

A Follow-up Report to Don't Call Them Dropouts

DON'T QUIT ON ME

**What Young People Who Left School
Say About the Power of Relationships**

**Center for
Promise**
AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE®

WHO'S A QUITTER?

You can't solve a problem if you don't understand what the problem is.

As the organization leading the GradNation campaign to increase high school graduation rates, it's incumbent on us to deeply understand why young people are leaving school before graduating. That's why last year we asked young people just that question and why we listened so carefully to their responses.

Young people who left high school before graduating told us their lives are enormously complicated and challenging, often marked by abuse, homelessness, neglect, hunger, violence and illness.

We also heard that young people felt the term "dropout" wasn't a fair or accurate term. Yes, they left school before graduating, but given everything that was happening in their lives, their decisions seemed reasonable, even responsible, to them. And even though they left school early, they still had aspirations and plenty of determination. They didn't want to be labeled quitters or losers, which is what the term "dropout" conveys.

With that admonition in mind, we called our report *Don't Call Them Dropouts*.

Young people also told us last year about relationship poverty. They said they had looked for the people, relationships and support they needed and just couldn't find them.

So this year, with enthusiastic support from our partners at Target, we set out to learn more about what young people need from relationships with adults. We asked what that support looks like. What could adults and peers do to help them stay in school, help bring them back after leaving, help them begin to thrive?

They told us they need respect, not judgment. They need resources—bus passes, a ride to school, a meal, a job, a chance. They need people to show care through actions, not advice. They need an anchor, not a hero. And they need a web of support, a healthy, supportive community of their own.

If this year's report tells us anything, it's that young people want and need us to stick with them, and that every action, or lack of action, matters.

Relationships are powerful vehicles for growth, particularly for young people living in challenging circumstances. And yet, too many young people don't have enough relationships with stable, caring adults who can help them get what they need to stay on track toward graduation and career. Relationship poverty is not a lack of love or family, but a lack of access to additional sources of support that can lead to a more promising future.

It's on us to do something about it.

Sincerely,



John Gomperts
President & CEO
America's Promise Alliance

CHANGE THE ODDS

Today, too many young people face incredible odds of staying in school, let alone graduating. And yet education is a pathway out of poverty and into economic opportunity and a life of wellness. It's also critical to creating educated leaders and a skilled workforce for the future. As caring adults, we need to do more than help youth beat the odds. We need to change the odds.

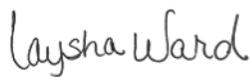
That's why Target is proud to support this deeper look into how we can help young people re-engage and keep them on the path to high school graduation so they're ready for college or some form of postsecondary education, a career and a healthy life.

At Target, we believe that every child deserves a quality education regardless of race or socioeconomic status. To show our support, we've committed \$1 billion to the cause—an investment we'll reach by the end of this year. Our team members donated more than a million volunteer hours nationwide in 2014. We use our strengths as a national retailer to foster public/private partnerships, convene cross-sector leaders and raise awareness of the importance of education. And we support strong, action-oriented partners like America's Promise Alliance that are dedicated to helping all children reach their full potential.

But there's also something we all can do. Whether you're a parent, educator, nonprofit leader or a concerned citizen, we must step up to help turn adversity into opportunity. Babysit for a struggling young neighbor. Introduce a young person to a prospective employer. Become a graduation coach like I did for a student in need in my community or find other ways to support youth like caring adults did for me when I was young.

An interrupted education doesn't have to be the end of the learning journey. We need to show young people that we care about their overall wellbeing. We can help them navigate the chaos in their lives and connect them to supportive relationships, experiences and resources. We want them to know that education is important and they are important.

Respectfully,



Laysha Ward
Chief Corporate Social Responsibility Officer
Executive Vice President, Target

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- Boston Re-Engagement Center, Boston, MA
- Student Outreach and Re-Engagement Center, Chicago, IL
- Project Voyce, Denver, CO

- Henry Ford High School/Osborne Evergreen Academy of Design and Alternative Energy, Detroit, MI
- Phillis Wheatley High School, Houston, TX
- Center Alternative School/ DeLaSalle/ Full Employment Council, Kansas City, MO
- Learning Works at Homeboy Industries, Inc., Los Angeles, CA
- Learning Works Charter School, Pasadena, CA
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INTRODUCTION

This report examines, from the perspective of young people themselves, the roles that relationships with adults and peers play in decisions about staying in, leaving and returning to high school.

Building on previous studies, including *Don't Call Them Dropouts*¹ (see sidebar, page 3), this report offers new insights about how support from adults and peers can help to close the remaining gaps between those who graduate from high school on time and those who don't.

The nation's high school graduation rate reached a record high — 81.4 percent — in 2013 and remains on pace to reach a national on-time graduation rate of 90 percent by the year 2020. This progress means that, over the last decade, 1.8 million more students graduated rather than dropping out.

Still, there is much more work to do to help all young people build a foundation for success. The latest *Building a Grad Nation* report² clearly shows that the students who do not earn a diploma with their ninth-grade classmates are disproportionately low-income, students of color, English-language learners and students with disabilities.³

Why does this matter? Because, in a nation built on the dream of equal opportunity, not all students have an equal chance to succeed. Because more than 485,000 young people still leave high school each year before earning a diploma, severely limiting their options for further education and sustainable employment. Because those who don't return to school will remain less likely to be employed, will earn lower taxable income, will be more likely to require social services, are more likely to be involved with the justice system and will live shorter, less healthy lives.⁴ Because young people who don't graduate from high school aren't qualified to serve in our armed forces and are far less likely to vote. Because the financial cost to society for just one cohort of young people who

leave school without graduating can be calculated in billions of dollars.⁵ In sum, graduation matters now more than ever — not just for young people's futures, but for our country's future.

What, then, can we do to increase the graduation rate?

We know from previous research on youth development,⁶ dropout prevention⁷ and social support networks⁸ that relationships — for example, with formal and informal mentors⁹ — are key to helping young people stay in school, even against long odds. But we know less about how and why these relationships matter and what it takes to make the right support available at the right time for young people who are not graduating high school on time.

Relationships are key to helping young people stay in school, even against long odds.

This report seeks to illuminate:

- How different **sources** of support — parents, adults at school, adults in the community and peers — relate to young people's decisions about staying in or leaving school.
- How different **types** of support matter to young people, particularly with respect to promoting their strengths or buffering the risks they face.

1 Center for Promise, 2014

2 Civic Enterprises, 2015

3 See <http://www.americaspromise.org/high-school-graduation-facts-ending-dropout-crisis>

4 Catterall, 2011; Civic Enterprises, 2015; Rouse, 2007; Sum et al, 2009

5 Amos, 2008; Belfield, Levin & Rosen, 2012; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin & Palma, 2009

6 Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2004

7 Hammond, Smink & Drew, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008

8 Donlan, Gunning & Wentzel, 2015

9 Civic Enterprises, 2014; George, Cusick, Wasserman & Gladden, 2007; Nathan, 2013; Rodriguez-Planas, 2012; Schirm, Stuart, & McKie, 2006

- What it takes for young people and the adults in their lives to develop supportive relationships that lead to continuous engagement or re-engagement in school. That is, what are the **conditions** under which support is successfully offered and received?

