional school setting. Only 23% of students at disciplinary schools re-enter a regular high school within 2 years of being transferred to a disciplinary school.¹¹

On Safety and Violence

Presumably, this harsh disciplinary climate has been established to minimize violent incidents and bullying in schools and to keep students safe and in school. Despite the School District’s efforts, however, 68% of survey respondents said that there was “a lot of violence” in their school. Despite the District’s harsh policies, violence continues to be a problem. We believe that punitive disciplinary policies and climates do not make schools safe learning environments. Instead, they push young people out of school and into the streets or the criminal justice system.

It is important to note that while 68% of respondents said that there was a lot of violence at their school, only 12% identified feeling unsafe or being bullied as reasons for leaving school. This is to say that while pushouts did identify violence as a problem, it was not a problem that tended to contribute to them actually leaving school. While 12% is too much it is worth noting that this is a relatively small number compared to the 57% who left for reasons related to the school’s disciplinary environment.

Not only has the School District’s response to violence in schools failed to solve the problem, it has created a larger problem of pushing students out through disciplinary measures. 88% of respondents did not identify violence as a reason for leaving school. Instead, young people were much more likely to identify the disciplinary policies and procedures that were supposed to keep the school safe, such as suspensions and expulsions as reasons for leaving. What is more, these disciplinary practices do not seem to impact the behaviors that they are supposed to improve. Instead of keeping students safe so as to improve the educational environment, the District’s discipline policy is creating a negative climate and is pushing them out of school.

YUC has written extensively about the District’s discipline policy in the report *Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison* which can be found at www.youthunitedforchange.org

“ Don’t just sit there and suspend someone and then they come back to school and you’re wondering why they’re fighting again because the problem has not been resolved. Actually help them. Just because you suspend them doesn’t mean it’s going to be over [and] they’re going to come back in a week and everything is going to be okay. Because it’s not. In fact, they come back even more mad. ”

– Pushed Out Youth

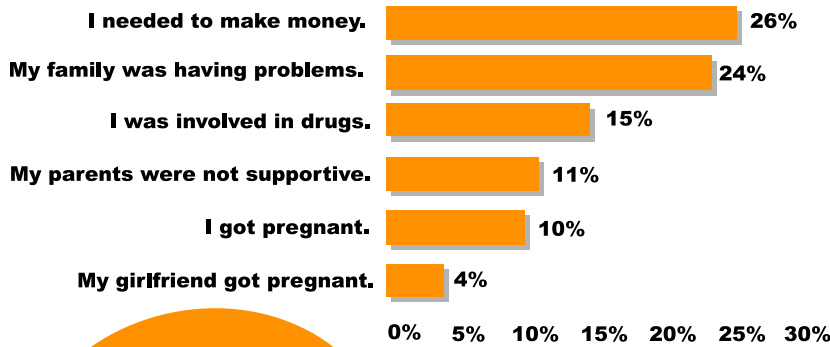


“ One young lady brought in a butter knife for a ceramic project in art class and they didn’t believe her and she was suspended. ”

– High School Teacher

Out-of-School Issues

52% of survey respondents identified Out-of-School Issues as contributing to their being pushed out of school. These are problems that the School District has very little to no control over but often lead to young people leaving school. However, the School District could do more to address these issues by making necessary supports more available to students.



52%

gave at least one reason related to **Out-of-School Issues**

Chart 10
Source: YUC Survey
267 respondents

Family and Financial Problems

From the surveys that we collected, 24% of females responded that they left school because they got pregnant and 6% of males left because their girlfriend got pregnant. Of those who left school because they or their girlfriend got pregnant, 32.4% said that, if their school had provided childcare they would have stayed in school longer. While this shows that pregnancy would have led to a good deal of young people leaving school regardless of access to childcare, a significant number would have stayed in school if they had just had access to daycare.

While pregnancy contributed to 25% of females being pushed out, 33% of males left school because they needed to make money. Many pushouts felt that school was not relevant and they saw easy opportunities to make money outside of school. This also led to a lot of cutting classes which suggests that some young people tried attend school when they could but making money took priority.

In addition, 24% of survey respondents said that they left school because their family was having problems. As Chart 11 indicates, while family problems manifested themselves in many ways, financial problems were particularly

Q: What could have been different to keep you in school?

A: Respondent 1: Daycare! Daycare! That I [don't have to] pay for.

Respondent 2: Some things like if my mom would have had help from one of my mentors like as far as buy uniforms and school books. Like I would go to school and then get disciplined because I didn't have a book or a pencil.

– Pushed Out Youth



Q: As much as you are comfortable, tell me about the reasons that you are currently not in school.

A: My mom lost her job. She had a baby. And I had to get a job and help her take care of the baby and some of the bills around the house.

– Pushed Out Youth

FINDINGS: Out-of-School Issues

common. Together, these statistics show that the burdens of poverty, simply not being able to make ends meet, contribute significantly to young people being pushed out of school.

Parents

Conversations about the “dropout” crisis are often dominated by stories about dysfunctional families and neglectful parents. “Where are the parents?” and “The parents need to get involved” have become catch phrases, even clichés in the education reform world. According to our research, however, parents were an overwhelmingly positive influence on young people. While 11% of pushouts said that one of the reasons that they left school was that their parents were not supportive, 84% said their parents expected them to graduate, 71% said that their parents encouraged them to do their work and 57% said their parents tried to be involved in their school (see Chart 12).