Our hypothesis is that supportive relationships are a critical strategic intervention in the lives of young people who are most at risk for not graduating on time. By understanding how social relationships influence academic outcomes — such as high school graduation or interrupted enrollment¹⁰ — as well as the conditions in which these relationships flourish, decision-makers at all levels can intervene more strategically in young people’s lives, affect the social contexts within which young people interact with adults and peers and positively affect young people’s path to high school graduation.

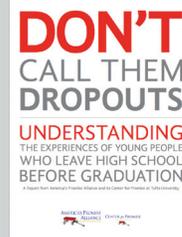
“ I guess if I have people that help me out and make me feel comfortable, it will make me want to come to [this program] and I didn’t have that when I went to high school...Like [at this program] they asking me what are my goals and how am I going to achieve them and helping me to reach my goals and 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.”

Tina¹¹ (age 20)

10 We do not use the familiar term “dropout” to describe young people who interrupt their education, because what the Center for Promise team has heard over the last two years of research tells us that this is not how young people see themselves, nor is it an accurate description of the events that result in their leaving school. Instead, we use the terms “interrupted enrollment” and “continuous enrollment” to describe students’ educational trajectories.

11 Each quote is from a single individual, referred to by an alias. To protect the young people’s identities, the quotes are not associated with the cities or the programs where interviews took place. A list of the cities and programs associated with the group interviews is shown in Appendix II.

DON'T CALL THEM DROPOUTS



In May 2014, the Center for Promise at America’s Promise Alliance released *Don’t Call Them Dropouts*, a report based on a 3,000-person survey and narratives gathered through group interviews with more than 200 young people

across 16 communities. The research team heard four clear messages about why young people say they leave high school before graduating and what enables them to return.

1. **A confluence of factors.** There is no one compelling reason or circumstance that leads to leaving high school before graduating, nor that explains returning to high school. Both disengagement from and re-engagement with school result from clusters of factors.
2. **Toxic environments.** Young people who stop going to school are likely to be navigating toxic environments at home, school or in their neighborhoods. These young people faced multiple adverse experiences, such as violence at school and at home, navigating unsafe neighborhoods, taking on caregiving and wage-earning roles, homelessness, or changing schools multiple times during their high school years.
3. **Yearning for connection.** Young people persistently pursued human connection. These relationships could lead young people toward or away from school, depending on the circumstances.
4. **Bouncing back and reaching up.** Before and after leaving school, young people showed tremendous resilience, bouncing back time and again from difficult circumstances. But individual resilience, by itself, wasn’t enough to get young people back to school. To reach toward a more positive future, they needed intensive support from caring adults or trusted peers.

The report builds, in part, on the [2014 findings](#).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In addition to what is already known about graduating from or leaving high school, several existing bodies of research informed our analysis, findings and conclusions.

These include theoretical frameworks and perspectives related to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), toxic stress, structural barriers such as poverty and institutionalized bias, resilience to adversity and various ways to understand relationships, such as attachment theory, social support and perceived partner responsiveness (PPR).

We use ecological systems theories to understand the decisions and behaviors of youth, including the decision to leave school.¹² Among these are the Bio-Ecological Framework, the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) and the Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) framework,¹³ which view young people as embedded within a multi-layered ecology. This ecology includes more proximal contexts, such as family and school, and more distal factors such as public policies, the economic climate and societal norms. The PVEST and SJYD frames explicitly recognize the structural barriers—such as inequality in economic opportunity, institutional racism and biased justice systems—that young people, especially those of color, those from low-income families and communities, and those from urban areas, may face. PVEST further offers the perspective that young people’s adaptations to these structural barriers are competent reactions to adverse experiences.

Risk factors and Adverse Childhood Experiences.

The risk factors that knock young people off positive academic and social trajectories have been studied extensively. The more risk factors a young person experiences, the more likely that young person is to leave high school.¹⁴ Exhaustive syntheses of the existing research on graduation have found that young people who leave school before graduating may be affected by:

1. **Individual factors** such as academic performance and engagement, taking on adult responsibilities and engaging in maladaptive behaviors such as truancy and drug use;
2. **Family factors** such as family structure, family resources and parental attitudes, expectations and involvement in a child’s life;
3. **School-level factors** such as a culture of low expectations, exclusionary policies and practices, and an unsafe school climate; and
4. **Peer factors** such as having friends who engage in deviant actions and drop out of school.¹⁵

In addition, research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) has shown a connection between experiencing multiple stressful events in childhood and the likelihood of leaving school before graduation. Mental health concerns

12 Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006

13 Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann, 1997

14 Hammond et al., 2007

15 Hammond et al., 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008

may mediate¹⁶ the association between ACEs and leaving school. This suggests that ACEs have detrimental effects on young people's psychological well-being, subsequently leading to negative educational outcomes.¹⁷

Many young people are resilient to this adversity. That is, because of a dynamic between internal and external assets, they have the capacity to recover from adversity and positively adapt in the face of risk.¹⁸ Thus, young people may experience a multitude of adverse experiences, but still succeed academically and avoid negative behaviors. Research shows that resilience is often bolstered by relationships,¹⁹ with adults providing emotional support in times of stress, listening, helping to solve problems, raising challenging questions and encouraging positive goals.²⁰ In addition to buffering the effects of adverse experiences, supportive relationships can help young people learn from adversity and thrive educationally, socially, emotionally and physically.²¹

The importance of secure and supportive relationships.

Social relationships are a fundamental need for all humans, built into our biological, neurological and psychological architecture.²² When this need is met, an individual is more likely to do well in life. As Abraham Maslow so famously encapsulated in his hierarchy of needs, relationships are necessary to a person's well-being and to the pursuit of other goals.²³ When this basic need for love and belonging is not met, people experience higher levels of stress, an increased risk of illness and decreased immune system functioning.²⁴

The need for connection begins once a child is born. When a primary caregiver is warm and responsive and provides the infant with opportunities to safely explore, the child

is more likely to become securely attached, meaning that he or she feels connected to the caregiver, prefers the caregiver to other adults, can cope with brief separations, and develops an internal working model that positive, supportive relationships are the norm.²⁵

A secure attachment style with parents or other caregivers in infancy predicts better relationships in adolescence.²⁶ When these initial interactions between infant and caregiver are disrupted, unresponsive or absent, a child can develop an insecure or avoidant attachment, which works against the creation of strong, nurturing, supportive relationships. Relationship disruptions also put a child's physiology into overdrive, triggering a stress response, which has negative implications for the development of the young child's brain and long-term implications for a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.²⁷ Security of attachment varies within and across socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and other demographic characteristics.

Although often discussed in relation to infants, attachment theory has been extended to adolescent and adult relationships. Peers and adults who are not a child's parents can provide a safe and secure base to which a person can return, as needed, and from which the person can explore other experiences and opportunities in the world.²⁸

Social-cognitive theory suggests that previous social experiences influence how a young person processes and interprets social cues.²⁹ Those who do not have a stable base might end up avoiding attachment and not trusting that future relationships will be long lasting and constructive. Young people who have experienced adversarial and even abusive relationships, for example, are more likely to mistrust adults who offer help or support.³⁰

16 A mediating variable explains how or why a particular effect occurs. See, for example, <http://psych.wisc.edu/henriques/mediator.html>

17 Porche, Fortuna, Lin & Alegria, 2011

18 Garnezy, 1991; Masten, 2001

19 Crosnoe & Elder, 2004

20 Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006

21 Center for Promise, 2014; Center for Promise, 2015

22 Ainsworth, 1979; Center for the Developing Child, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000

23 Baumeister & Leary, 1995

24 Baskin, Wampold, Quintana, & Enright, 2010; Chipuer, 2001; Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007; Watt & Badger, 2009

25 Ainsworth, 1979; Karen, 2008

26 Booth-LaForce & Kerns, 2009; Buyse, Verschueren, & Doumen, 2011; Donlan, Gunning, & Wentzel, 2015; Doyle & Markiewicz, 1996

27 Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Center on the Developing Child, 2015

28 Shaver & Mikulincer, 2011

29 Bandura, 2001

30 Dodge & Pettit, 2003

Sources of support.