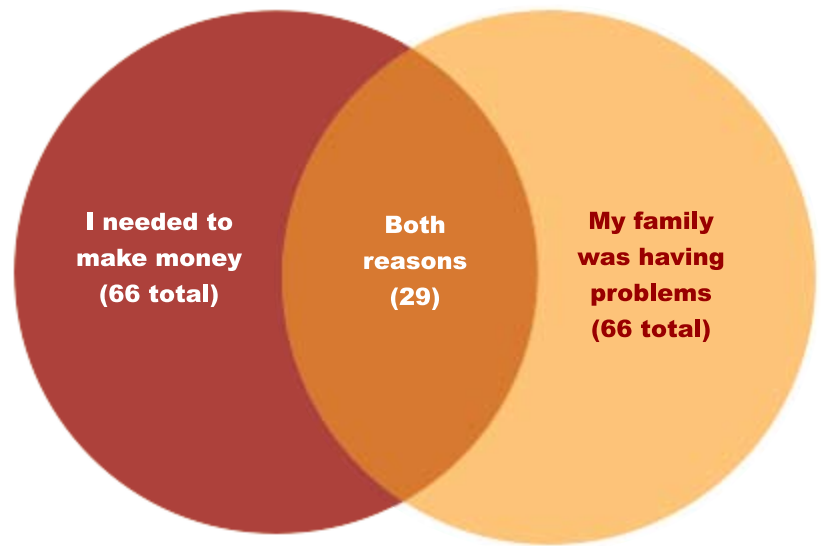


Chart 11
Source: YUC Survey
267 respondents

“While I was going to the last regular high school I attended . . .”

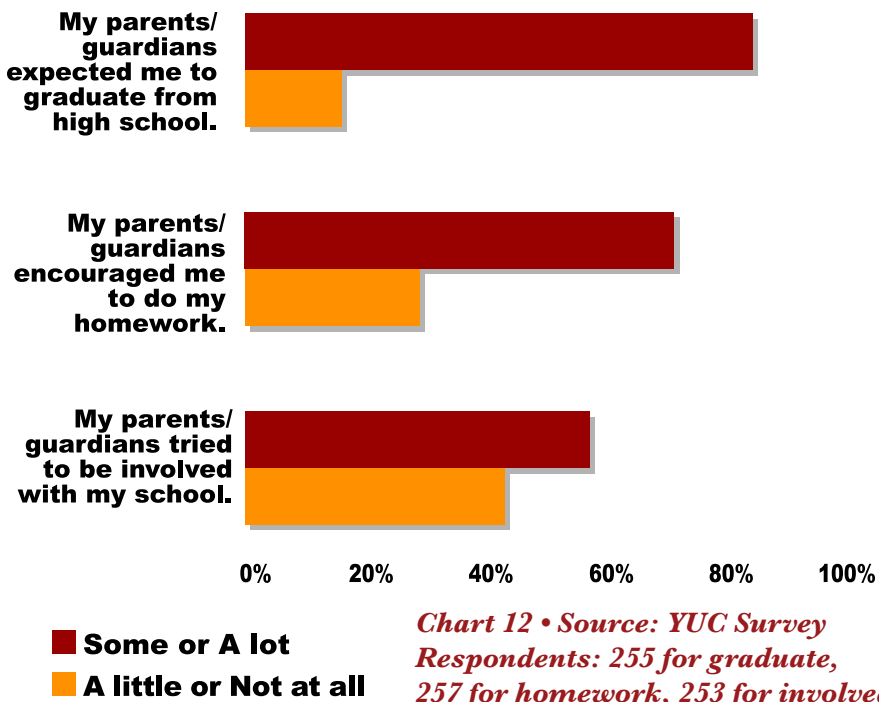


Chart 12 • Source: YUC Survey
Respondents: 255 for graduate,
257 for homework, 253 for involved

As shown in Chart 13, parents were also more likely than anyone else, including teachers, to have influenced young people to succeed in school.

“ There’s a reason why parents aren’t more engaged... Whenever parents do come to [my school] and try to advocate, they get treated like 2nd class citizens. They don’t have a college education and have different ways of interacting. They get made to wait for hours at a time when all they want is to make sure their kids get credit for that summer school class. ”

– High School Teacher

How much did these people influence you to succeed at school?