Having a single, stable social relationship is a start, but the existence and number of relationships (quantity); the depth, intimacy and frequency of the relationship (relationship structure); the source of the support (e.g., parent, teacher, coach, peer); and the quality of the relationships (relationship content) all affect the impact that social support can have on developmental outcomes.³¹

“Social support” is not a homogeneous construct. Different *sources* of support (e.g., a friend vs. a parent) can provide different *types* of support (e.g., listening to problems vs. securing financial aid). Furthermore, the nature of support changes throughout development. Thus, when considering the influence of social relationships, we also need to consider:

- who the young person has relationships with,
- what developmental period the young person is in, and
- what type of support is being provided.

Young people connect with an array of adults in their lives, including their parents, other family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents), neighbors, religious leaders, and paid professionals (e.g. coaches, guidance counselors, youth development workers). These adults, sometimes considered natural or informal mentors, can play an important role in young people’s lives.³² Several studies have shown the benefits of natural mentors on young people’s mental health, risk behaviors and academic achievement.³³

There is also solid evidence that formal mentors can promote educational, social and emotional well-being, as well as positive identity development, especially among youth at heightened risk for negative developmental outcomes.³⁴

While youth-focused interventions often emphasize creating more one-to-one or one-to-many connections — through mentoring or coaching, for example — the effects, though positive, are modest. And mentoring programs, despite their growth over time, still reach only a fraction of the young people who would benefit from these types of positive relationships.³⁵ The challenges of continuing to scale up both the number of relationships and the intensity of support needed, particularly utilizing existing levels of volunteer recruitment and funding investment, are enormous. What’s more, young people who have experienced high levels of adversity may have difficulty forming connections with new people. Therefore, it is essential to identify other ways of bringing supportive relationships into young people’s lives, while continuing to study the impact of formal and informal mentors.

Researchers have found that young people who have supportive relationships with parents, friends and teachers have better school outcomes and fewer behavior problems than youth who have relationships with fewer sources of support.³⁶ Evidence further suggests that the benefits from social support are amplified when they are embedded within social networks that contain a variety of support types.³⁷ Therefore, the more types and sources of support, the better.

Beyond the number of caring adults in young people’s lives, the quality and content of the support matter.³⁸ Consistent with the idea that development is the function of a dynamic relationship between a young person and the surrounding context, support will only be effective when an individual’s need is matched with support that corresponds to that particular need.³⁹ And support will only be accepted if a young person trusts the adult and feels heard.

31 House, Landis & Umberson, 1988

32 Chang, Greenberger, Chen, Heckhausen, & Farruggia, 2010; Greenberger, Chen & Beam, 1998

33 Cohen & Wills, 1985; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Haddad, Chen & Greenberger, 2011; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010

34 Rhodes & Dubois, 2008

35 Dubois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002; Klaw, Rhodes & Fitzgerald, 2003; Rhodes, 2008; Sterrett, Jones, McKee & Kincaid, 2011

36 Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen, 2000; Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2008

37 Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000

38 Feeney & Collins, 2014

39 Cohen & McKay, 1984

Types of support.

Many previous studies have explored the specific types of supports that adults provide to adolescents and young adults. This report examines four types of social support: **emotional**, **informational**, **appraisal** and **instrumental**. Each of these plays a specific role for a young person's development.

- **Emotional support** expresses comfort, caring and trust.
- **Informational support** is comprised of helpful insights or advice such as how to re-engage in school, where to find a job or how to apply to college.
- **Appraisal** refers to positive feedback that someone can use for self-evaluation, such as affirming a young person's competence by pointing out specific strengths, or providing constructive criticism.
- **Instrumental support** refers to tangible resources or services such as providing a bus pass, babysitting an infant so a parent can attend school, introducing a young person to a potential employer or taking a young person to visit a college campus.

Since they were conceptualized, these four factors have emerged in qualitative studies⁴⁰ and been validated in quantitative studies.⁴¹ Previous research has shown that all of these supports promote positive developmental outcomes but that there are differential effects depending on the type of support given.⁴²

Building new connections.

Previous research has identified four benchmarks implicated in building connectedness and trust in a relationship. To build trust, a young person must believe that the adult or peer:

1. Understands her/his needs, strengths and goals.
2. Recognizes and is being responsive to what's going on in her/his life.
3. Cares for her/him and will be available and provide support if she/he is confronted with challenges.

4. Instills a sense of warmth and connection, a sense that is present even when the adult or peer is not.⁴³

When a young person experiences a constellation of negative relationships, he or she begins to develop a belief system that relationships are bereft of trust, stability and positivity. If prior experiences have included a lack of relationship stability and a lack of trust, then a young person may be less likely to embrace any support being offered.

When adults can meet youth where they are and recognize their strengths in challenging circumstances, the positive interactions between youth and adults can create the connection and trust that can facilitate the transmission of emotional connection, information, resources and praise. Otherwise, adults can engender a lack of connection and trust with youth, at a time when youth are most in need of support.

The level of connectedness and trust in a relationship can affect how young people perceive the support that they are being offered, called *Perceived Partner Responsiveness* (PPR).⁴⁴ PPR has been found to mediate the connection between the support someone offers and the effect that the support has on the potential recipient and his or her academic achievement, social and emotional well-being and physical health.⁴⁵ That is, perceived social support has been found to be a more powerful predictor of positive outcomes than the objective provision of support. Therefore, understanding young people's perceptions of available support is essential to designing interventions that work. Young people cannot reap the benefits of support unless they trust that it is available to them.

40 Ahrens, DuBois, Garrison, Spencer, Richardson & Lozano, 2011; Aronowitz, 2005; Dang & Miller, 2013; Greeson & Bowen, 2008

41 Furman & Burhmester, 1985; Klaw, Rhodes & Fitzgerald, 2003

42 Dang & Miller, 2013; Greeson & Bowen, 2008

43 Reis, 2007

44 Reis, 2007

45 Reis, 2007; Ryan & Ladd, 2012

METHOD

Because the power of relationships, or “connectedness,” emerged as such a strong theme in last year’s *Don’t Call Them Dropouts*, the Center for Promise undertook this study to explore, through the perspectives of young people, the role that relationships played in leaving school and, for those who returned to school after a hiatus, the role relationships played in re-engagement.

Our research team implemented a mixed-methods convergence model⁴⁶ to understand the role that social relationships play in the lives of young people who leave high school before graduating. We conducted 16 group interviews in eight cities with a total of 102 young people, 19 additional individual interviews in five of the same eight cities and a national 96-question survey⁴⁷ of 2,830 young people, 42 percent (1,190) of whom had interrupted their high school education for at least one semester before graduating.

The group interview method drew upon an interactive facilitation methodology developed by the Center for Teen Empowerment,⁴⁸ an organization founded in 1992 to raise the voices of youth and young adults to effect social change. Data collection occurred between February and June, 2015. Responses to the survey questions were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, as described in Appendix I.

We analyzed each data element independently, then analyzed the data elements together and derived themes. That is, we *converged* the quantitative and qualitative findings.

As you read through our analysis, please note that the survey and the interviews draw from different groups of young people. The **survey population** of both interrupted-enrollment and continuous-enrollment youth is more diverse racially, roughly reflecting national demographics. Among the interrupted-enrollment survey respondents,

16 group Interviews

8 cities

102 young people

19 additional individual interviews

5 cities

96 question survey

2,830 young people

42% had interrupted their high school education for at least one semester

more than three-fourths had eventually completed high school, and 40 percent had completed at least some college. Nearly half were working full- or part-time and just over one-third were not employed and not in school.

Young people in the **interview settings** had all interrupted their education at some point. They were recruited with the help of community programs in eight cities; therefore, the majority are enrolled in an education program and they have multiple types of support from the adults in the program. The interview participants also include a greater proportion of young people of color than the survey population does.

For more information about the method and the full demographics of the survey and interview samples, see Appendix I and Appendix III.

46 For a full description of the methodology, please see Appendix I.

47 For a full description of the sample, please see Appendix I.

48 Pollack & Fusoni, 2005

FINDINGS

As described in the introduction, *Don't Quit on Me* examines the role that relationships play in young people's decisions about staying in, leaving and returning to high school.

We listened to, analyzed and interpreted young people's own perspectives about the types and sources of support enumerated in previous studies. This report examines four types of social support — emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental⁴⁹ — that young people may receive from different sources, including parents, peers, adults at school and adults outside school. Here's one example of how support looks to a young person we interviewed.

“ Well, let me tell you this, [Jorge]'ll help me 6:00 in the morning every day, get up, get ready to go to work, go to school... He comes, like I said, he doesn't even know me.

[He] knows me, but at the same time, it's like I done got so close to him I feel comfortable telling him anything. I could tell him this happened or this and he not gonna judge me off of it, but he's also gonna give me a lotta feedback...

Like I said, my mom died, it took a impact on me especially because I felt like my family just took that as a loss and just chunked it up. How you guys just so — all of a sudden everything' back to normal? How is everything back to normal? How does that work?

I don't know. Right now currently I don't even talk to none of my family members at all...I talk to him a lot. Anytime I'm feelin' down I'll tell him. Him [Jorge] or [Kyle].”

Terrence (age 20)

Terrence, a young man from the Western U.S., speaks about three of the four types of social support. After a tragic event in his life, two youth workers who are a part of a programmatic web of support offer instrumental support (help Terrence get out of bed in the morning to get to work and school), emotional support (offer Terrence an ear when he feels down) and appraisal support (give “a lotta feedback” without judgment), thus helping Terrence stay in school and employed.

After listening to more than 120 young people through group interviews and individual interviews, and nearly 3,000 more through survey responses, the Center for Promise team found that:

- Too many young people are facing too many hurdles to high school graduation with too little support.
- Relationships matter, but their importance to graduation varies by type, source and intensity of support.
- Supportive relationships can buffer the effects of adverse life experiences on leaving school and open the opportunity for youth to express their strengths. But, for young people facing the greatest risks to graduation, support from family, school and friends does not overcome the effect of numerous adverse experiences. More intensive, intentional and specialized support may be needed for these young people.
- To access the support they need to stay in school and succeed in life, young people need both a stable relationship that serves as an anchor in their lives and a wider web of relationships.

49 As described in the Review of Related Literature, beginning on page 4.

FINDING 1

Too many young people are facing too many hurdles to high school graduation with too little help.

Young people who leave school before graduating are much more likely than their peers who stay in school to report multiple “adverse life experiences” (ALEs)⁵⁰ — five events on average — between the ages of 14 and 18. What’s more, some of these adverse experiences are strong, individual predictors of whether they will leave school. This group of young people also has fewer supports to buffer the impact of adversity.

For example, Maxwell (a 25-year-old male) experienced his father’s death and his mother’s depression. He moved repeatedly from home to home. He had “so much in my head going on that I fell down.”

“ I was raised in [place]. At eight years old, I had a good life ... till my father passed away. Then my mother became depressed... I think it impacted me a lot because he died by overdose in front of us so I think it impacted us, me and my brother a lot. Because I think sometime my mama would blame us for that. So yeah it impacted me a lot...

Me and my brother went into the system. My mother got us back after like five years or so. I think right there was the deep journey where I disconnected myself, like I fell down...I don't know how to explain it.

50 The adverse life experiences (ALEs) we discuss in this report are slightly different from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Our survey respondents were asked whether they had experienced any one of 19 adverse life experiences between the ages of 14 and 18. The ACEs survey asks whether someone has been exposed to 10 commonly experienced types of childhood trauma at any time before his or her 18th birthday.

I felt lost. Like I went to eight different foster cares in all. Me and my brother separated. ...

The whole time, I think I was just struggling with my mother the whole time. I mean by the time she got me out of foster care, my ma just practically told me I ain't need her. You know my mother was struggling so I couldn't really focus at school. You know there was so much in my head going on that I fell down..."

In *Don't Call Them Dropouts*, we found that many young people who leave school before graduating live in toxic environments and face many more risks than young people who stay in school.⁵¹ We spoke with young people who were confronted with violence in their homes, schools and neighborhoods; took on the roles of chief breadwinner, caretaker and protector for their families; and lived in multiple homes or no home. Time and again, many were able to show great resilience, bouncing back over and over from these adverse situations, going to work to support their families, caring for and sticking up for their siblings.

For this study, we reviewed the presence of self-reported adverse life experiences as well as the availability of social supports in young people’s lives and examined how the two worked together to predict graduation from high school without interruption.

51 Center for Promise, 2014



Too many hurdles.

We found that young people who leave high school before graduating (also referred to here as ‘interrupted-enrollment’) face multiple hurdles. These include instability or negative experiences in their families and other close relationships, as well as a greater incidence of overall adverse life experiences. While we did not collect data about economic status, it is important to note that many of the adverse or negative experiences — such as frequent moves from school to school or becoming

homeless — disproportionately affect families in poverty. Therefore, we recommend viewing these findings in the context of the ecological and social justice frameworks offered in the Review of Related Literature.⁵²

On average, interrupted-enrollment youth reported that they experienced nearly **twice as many** adverse life experiences between ages 14 and 18 as young people who graduated high school without interruption (Table 1).

52 Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998

Table 1. Number of adverse life experiences by enrollment status

Number of Adverse Life Experiences	Percent of Total Continuous Enrollment	Percent of Total Interrupted Enrollment
0-1	42.7%	16.8%
2-4	36.3%	30.4%
5+	21.0%	52.8%
Mean number of adverse life experiences	2.7	5.3

Table 2. Adverse life experiences predicting interrupted enrollment

Adverse Life Experience	Continuous Enrollment (CE)	Interrupted Enrollment (IE)	Odds Ratio (Increased Likelihood of Interrupted Enrollment)
EVER SUSPENDED/EXPELLED	9.1%	29.9%	2.3**
GAVE BIRTH OR FATHERED A CHILD	5.4%	18.1%	2.2**
MOST FRIENDS DROPPED OUT	6.5%	21.6%	2.2**
MAJOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE	30.4%	52.5%	1.9**
NOT PREPARED FOR SCHOOL	14.8%	36.1%	1.8**
EVER HOMELESS	5.2%	18.7%	1.5*
MOVED HOMES	28.6%	47.8%	1.3*

Control variables: Gender, Age, Race, Maternal Education *

*p < .05; **p < .01

See Appendix III, Section 2, Tables 14-29 for a full list of the Adverse Life History Experiences by Enrollment Status.