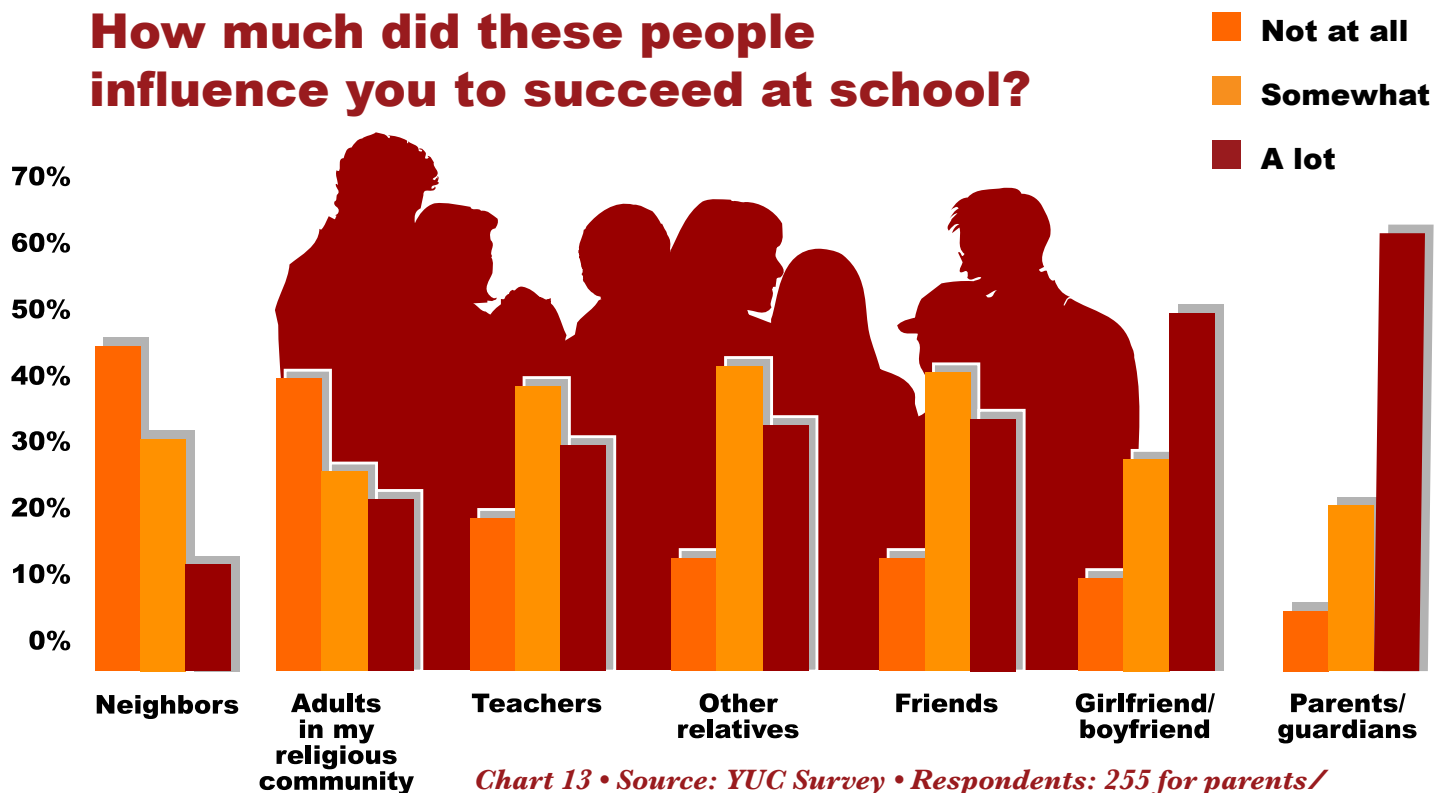


Chart 13 • Source: YUC Survey • Respondents: 255 for parents/guardians, 248 for other rel., 242 for neighbors, 247 for girl/boyfriend, 246 for friends, 247 for teachers, 234 for adults in rel. community

This contradicts the dominant narrative that young people leave school because of poor parenting. While unsupportive parents did contribute to people leaving school, problems at school were much more prevalent contributors to school pushout than neglectful parents.

Alternative Education

The School District of Philadelphia and other agencies and organizations have developed a portfolio of alternative schools and programs that are designed to re-engage pushed out youth. Included in this portfolio are diploma-granting accelerated schools, Educational Option Programs (EOPs or “twilight” schools), alternative charter schools and several GED programs throughout the city.

The effectiveness of these programs has been mixed. A 2010 study found that 21% of students at accelerated schools graduated within three years. Graduation rates for individual accelerated schools ranged from 12%-64%.¹² A grouping of GED programs called E³ Centers have had similar results. In 2010, 766 young people participated in one of the five E³ Centers’ GED prep classes. Of those 776, 72 (9.3%) received their GEDs.

“ It’s assumed if the kid has any problems that the parents aren’t good parents. I think most parents do care about their children. If we as teachers reach out to them and build relationships, most of them are going to be supportive of what we’re trying to do but unfortunately there are a lot of stereotypes about parents that are harmful. ”

– Former Middle School Teacher

FINDINGS: Alternative Education

While accelerated schools' graduation rates are low, they seem to serve their students better than traditional high schools serve similar students. A 2010 study compared credit accumulation and graduation rates of students at accelerated schools to similar students who attended traditional schools. The traditional school comparison group was selected based on test scores, grades, accumulated credits, attendance, behavior records, enrollment patterns and demographic characteristics. Students at accelerated schools had five and six-year graduation rates of 28.9% and 25.2% respectively while comparison students at traditional high schools had five and six-year graduation rates of 21.7% and 21.2% respectively. Students at accelerated schools acquired an average of 4.4 credits during the 2009-10 school year whereas comparison students acquired an average of 3.2 credits. This is to say that the five and six-year graduation rate of students at accelerated schools exceeded that of the comparison group's graduation rate by 7 percentage points and 4 percentage points respectively. Accelerated school students earned an average of 1.3 more credits in the 2009-10 school year than comparison students at traditional high schools.¹³

As these numbers indicate, experiences with alternative education have been mixed and evaluating the effectiveness of alternative options depends on perspective. Alternative education graduation rates are far lower than the District average. However, many, if not most, of the students who graduate from alternative schools would not have graduated if they had not had these alternative options available and those who do not graduate after enrolling in an alternative school probably would not have graduated anyway because most of them had already left school.

As we surveyed students at several of these alternative schools and programs, we received a good deal of feedback about how they compare and contrast to traditional schools. Below are some findings about these schools. Not touched on in this section are a considerable amount of disciplinary schools which also fall under the School District's Alternative Region. For comments on disciplinary schools, please see our Discipline and Climate section.

Positive Experiences with Alternative Education Teaching and Learning

Many students who attended alternative schools described a more positive learning environment there than at their old schools. The most frequently cited benefit of alternative schools was closer relationships between teachers and students. Respondents indicated that alternative school teachers take time out to listen to students. They congratulate them on their accomplishments and help them deal with conflict.

One of the reasons that teachers are able to establish these types of relationships with students at alternative schools is that alternative schools are much smaller than most District high schools. Smaller overall enrollment and smaller classes allow teachers to get to know their students. This allows them to build trusting relationships and develop lesson plans that will work to better fit their students' needs and learning styles.



“ When I was in my alternative school... every morning to get people in a happy mood, we used to play games in the morning and stuff, and skits...just to get everyone happy and cheerful and ready. ”

– Pushed Out Youth

Besides more constructive teacher-student relationships, students at alternative schools expressed feeling less stressed because they are not under the same type of academic pressure as students at traditional schools. Many alternative schools from our sample do not issue letter grades to students. They are evaluated periodically but not with letter grades. These schools also have more autonomy when it comes to testing. While alternative schools have to test their students, they have more breathing room around local, state and federal guidelines. This allows them more creativity for project-based learning and individualized learning plans for their students that would be impossible to institute under traditional testing mandates that apply to most District schools.

Need for Improvement in Alternative Education Teaching and Learning

That being said, alternative schools still have a lot of room for improvement. Graduation rates are much lower at alternative schools than at traditional high schools. While it is true that many students who graduate from an alternative school probably would not have graduated otherwise, it is important that these schools serve their target population. We also observed a high level of student and teacher turnover which is surely detrimental to the relationship-building that is so important in these schools.

Alternative School Discipline

Just as alternative schools offered a positive counterexample to the traditional high school system's teaching and learning practices, alternative schools often provided an example of a more reasonable approach to discipline and a generally more positive climate.

Much of this had to do with the same positive relationships between students and teachers that made teaching and learning easier in alternative schools. Students at alternative schools indicated that relationships were better across the board; not just between the students and the teachers but also between students and other staff, security and other students. Once again, the importance of positive relationships is impossible to ignore. 56% of survey respondents said that they would have stayed in school longer if there had been better relationships between students and teachers or between students (see Chart 7 on page 13).

While these alternative schools do use punitive measures, they tend to focus more on creating a positive environment and some have moved to instituting restorative justice practices. Many of these schools have very few security personnel and some do not have metal detectors or security cameras at all. Yet students at alternative schools tended to indicate feeling safer at alternative schools than at the traditional schools that they had once attended.

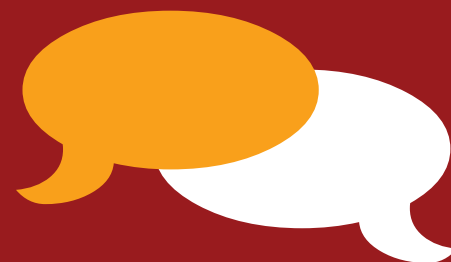
Q:

What are some of the strategies that you have seen engage students the best?

A:

Small classes as opposed to huge classes...We probably have max 15 kids in a class...At [a local literacy program], there is a maximum of three students in the class so the instructor can work individually. And the same thing for math. Our youth who score below a fourth grade level, we have someone working with them one-on-one.

– Alternative Education Administrator



“ Because our model is so different, it’s project based learning, we have to have curricular control. We can’t have them telling us who to hire, we can’t be taking these district wide tests. ”

– Alternative Education Administrator

FINDINGS: Alternative Education

Instituting restorative practices which offer less punitive disciplinary practices is easier to accomplish in these schools because of their size.

In these schools, students feel more comfortable bringing their concerns to teachers and staff who in turn are more willing to deal with conflict in a constructive manner. Alternative schools do a lot to create a positive and trusting environment. They work to create positive environments where students are rewarded for good behavior and not simply punished for bad behavior. Community building is often institutionalized. The smaller size of alternative schools makes this a much easier and organic process. A teacher who has developed a close relationship with his or her students is less likely to suspend him or her and is more likely to talk issues out.

Need for Improvement in Alternative School Discipline

While we did see some positive disciplinary practices at alternative schools, we were also concerned by some of these schools' disciplinary practices. Over the course of our research, several young people in YUC's Pushout Chapter were dismissed from alternative schools both for relatively minor infractions and without going through the District's established processes. In fact, over the course of our research, we never heard of an alternative school student going through the suspension or expulsion hearing process but many were kicked out of school. This is not to say that alternative schools never adhere to procedure but the same autonomy that allowed these schools to foster positive relationships and innovative teaching methods may sometimes allow alternative schools to sidestep other important practices and procedures.



“ In solid year 3 of us doing restorative practices, I feel like everybody is on board now. In the beginning we had a traditional model. Teachers at first were like, “you have to get this kid out of my room, I don’t know how to deal.”... To me it’s magic once you get some of your key players on board, it’s been magic for us. My suspensions have gone down 33%. Quantitative stuff. ”

– Alternative Education Administrator

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At Youth United for Change, we believe that education is a right, not a privilege. Unfortunately, far too many young people in Philadelphia are denied their right to a quality public education and are pushed out of school. While the pushout crisis is not unique to Philadelphia, we are hit particularly hard.

Too often, educators and reformers focus on what is wrong with individual students instead of the serious, systemic problems that contribute to thousands of young people being pushed out of school every year. We must embrace a holistic, multi-pronged approach to address this crisis.

Recommendations to the School District of Philadelphia

Experiential Learning

To address some of the problems with boredom and engagement, school should be made more enjoyable and experiential. If young people are able to draw real world connections to the curriculum and actively engage in the learning process, they will be more likely to stay engaged and see school as a fun and worthwhile experience. The School District should incorporate more interactive activities, games, field trips, and media into the curriculum. The District should also increase extracurricular opportunities and ensure that subject areas such as art, music, and physical education are available to all students. Beyond this, recommendations for the School District of Philadelphia include:

1. Incorporate issues that are relevant to Philadelphia's youth into curriculum

Curricula should address topics that are of interest to Philadelphia's youth. Topics that pushouts expressed interest in tackling include:

- Relationships
- Sex Education
- Violence
- Drugs
- Various Cultures

2. Small group work

School is a social place and young people socialize in class. Curricula should capitalize on this instead of trying to combat it. Getting students to work together will improve relationships between students and help build valuable 21st Century skills such as teamwork and problem solving.