These events include becoming a parent, losing a parent or caregiver, moving homes or schools, having many friends who don't graduate, using drugs, experiencing a major mental health issue like depression or anxiety, or being suspended or expelled. This robust measure indicates whether or not the student had a particular experience but does not indicate frequency or intensity of the experience. **More than half** of young people who interrupted enrollment in school experienced five or more adverse life experiences, compared to only **21 percent** of young people who stayed continuously enrolled.

As a group, interrupted-enrollment young people experienced **suspension/expulsion, school mobility, lack of academic preparation and major mental health problems** at rates **20 percentage points higher** than those with continuous enrollment (see Table 2). As we discuss below, several of these adverse life experiences directly predict the likelihood that a young person will leave school without graduating.

In a logistic regression model that assessed whether certain adverse life experiences predicted the probability of interrupted enrollment, seven factors emerged as significant predictors (the factors remained significant after accounting for age, gender, race and maternal education). These were:

- Suspension or expulsion from school
- Giving birth or fathering a child
- Being part of a peer group in which most friends did not graduate
- Experiencing a major mental health issue (e.g., depression or anxiety)
- Not feeling academically prepared for school
- Homelessness
- Moving homes (mobility)⁵³

Being suspended or expelled more than doubles the odds that a young person will leave school before graduating. The same is true for a young person who becomes a mother or father or who has many friends

53 Homelessness and moving homes (mobility) are distinct adverse events. While moving homes emerged as a statistically significant predictor on its own, changing schools did not. This may be because moving homes indicates a bigger life change, and therefore overlaps with and eclipses the effect of changing schools.

stop attending school. As noted above, young people who interrupt their enrollment are affected by these adverse life experiences at much higher rates than those who remain continuously enrolled. For example, **more than three times as many interrupted-enrollment youth, compared to continuously-enrolled students, report being suspended or expelled.**

Not only do interrupted-enrollment respondents experience significant adverse experiences at higher rates, these events often have a more intense effect. For example, while both interrupted-enrollment and continuously enrolled students report changing schools, students who interrupt their enrollment are more likely than those who don't to change schools more than once. In fact, **22 percent of interrupted-enrollment survey respondents report that they changed schools four (4) or more times between ages 14 and 18 — a rate three times as high as students who stayed continuously enrolled.** (See Appendix III, Table 27). This frequent mobility can have a strong negative effect on graduation, particularly for young people who lack an advocate.⁵⁴ For example, in one young person's words:

“ *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 (group interview participant)

In addition, **exposure to more risk factors is related to a higher risk of leaving school, and increased support from adults in school is related to a lower risk of leaving school**, beyond what can be explained by students' age, gender, race and maternal education. (See Appendix III, Table 56.)

Too little help.

In addition to experiencing greater risks, youth who left school reported fewer supportive resources on which to draw to help them cope with adversity. For example:

54 Mehana & Reynolds, 2004; Reynolds, Chen, & Herbers, 2009

Table 3. “Who Helps” by enrollment status

When you were 14-18 years old, and had trouble with school, who did you go to for help?

Most Common Top Rankings	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Mother	36.5%	35.5%
No One	11.6%	23.3%
Teacher	19.8%	8.8%
Friend	12.8%	8.1%
Father	8.3%	7.0%

- Interrupted-enrollment youth report lower levels of emotional, informational, instrumental and appraisal support from parents, adults in school, adults outside of school and friends (see Appendix III, Table 55).
- When asked “not counting your parents, when you were between 14-18 years old, how many adults in your school, neighborhood or community knew you well, and could you rely on to help if you had a problem?” continuous-enrollment youth reported an average of about two adults, and interrupted-enrollment youth reported an average of just 1.5 adults—a 25 percent difference.

Further, survey respondents who experienced more risks (regardless of enrollment status) had fewer adults they could reach out to for help.

Compared to students who were continuously enrolled, more than twice as many interrupted-enrollment youth said they reached out to “no one” for help when they had trouble in school, and less than half as many reached out to a teacher (see Table 3).

However, there is also hope in these numbers. Interrupted-enrollment youth reached out to their mothers for help more frequently than they did to any other source of support, and just as often as those who never left school. Overall, more than two-fifths of young people, regardless of enrollment status, sought help from a parent when experiencing difficulty with school. This finding suggests that parents are a trusted asset for many young people, but that parents might not have the capacity to provide all of the supports (e.g., instrumental or informational) needed at a particular time.

On the other hand, young people who have interrupted their enrollment in school turn to teachers for help **less than half** as much as continuously enrolled young people. Considering the positive effect that adults in school have on young people’s educational outcomes (see Finding 2), strengthening the salience of teachers in the lives of young people at risk for leaving school could put them back on a positive educational trajectory.

Twice as many young people who interrupted their enrollment, compared to those who didn’t, said that someone at school encouraged them to drop out. While this is a small number—only 10 percent of interrupted-enrollment respondents—this statistic reinforces the narrative that young people with more threats to graduation are also experiencing lower support from the people around them. The combination heightens the risk that this group of young people will not stay continuously enrolled.

The qualitative data complements the survey findings. Young people who participated in the group and individual interviews:

- had a far greater number of positive life experiences during the time of re-engagement compared to during their disengagement;⁵⁵

⁵⁵ We define the period of “disengagement” as the time during which young people describe circumstances that led to leaving school; and the period of “re-engagement” as one during which a young person describes returning to (and hopefully recommitting to) an educational program. We coded the experiences young people described in the interview settings as having a positive or negative valence.

- mentioned more occurrences of different types of support during re-engagement; and
- mentioned more sources of support during re-engagement.

Participants in the group interviews **mentioned negative experiences nearly 2.5 times as often as positive ones during disengagement, and positive experiences 3.5 times as often as negative ones during re-engagement** (see Appendix III, Table 45 and Table 46). When talking about disengagement, a time when negative experiences predominated, interview participants mentioned many fewer types of support.

In contrast, participants mentioned a greater number of **types of supports** during re-engagement or in the present (see Appendix III, Table 47 and Table 48) and a much greater number of **sources of support** during their re-engagement and now (see Appendix III, Table 49 and Table 50). Looking at their current experiences (now), group interview participants mentioned positive experiences nearly **eight times** as often as negative ones. The individual interviews show a similar pattern.

In sum, young people in our qualitative sample mentioned a high number of negative life experiences, a low number of support types and fewer sources of support during their period of disengagement, which we interpret to be an indication that these young people had a low sense of social support.

Delilah (a 19-year-old female) indicates that she had negative experiences with high staff turnover in her school, becoming homeless and being poorly treated by new school staff who didn't understand the issues she faced. Delilah indicates that her emotions and her circumstances overwhelmed her capacity to learn when "everybody was gone," and she had "no one to talk to."