“ Most students like to talk so there needs to be more opportunities for ‘student talk’ related to what they are learning. ”

– High School Teacher



“ The stuff that really worked for me was project-based learning. A lot of hands-on activity and service-based learning where you get out in the community... That kind of approach worked much better than what [instruction] has become now: memorize the terms. ”

– Former Middle School Teacher

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Project Based Learning

Another excellent tool for making learning experiential is Project Based Learning. Instead of worksheets where questions are presented with little contextualization, Project Based Learning incorporates subject material into ongoing projects with real world applications.

4. Career and Technical Education

Many pushed out youth expressed an interest in vocational or occupation specific training. The District already has several Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools and programs. These CTE programs should be strengthened by implementing block scheduling, mandating structured training for all CTE principals and better collaboration with labor unions to ensure that students learn all aspect of an industry. YUC's full CTE platform can be found in the appendix.

5. Alternative Assessments

Standardized tests like the Benchmarks and PSSAs as well as the prep for these tests are extremely boring and are largely responsible for students disengaging from school. Aside from the tests and test prep being boring, students are simply being over-tested. Whenever possible, the District should opt for alternative methods of assessing students such as evaluating student portfolios composed of assignments and projects that were completed throughout the school year.

Class Selection

Students should have a say in what classes and electives are offered as well as what classes they take. Young people are more likely to attend a class that they enjoy than one that they do not. They are also more likely to enjoy their classes if they have a say in what classes are offered and in which they enroll. This would be a good opportunity to take an interdisciplinary approach to dealing with issues of interest to young people.

Build Relationships in School

Schools should create special spaces, times and events specifically for building relationships among members of the school community. In addition to community building days, relationship building should be incorporated into the curriculum and the everyday operations of schools. Special events will help create relationships and foster understanding between members of the school community. This type of interaction, however, should be the rule and not the exception. Curriculum should be interactive in such a way that students and teachers learn about each other and build mutual respect and understanding.

Q: What things do you think would help bring young people back to school to successfully complete a degree?

A: Having some voice in the process. Being able to express their interests, what do they want to get out of an education.

– High School Teacher



Q: What do you think causes tension between students and teachers?

A: Not understanding each other and who they are. Or maybe the teacher not understanding how to understand a student. Or students who have had experiences that may not have been great and they see the teacher as something horrible.

– Former High School Teacher

“ I think what makes a school safe is an established community environment where everyone is invested, from the person who answers the phone to the lowest level reader in the building. From the executive director to the janitor, everyone has to feel the expectations of the community. ”

– Alternative Education Administrator

Professional Development

Professional Development is undervalued and deserves much more focus. Teachers need more training on creating an engaging curriculum as well as general classroom management and dealing with conflict. The District should implement a district-wide training program on the adverse consequences of exclusion from school as well as effective classroom management techniques, relationship building, conflict resolution, restorative practices, other disciplinary alternatives, and student engagement through challenging and culturally relevant curricula

Student Evaluations

Every student should anonymously evaluate his or her school at the end of every semester. Evaluations should be created by students and pushed out youth and should have a series of questions pertaining to school environment, teacher performance, and curriculum.

Educational and Social Supports

Establishing closer learning relationships would do much to help keep students on track academically and in school. Tutoring, counseling, childcare and wraparound social services offer students one-on-one attention that can help them stay on track academically and provide an opportunity to build a more personal relationship with adults in school.

Recruit Teachers from the Neighborhood

Recruiting teachers from the neighborhood is a way of making students feel more comfortable inside of school. These are the people the students see every day and since they are individuals that go through the same struggles we do; they can relate to students and their families on a more personal level.

“ There are class [and] ethnic tensions. There are more teachers who either have none to little experience in urban areas. Many more don’t live in Philly or live in “posh” sections of Philly.”

– High School Teacher

“ I don’t know of a single education school in the country—or not many—that really teach teachers to teach.. They teach you how to memorize content and how to write it up on the board in nice colors, but facilitating and teaching is something totally different than memorizing content. ”

– Alternative Education Administrator



Q: What do you think schools could do better to keep students in school?

A: Support services. These kids come with a lot of situations in their life. They need more personal relationships and people caring about them and what they’ve been through. That makes them want to be in school.

– High School Teacher

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reduce Class Size

Smaller classes are important because when a class is too large the teacher is unable to give the students the attention they need and deserve. Smaller classes will make room for more learning and one-on-one time for each student, creating a calmer and less distracting environment. Also with smaller classes the students will be able to get to know each other, which prevents a lot of bickering and fights.

Small Schools

Small schools will enhance the benefits of smaller classes. Just as smaller classes give teachers an opportunity to know the students on their roster better, small schools give students, teachers, administrators and other staff an opportunity to get to know everybody in the school.

Discipline

The School District should move away from the overly punitive policies that it has now and towards more positive and restorative practices. The school district should implement evidence-based practices, such as restorative justice (or “restorative practices”) in all schools and reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests. The District should also work to eliminate racial disparities in school discipline measures.

Transition Schools (formerly called disciplinary schools) are not doing their job of helping young people transition back into traditional schools. The School District should either phase out these schools or revamp the system that exists to ensure that students receive thorough instruction and the supports that they need.