“ And then [Ms. Moore], she fucking left, junior year. It's like, what the hell — what kind of mess is this? Some chick [Amy] came in, and I was like, who's this chick? [S]o then junior year just was ugh. And then, I had that whole semester with [Amy], and she just didn't have the same understanding and concept that [Ms. Moore] did. And she was just so by-the-books, she just wouldn't bend anything, and just argh, and I couldn't do it. You know?

And then I went — and then we went homeless, you know? We lost our apartment, so then I had the, I had the option of staying in the car with them or going to a shelter. And I said, I'm going to go to a shelter, shit.

...it wasn't the fact that I couldn't learn. It was just that my emotions and my anger and the anxiety and all of that would play a higher rate over my learning, so I was unable to learn, because of those emotions. You know what I mean?

So because they couldn't understand that, I just was made out to be this terrible-ass kid, and like, "Oh, she's just terrorizing our school." And it wasn't at all like that. I just had these problems, but then I had no one to talk to. Because [Colin] left, [Ms. Moore], she left. [Mr. West] was gone. I mean, Mr. — everybody — [Chris] — was gone. You know?"

Justin (a 25-year-old male) had similarly challenging circumstances, with a parent who wasn't available and a school where teachers and other adults were unable to meet the needs of all the young people who needed help.

“ So she [mom] moved back to doing crack and drinking. So it was just I don't know how to explain, but at that time we was my mind was racing on way other things than school. Then with the school I went to there was a lot of kids like me so every teacher can't focus on every single kid...So that's how the school was. Everybody had, teenagers had issues and all the teenagers I seen was searching for help, but it was so many teenagers that every adult couldn't reach out to in the school particularly.”

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis, we conclude that overall, young people who leave school before graduating have fewer people in their network (fewer sources) that they can depend on for help, and that they lack the types of support they need. Both the quantity and quality of support are factors in their decisions to leave school.

FINDING 2

Relationships matter, but their importance to graduation varies by type, source and intensity of support.

While young people who are leaving high school before graduating clearly face high hurdles, specific types and sources of support can boost the likelihood of either on-time graduation or re-engagement, even in the face of adverse life experiences. That is, the right support can help most students over the hurdles. What's more, support can help young people express their own strength in ways that promote graduation. However, as the quantitative results make clear, several different factors matter: who provides the support, what support they provide and whether the support is the right match for the adversity the young person faces.⁵⁶

More specifically, we found that:

- While adverse experiences predict a higher likelihood of leaving school before graduating, stable relationships that provide specific kinds of support — particularly **emotional and instrumental** — predict a lower likelihood of leaving school before graduating.
- These supports not only buffer the effects of adversity, they also allow young people to direct their strengths toward academic success.
- Young people value stability, a key to re-engagement. They trust relationships they perceive as honest, truthful, unselfish, faithful and consistent, and come to rely on these relationships for support.

Emotional and instrumental support are key; parents, peers and adults inside and outside of school all play a role.

From our quantitative analysis, we find that only some types of support (primarily emotional and instrumental support) and some sources of support (adults in school and parents, but also adults outside of school) predict whether a young person will graduate without interruption (see Appendix III, Table 54).

More specifically, continuous enrollment was positively predicted by:

- emotional support from adults in school and parents;
- instrumental support from adults in school, adults outside of school and parents; and
- informational support from friends.

Our quantitative analysis also found that support and adverse life experiences related to dropout. Specifically, increasing support from an out of school, non-parent adult is associated with a 15 percent decrease in the likelihood of leaving school before graduation, after accounting for levels of adverse life experiences. Second, regardless of support, youth are less likely to graduate as they experience more adverse life experiences.

Two stories from our interviews illustrate how young people experience these different types of support and how supports can complement one another.

⁵⁶ This dynamic is consistent with the idea of person-environment fit (Eccles et al., 1993) and relational developmental systems theories (Overton, 2013).



“ And I had a drink or two, you know, nothing too crazy, but I was still intoxicated a little bit. And I woke up, and I was in handcuffs, and you know, I was being taken to [jail], you know...I only had one phone number. I called my friend, I was just like, “Hey, call [name of program], tell them that I’m in here. I’ll explain to them what happened.” ...So I was in, I was in there. And then, so four days later, my friend talked to [Laura], and [Laura] had talked to my principal. So the principal had talked to one of my friend’s’ moms, and so apparently they got together and talked...so they scrambled up the money and gave the money to one of my friend’s’ moms...and she bailed me out.

And so, you know, I guess you can see from that, you know, that they really helped me out, they got my back...And as soon as I got out, you know, are you okay, is everything all right, you know, the attorney is ready, and you know, they understand...It was, it was an accident...And so, they taught me...hey, you were in there for four days, you learned your lesson, you’re not going to do anything like that again...

And so like, they have my back. They can really help me, whether it’s like, the principal from my school, you know, or my friends, or [Laura] [the director of the program], you know? And they all got together to help out. So you know, I guess you can say I have great friends and support, you know, for them to even take time out of their hands and, you know, help me out like that.”

Kamal (age 20)

Kamal has several sources of support, and the sources are not located in one centralized location, like a re-engagement or residential program. Instead, Kamal has help from people in his community who are professionals (the director of the residential program and his school principal) and non-professionals (his friend and his friend’s mom). During his process of re-engagement, he hits more bumps in the road, having issues with substance use and abuse. But the supportive people in his life do not blame him for the circumstances leading to his incarceration.

They recognize it as a mistake, consider it a learning experience for him, and offer him both instrumental support (a lawyer) so that the mistake does not derail him further as well as emotional support (they ask if he is okay), indicating a lack of judgment and the presence of sympathy and respect.

What do young people’s positive experiences have in common? Several individuals offered the necessary supports to facilitate re-engagement. They worked together, like spokes on a wheel, in order to help Kamal navigate the hurdles in life.⁵⁷ And to negotiate the hurdles, they utilized a variety of different types of support.

While the young people we interviewed required a variety of types of supports, two types of support — emotional and instrumental support — resonated most prominently, both of which you can hear in Kamal’s story.

While adverse experiences predict a higher likelihood of leaving school before graduating, stable relationships that provide specific kinds of support — particularly emotional and instrumental — predict a lower likelihood of leaving school before graduating.

We found that, in the interviews (both group and individual) **instrumental and emotional support appeared to work in tandem**. For a variety of reasons, we cannot say whether the presence of emotional support led to the acceptance of instrumental support, or the delivery of instrumental support acted as the gateway to perceiving and accepting emotional support. What is clear, however, is that these two sources of support were important to the young people in our qualitative sample and appear to be essential to their positive engagement in school and the community at large.⁵⁸

57 This is consistent with the idea of collective mentoring, an approach whereby multiple adults in a given organization provide the constellation of supports that a young person needs. See, for example, Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011.

58 This finding is consistent with other recent research about the importance of relational and instrumental support in mentoring relationships. See, for example, Karcher, & Nakkula, 2010.

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE DESCRIBE ESTABLISHING TRUST

Consistent with previous literature on relationship building, young people we interviewed described four ways that adults or peers can build or rebuild trust in relationships with young people who have experienced a lot of instability.* They can:

- **Invest time.** Showing up once for a young person or saying that you will do something to help is not sufficient for building trust. Instead, the participants in our study talked about adults in their lives who invested significant amounts of time in listening to them or helping them.
- **“Be there no matter what.”** Time alone is not sufficient. The young people we interviewed have been through and continue to face substantial adversity. They need someone to be present and supportive when they need help, whether because they have an immediate problem to resolve or because they need help accessing resources or opportunities.
- **Empathize.** The young people we interviewed described the need to be appreciated for who they are

and what they have been through. They said they need someone who can empathize with them and respond to their needs.