YUC’s full recommendations for reforming school discipline can be found in the appendix or in YUC’s report *Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison* which can be found at www.youthunitedforchange.org

Financial Incentives

The reality is that in a city with such a high poverty rate at a time when the nation’s economy is in crisis, families will look to their children to help make ends meet. The District should provide financial stipends to students from low-income families. At least one alternative school in Philadelphia is already stipending its students and the acclaimed Promise Academy in the Harlem Children’s Zone has paid students up to \$120 per month. Recent research supports stipending students based on “inputs” (such as attendance, good behavior, wearing their uniforms and turning in their homework) and not based on “outputs” (such as grades or standardized test scores).¹⁴

I’m very motivated to get to know my students and to support them and respond to their needs and interests. But with 33 students in a class, teaching 5 classes, it’s impossible. I don’t even have my own family and I work crazy hours but it’s impossible to meet the individual needs of that many students.

– High School Teacher

Q: What do you think of the School District’s current discipline policy?

A: It is arbitrary and punitive for acts which aren’t the most disruptive. School has to be a safe place for everyone. That grows out of developing relationships. The curricula should include these opportunities.

– High School Teacher

At the very least, the School District should work with local partners to provide paid internships for students. These internships should be after school hours so that students will not have to choose between work and school and should build 21st century skills.

Support Groups

There are six special populations that have disproportionately high pushout rates. Those six are immigrant youth, pregnant and parenting youth, students in foster care, English Language Learners, LGBT youth, and adjudicated youth. Schools should create support groups for these subgroups so that they can see that they are not the only ones dealing with their particular issues and can help each other move through hard times.

Parent Involvement

The District needs to find more ways to meaningfully engage parents. Parents could easily be involved in planning and chaperoning field trips. Schools should host community nights where parents, family and community members are invited into the school to meet teachers and administrators. Teachers should meet with the parent or guardian of their students at least once per year and counselors should meet with parents at least twice per year. It is important for parents to know what is going on with their children at school and this could help deal with disciplinary issues.

Maintained Funding for Alternative Education

While there is much room for improvement in Philadelphia's alternative schools and programs, they are meeting an important need. Funding for these programs should be maintained so that overage, under-credited youth have options available to receive a secondary certificate.

Ultimately, changing school policies to address student needs at traditional school will decrease the demand for alternative schools.

Recommendations to the Pennsylvania General Assembly

State Funding

In 2007, the report *Costing Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Public Education Goals* established funding goals for every school district in the state of Pennsylvania. The Costing Out Study found that the School District of Philadelphia was underfunded by almost \$1 billion.¹⁵

As a result, the Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted a funding formula to be implemented over the course of six years which would bring funding for every school district up to an adequate level. The School District has benefited from the infusion of new state funds over the last few years but the District is still not receiving adequate funding from the state because the formula is yet to be fully funded. It is important that the state funding formula established by the Costing Out Study be fully funded.

State Prevention Funds

Pennsylvania currently allocates some of its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars to a Youth Development Fund. The Youth Development Fund provides funding for preventative programs which help reduce the overall number of people receiving TANF assistance. The state also allocates Act 148 funding to county child welfare agencies with the similar purpose of funding preventative programs.

In Philadelphia, the Youth Development Fund and Act 148 funds help support several programs which offer GED and career readiness training to pushed out youth. These funds should be maintained so that these preventative programs can continue to operate.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Alternative School Accountability

While alternative schools are meeting an important need, they also fall short in many ways. Too many students are getting kicked out of alternative schools without going through the proper procedures and many of these schools also have very low graduation rates.

The General Assembly should develop strong standards for alternative education. Alternative schools should be held to a high standard in terms of adhering to District and state policies and academic standards.

Recommendations to the United States Congress

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Target Title I dropout prevention activities to the students at greatest risk of leaving school prematurely, by providing activities and services demonstrated to decrease pushout rates for students such as:

- Individualized tutoring and mentoring
- Wraparound social services located within the school
- Relevant, real-world learning opportunities, including work-based learning

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act puts too much emphasis on math, reading, and writing standardized testing. Not only does this bore students, it incentivizes schools to push out students who do not perform well on standardized tests. To address this problem, disciplinary rates should also be used to measure Adequate Yearly Progress. Low graduation rates and high disciplinary rates should trigger additional supports and assistance to help districts meet their AYP goals.

Discipline

Congress should mandate the annual reporting of school discipline data for all schools, including alternative schools. The Federal Government should also provide increased support for Restorative Justice strategies which reduce the use of exclusionary school discipline and the number of youth entering the criminal justice system.

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) currently funds internships and alternative education programs for pushed out youth. WIA should be maintained as it provides valuable services for pushed out youth.

Other than maintained funding, WIA's definition for "out-of-school youth" should be revised to better target pushed out youth. As it is today, WIA-funded internships that are intended for out-of-school youth can employ pushed out youth who have not received a secondary credential but also young people who have either received their diploma or GED. Youth who have attained a secondary credential should be included in the "In-School-Youth" category for the purpose of this Act so that dollars intended for OSY can target pushouts.

APPENDIX

Zero Tolerance Recommendations

Recommendations to the School District of Philadelphia

1. Create a working group of stakeholders within the community – including parents, students, teachers, principals, and other community members – to rewrite the District’s discipline policies. The group should be tasked to: (a) limit the use of expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests to conduct that poses a serious, ongoing threat to the safety of students and staff; (b) limit the use of out-of-school suspensions to serious misconduct or to when other interventions have been unsuccessful in addressing low-level misconduct; (c) encourage the use of alternatives to exclusionary practices and referrals to law enforcement; (d) eliminate racial disparities in school discipline; (e) strengthen the protection of parents’/guardians’ and students’ due process rights during all disciplinary proceedings and placements; and (f) ensure that students and families have a legal advocate during the entire disciplinary transfer/expulsion process.
2. Reallocate funding dedicated to school police, security officers, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras toward more guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists who are available to address students’ academic and behavioral issues.
3. Implement evidence-based practices, such as restorative justice (or “restorative practices”), in all schools.
4. Implement a district-wide training program for all school administrators, teachers, police and security officers, school staff, and expulsion hearing officers on the adverse consequences of exclusion from school, effective classroom management techniques, adolescent development and relationship-building, conflict resolution, restorative justice/restorative practices, other disciplinary alternatives, and student engagement through challenging and culturally relevant curricula.
5. Implement an accountability structure under which school officials are held responsible for: (a) reducing the use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests; and (b) eliminating racial disparities in school discipline measures.
6. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Philadelphia Police Department through a revised memorandum of understanding between the school district and police department that limits school-based arrests to felony offenses that pose an ongoing, serious threat to the safety of students or staff.
7. Create a public reporting system for school discipline data, including referrals to law enforcement and school-based arrests, disaggregated by offense, age, gender, grade, race/ethnicity, disability, school, teacher/school staff, and result. Data should be also used within the District to track program success, identify areas of improvement, and develop alternative programs tailored to the disciplinary issues that exist.
8. Establish a school discipline oversight committee, which would include school personnel, parents, students, teachers, and interested community members. The responsibilities of these committees should be to: (a) conduct an immediate review of misconduct by school police and security officers; (b) conduct an immediate review of the academic offerings and school climate at disciplinary alternative schools throughout the District; (c) handle future complaints about school discipline practices; (d) review discipline and arrest statistics; (e) evaluate the District’s efforts to maintain safety in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner; and (f) make recommendations on discipline policies and practices.

Recommendations to the Mayor and City Council of Philadelphia

1. Create a local council to dismantle the City's School-to-Prison Pipeline. The council should be comprised of parents, youth, and representatives from the School District, the juvenile justice system, the Philadelphia Police Department, social services agencies, and non-profit community organizations. The council should be charged with developing comprehensive strategies for addressing policies and practices that lead to the over-criminalization of youth and students being pushed out of school. In particular, the council should be focused on the allocation of City resources and how they can be optimized to ensure that every child and youth in Philadelphia receives a full and equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education.
2. Conduct an immediate review of policing practices within the School District of Philadelphia.
3. Exercise oversight authority to ensure that the recommendations to the District described above are followed.

Recommendations to the Pennsylvania General Assembly

1. Amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to make a high-quality education the civil right of every child.
2. Eliminate all state requirements that students be expelled or referred to law enforcement for school-based behavior; prohibit the arrest or citation of students for misdemeanor and petty offenses at school; and prohibit the use of expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative school, and out-of-school suspensions longer than five days, unless there is a serious, ongoing threat to school safety.
3. Implement an accountability structure under which state funding can be withheld from districts and charter schools that: (a) repeatedly refer students to law enforcement for offenses that do not pose a serious, ongoing threat to school safety; (b) demonstrate a continuing over-reliance on out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and transfers to disciplinary alternative schools; and (c) have persistent racial disparities in the use of exclusionary school discipline and have not developed and implemented a plan for addressing them.
4. Provide resources for the formation of local or regional councils comprised of parents, youth, and representatives from school systems, juvenile courts, law enforcement agencies, social service agencies, and non-profit community organizations that would be charged with developing comprehensive strategies for addressing the School-to-Prison Pipeline in particular communities. In particular, the councils should be focused on the allocation of public resources and how they can be optimized to ensure that every child and youth in the community receives a full and equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education.
5. Allocate additional funding, and divert funding used for law enforcement and security infrastructure, to proven prevention and intervention programs like restorative justice/restorative practices and other educational purposes, such as additional guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists.
6. Amend the state statutes providing for alternative education for disruptive youth (AEDY) programs to require, at a minimum, the following: (a) a right of appeal for students placed in AEDY; (b) that teachers in all AEDY programs have proper certification and appropriate training in working with youth that have behavior management needs; and (c) that AEDY programs provide at least equivalent hours of instruction as traditional public schools in addition to counseling and behavioral health services.
7. Enhance the public reporting system for school discipline data, to ensure that all schools – including charter schools and alternative schools – are reporting data on the use of exclusionary discipline, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests that is disaggregated by offense, age, gender, grade, race/ethnicity, disability, school, and result.

Recommendations to Pennsylvania's Delegation to the United States Congress

Either within the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act), or through separate legislation:

1. Collect and report (on an annual basis) school-level disciplinary and climate data – disaggregated by race, gender, special education status, socioeconomic status, and English proficiency – from all schools and districts, including all charter schools and alternative schools.
2. Establish a process by which unusually high disciplinary rates – as well as pronounced disparities in such rates along race, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and language lines – trigger required technical assistance and support, rather than punishment, from state and local educational agencies.
3. Increase the availability of federal funds to support proven and promising school-based discipline frameworks to be implemented in a culturally relevant manner, such as restorative justice/restorative practice programs, instead of exclusionary methods of discipline.
4. Provide federal funding for comprehensive local or regional strategies involving multiple stakeholders – including, but not limited to, schools, the justice system, parents, and students – to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline and the number of students entering the juvenile and criminal justice system.
5. Address student reentry issues by doing the following: (a) require that states establish procedures for assessment and identification of students' learning needs upon entry into juvenile detention facilities; (b) require that states establish procedures for the prompt reenrollment of students in schools upon return from expulsion and juvenile justice placement, and for facilitating the transfer of credits earned during placement; and (c) provide federal funding for innovative practices aimed at ensuring the educational success of students reentering school from expulsion and juvenile justice placements.