- **Offer help without judgment.** The young people we interviewed know they’ve taken some wrong turns. They need help to get back on track, and they appreciate people who can offer needed resources without judging their circumstances or their choices.

Adults and peers who show commitment over time, who offer help without judging, and who express genuine care become critical bridges for young people to the critical benchmark that completing high school offers.

In the group interviews, facilitators used a collective brainstorming technique called Wordstorms to ask young people, “What is the first word that you think of when you hear the word relationship?” The graphic shows the words young people mentioned most frequently in response. The relative size of each word indicates the relative number of mentions.

What’s the first word you think of when you hear the word ‘relationship’?

ABUSE ACCEPTANCE ACQUAINTANCES ADOPTION ADVENTURE AGGRESSION AGITATE ANGER ANNOYING ARGUING BACKSTABBING BAE BEING THERE BELIEVE BETRAYAL **BOND** BOSS BOYFRIEND
BROKEN **CARE** CHEATING CHECKING IN **CLOSE** COMFORTABLE COMMITMENT COMMONALITIES **COMMUNICATION** COMMUNITY COMPANION COMPLEX CONFIDENCE CONFUSION
CONNECTION CO-WORKER DECISIONS DESTRUCTIVE DIFFERENT DISAGREEMENT DISAPPOINTMENT DISHONEST DISLIKES **DISLOYAL** DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DOWNTIME **DRAMA** EFFORT
EMOTION ENVIRONMENT EXCITEMENT FAITH FAKE **FAMILY** FEELING FOCUS FOOD FOREVER FOULED **FRIENDS** FUN GETTING WHAT YOU PUT IN GIRLFRIEND
GROWTH **HAPPY** HARD **HATE** HAVING SOME HEADACHE HEALTHY **HEARTBREAK** HELP YOU GET IT **HONEST** HURT IGNORANCE ILLUSION INSECURITY INTERACTION IRRITABILITY
ISSUES **JOB** **KIDS** LAUGHTER LEADERSHIP LIES LIKES LISTEN LOCK LONELY **LOVE** LOYAL LUST LYING MADE TO BE FIXED MAINTENANCE **MARRIAGE** MEMORIES MISUNDERSTANDINGS
MOTIVATION MY LADY NEEDEY PEOPLE **NEGATIVE** NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT NO HURT NOT SPREADING BUSINESS NOT TALKING BEHIND BACK OFFERING ANYTHING AND FOLLOW THROUGH **OPEN** OPPORTUNITY
OTHER STUDENTS/SCHOOL **PARTNER** PASSION PEOPLE PLEASURE POSITIVE PROBLEM PROMISES PROVE IT RELIABLE **RESPECT** SAFE SECRET SELFISH SELFLESS SEX SHARING SKEPTICAL
SNEAKY STAFF **STRESS** **STRONG** **SUPPORT** TEACHER **TEAMWORK** TIES **TIME** TOGETHER TOTAL DISSIN’ TROUBLE **TRUST** UNDERSTANDING UNFAITHFUL UNITY UNWORTHY VERBAL
WEAK WIFE WOMEN WORK

* For example, see Reis’s (2007) four benchmarks listed in the Review of Related Literature, beginning on page 4.

“ There’s two people, like the men [Kyle] and [Jorge]... 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.

All my bills I have to pay, we always manage my money to see which one goes where, how much I have for my daughter this month, phone bill, stuff like that. They’ve been really helping me manage everything and make sure I’m on the right track, making sure everything is paid and just basically staying on top of me and as they do, I’m starting to get the hang of it myself.”

Terrence (age 20)

Terrence receives instrumental and emotional support from Kyle and Jorge, youth workers at a re-engagement program in which he is enrolled. The support they provide is instrumental (for example, help with money

management and completing his homework), as well as emotional (checking in with him to see how he is doing, making sure he is “doing alright”).

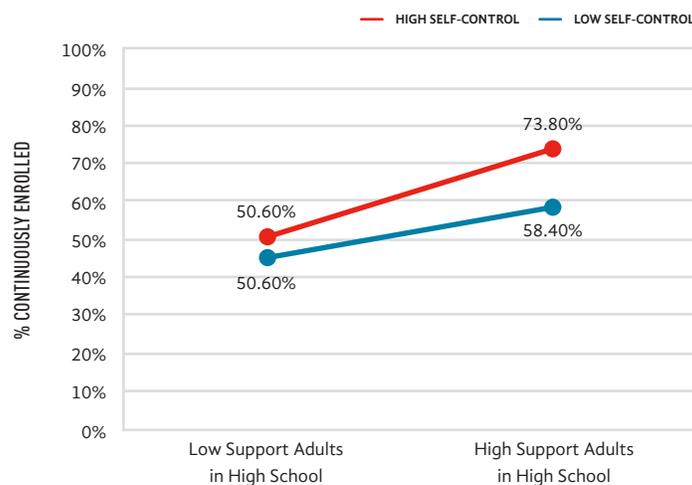
Such support appears to act as a scaffold for Terrence and Kamal; with this support, these young people feel the freedom and the ability to pursue both educational and community engagement. As Terrence says, **“I’m starting to get the hang of it myself.”** Indeed, the emotional and instrumental support that these youth experience from a variety of individuals in their lives appears to not only act as a buffer to the effects of adversity, but also as an enabler of young people’s own capacity.

Support enables young people to direct their strengths toward academic success.

In addition to support from others, young people bring their own strengths to academic achievement. Supportive relationships play a role in buffering the effects of adverse experiences and promoting students’ own strengths, helping them surmount hurdles to graduation.

As part of our quantitative analysis, we looked at a series of survey questions that measure young people’s “self-control” —e.g., considering the consequences of a

Figure 1. Individual self-control is moderated by support from adults in school



A moderating variable affects the strength of a relationship between two other variables. In this case, the relationship between the internal strength “self-control” and the likelihood of continuous enrollment changes based on the amount of support from adults in school the young person received.

potential action, not taking unnecessary risks, or taking care with one's speech. We conducted a logistic regression to examine interactions between self-control and overall support from four different **sources** (parents, adults in school, adults outside of school and friends) as well as between self-control and four different **types** of support (emotional, informational, instrumental and appraisal) from each of the four sources.

We found that the combination of high support from others and high self-control work together to boost likely graduation beyond the effect of either factor alone.

- Youth who reported higher levels of self-control had higher rates of continuous enrollment than youth who reported lower levels of this strength.
- Having a higher level of self-control made more of a positive difference, in terms of their likelihood of having continuous enrollment, when students experienced high social support from adults in school (see Figure 1), more specifically, overall support, instrumental support, informational support or appraisal support from adults in school, and instrumental support from parents.⁵⁹
- The gap in continuous enrollment (that is, staying in school) between those with high and low self-control grows substantially larger when high social supports are in place.

In other words, **having high levels of self-control made the biggest difference for students in terms of likely continuous enrollment, but only when they also report a high level of support from adults in school and from their parents.** The combination of high support and high self-control work together to raise graduation-without-interruption rates beyond the effect of either factor alone.