APPENDIX

Career and Technical Education Platform

1. Community Involvement

- **Current State:** There is no clear sense among the 8 CTE schools whether or not students and parents know and/or understand the role of an advisory committee.
- **Demand:** Ensure collective leadership through active advisory committees at any school offering contextualized learning programs. Students, parents, teachers, and community residents must be able to participate directly in both the state and local decisions that shape CTE programs, have a timely appeal when they disagree with those decisions and are provided the information to participate in decision making and the appeals process.

2. Strategic/Sustainable Funding

- **Current State:** Significant education-related resources are available to the School District to support CTE, but are insufficient to fully support current programming.
- **Demand:** Increase, leverage and/or reprogram existing funding streams to support all recommendations. Target the funds to have maximum impact, and institute clear accountability measures.
- **Demand:** New and leveraged resources to support recommendations especially in the areas of: equipment and facilities, human capital and programming and curriculum

3. Year Round, Mandatory and Structured Professional Development

- **Current State:** CTE Teachers may have sufficient field experience but lack professional training as high school instructors. In fact, over one-third of CTE teachers do not have four-year degrees, and a similar fraction is new to the field of teaching, holding only emergency certification or intern status. (PYN CTE Report March 2009 – Executive Summary)
- **Demand:** Year round, mandatory and structured training for all CTE principals in specific roles and responsibilities associated with being a successful CTE instructional leader.
- **Demand:** Year round, mandatory and structured common planning time and Professional Development to promote integration of academic and career-technical content, which will boost academic rigor so that graduates are prepared for both jobs and college.

4. Program Quality Assurance

- **Current State:** For the most part, while they outperform their non-CTE peers in the City, Philadelphia CTE students and CTE high schools perform below statewide averages on assessments of reading and mathematics. In fact, four CTE high schools are in “Corrective Action 2” status. (PYN CTE Report March 2009 – Executive Summary)
- **Demand:** Develop & Implement structured labor union partnerships, in part by including union and industry representatives in curriculum development, professional development, school governance, facilities design and classroom instruction.
- **Demand:** CTE content must include all aspects of the industry. Students must have an understanding of the industry as a whole, including planning, management, finance, the principles underlying technology, labor and community issues, and health, safety, and environmental issues -- as well as technical skills
- **Demand:** All CTE Programs of Study must be aligned with PA's High Priority Occupations and other high wage/high demand careers in the region.
- **Demand:** Implement a uniform system of data collection and analysis that will allow ongoing planning and monitoring of program effectiveness in all schools offering contextualized learning
- **Demand:** Block scheduling should be used at all schools offering any “contextualized learning” to keep cohorts of students and teachers together to promote teacher collaboration and a rigorous curriculum. Edison high school should have block scheduling which guarantees academic rigor and student certifications in their industry of choice.



APPENDIX

Endnotes

- 1 Editorial Project in Education Research Center, Education Week. (2010) *Diplomas Count 2010: Graduation by the Numbers – Putting Data to Work for Student Success*, 2010. Retrieved January 27, 2010, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2010/06/10/index.html>
(These numbers are 4-year, CPI graduation rates. Philadelphia uses a cohort model to measure its graduation rate. All following graduation rates are based on a cohort and not a CPI formula. National cohort graduation rates are not available).
- 2 On-time graduation rate is down slightly. (2010, April). *The Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, p. 27; The African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce. (2010). Report, 5.
(Philadelphia's CPI graduation rate is 48.4%, 20 percentage-points below the national average). See: <http://www.edweek.org/apps/gmap/details.html?year=2009&zoom=6&type=2&id=4218990>
- 3 The African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce. (2010). Report, 7.
- 4 Neild, Ruth C. & Balfanz, Robert. *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005*. Retrieved from http://www.projectturn.net/unfulfilled_promise.html
- 5 Fogg, Neeta P., Harrington, Paul E., & Khatiwada, Ishwar. (2009). *The Tax and Transfer Fiscal Impacts of Dropping Out of High School in Philadelphia City and Suburbs*, ii-x, 52.
- 6 Socolar, Paul. (2010). Graduation rate inches upward to 63%. *The Philadelphia Public School Notebook*. Retrieved January 27, 2001 from <http://www.thenotebook.org/blog/102773/graduation-rate-inches-63>
- 7 Youth United for Change & The Advancement Project (2011). *Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia: Denying Educational Opportunities and Creating a Pathway to Prison*, 2.
- 8 Id, 17-23.
- 9 Id, 9.
- 10 See e.g., Neild, Ruth C. & Balfanz, Robert. *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005*; Sweeten, Gary. (2006) Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement. *Justice Quarterly*, 23, 462-480.
- 11 Chiang, Hanley & Gill, Brian. (2010). *Student Characteristics and Outcomes in Alternative and Neighborhood High Schools in Philadelphia*. Mathematica Policy Research, 20.
- 12 Id, 54-57.
- 13 Chiang, Hanley & Gill, Brian. (2010). *The Impacts of Philadelphia's Accelerated Schools on Academic Progress and Graduation*. Mathematica Policy Research, xi-xiii.
- 14 Fryer, Jr, Roland. (2010) *Financial Incentives and Student Achievement: Evidence from Randomized Trials*. Harvard University, EdLabs, and NBER, 4-6.
- 15 Venkataramanan, Rajiv & Mezzacappa, Dale. (2010). How state funding has changed since the costing-out study. Retrieved January 27, 2001 from <http://www.thenotebook.org/october-2010/102893/how-state-funding-has-changed-costing-out-study>