This set of results suggests that academic success is the function of both internal assets (e.g., students' self-control) and the ecology around them (e.g., supportive relationships).⁶⁰ That is, the sole burden of achieving success within a context of adversity cannot be placed

⁵⁹ The finding related to instrumental support from parents is particularly interesting in light of the data shown in Finding 1, Table 5 about young people turning to their parents for help when they have difficulty in school.

⁶⁰ This assertion is consistent with the bioecological framework as well as process models of positive youth development. See Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma (2006); Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006).

on the shoulders of young people. Instead, our findings suggest that **no matter their internal assets, young people need support from those around them to succeed in school and in life.**

Stability matters to re-engagement.

When the young people we interviewed were asked to talk about relationships and the influence of relationships on their decisions to leave and return to school, one of the most prevalent characteristics they described was **stability.**

Based on the number of mentions of stability and instability in the interviews (see Appendix III, Table 51 and Table 52), stability predominates young people's descriptions of re-engagement. We conclude, therefore, that there is a relationship between re-engaging and the level of stability that a young person feels about the relationships in their lives.

When young people spoke about the stability of family relationships, they mentioned more negative than positive experiences in both the group interview and individual interview settings. However, they primarily described these experiences as occurring during the time they were disengaging from school. Here's an example of the kind of story we heard:

“ Growing up, my mom, when she was single, my dad was never around. And then I had a younger sister I had to take care of. My mom, we barely had the minimum. She provided food and everything that we needed. She was always busy, so we never really saw her, so I was always in charge of my little sister. Going to school, I did good...then once I hit high school, I had to step up and get a job and help out. So I started going away from school, and I got a job, and helped my mom out and take care of my little sister, so little by little I fell out of school. At the time money was more important, 'cause we had to get by day by day. So that's when I lost track and just dropped out.”

Freddy (age 24)

Similar to Freddy's story, young people predominantly recounted family instability experiences when recalling the past, rather than when describing their current

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE DESCRIBE CARING

Young people trust and come to rely on caring relationships they perceive as honest, truthful, unselfish, faithful and consistent.

Young people we interviewed offered insights into damaging past relationships with important individuals in their lives and described what they think good relationships entail. They often defined caring as “trust” and “honesty,” being “truthful,” not being “fake” or “talking behind [your] back,” not being “selfish,” inflicting “drama” or being hurtful.

For the young people we spoke with caring also involved feeling “connected” to a person and feeling a “connection” from them. They associated caring with stability, which they defined as “loyalty,” having a person spend time with them and be there “forever,” offer “consistency” and “commitment,” be “faithful” and not a source of “heartbreak” or a “cheat.”

Stability was a recurring theme. Young people who interrupted their educations generally described unstable family relationships and few overall supports during the period when they stopped attending school. During re-engagement, however, they described multiple stable relationships — particularly with adults outside their families.

Freddy (a 24-year-old male) describes what it meant to him that “somebody cared” to connect with him while he was incarcerated:

“ They would accept my phone calls. I would call once a week. And they’ll accept my call and they’ll talk to me. And then they would try to go visit me at least once a month where they try to go constantly. So it was good...But just a phone call. Nobody else would accept my phone calls...I would call the people and like, “No.” They couldn’t accept it. And I would call here and they’ll accept it. And right away, “Hey. How are you? How’s it going? Do you need anything? What can we do for you? Do you need money? Or whatever it is we will, we’ll help you. Is your mom okay? Do you want us to stop by your house and go check on them?” So, it was really good....They went beyond what they’re supposed to and really made me feel safe....Made me feel important, ‘cause somebody cared. ‘Cause these people didn’t even know me. They weren’t even related to me. They weren’t blood or nothing, but they cared. So it felt good.”

Freddy’s story also enumerates multiple types of support from youth workers, including instrumental (phone calls and visits, the offer to check on his family) and emotional (the tone of the phone conversations, enabling Freddy to feel safe and important).

Thus, the young people we spoke with described caring relationships as trusting and stable — trusting that the relationship will last, trusting that the people in their lives will always be there and trusting that the individuals in their lives will do right by them.

experiences. As shown in Appendix III, Tables 51 and 52, instability was mentioned three times more in the past versus the present during group interviews, and about four times more in the past versus the present in individual interviews.

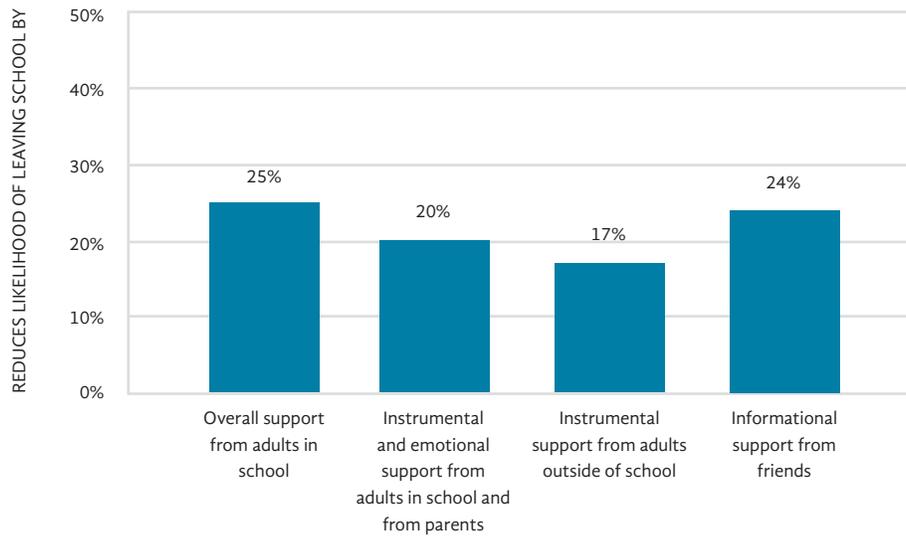
While individual interviewees had few mentions of positive or negative family relationship experiences, youth in the group interviews recounted several experiences of positive family support. For example:

“ Interviewer: What do your parents think of this? [involvement in an education program and pursuing Job Corps]

Julian: They’re...like, right behind me. They’re, that they’re all, all the time, like when I have something going or something, they’re always there pushing me.”

Julian (unspecified age)

Figure 2. Relationships and continuous enrollment



Julian wasn't alone in recounting some positive family relationships, but the preponderance of young people we spoke with described negative family experiences when they were disengaging from school.

On the other hand, **stable relationships with non-family adults play a large role in young people's positive re-engagement with school.** Considering data from the individual interviews, we heard young people mention twice as many experiences of instability vs. stability in their non-familial relationships during descriptions of leaving school; and eight times as many experiences of stability as instability during periods of re-engagement (see Appendix III, Tables 51 and 52).

Overall, both group and individual interview participants had more negative than positive experiences with their family across time periods, and that even though the negative experiences predominate the disengagement period, young people describe few positive or negative experiences with family during the time period we coded as "re-engagement/now." Negative experiences with family in the past appear to be related to a growing reliance on the positive relationship experiences with other adults and peers that predominate in young people's re-engagement narratives.

For example, a young man in the Midwest spoke of a teacher who stepped up to help him.

“ Well cause like eventually I started missing a few days. She's like, 'What's up with that?' And I was like, 'Well I have to catch the bus and stuff. And sometimes I don't have money.' And she's like, 'Well, we can try to get you a bus pass and stuff.' And then also free lunch and stuff. I didn't have that, so they hooked me up with that, too. And they were like, 'Yeah, you should get a free lunch and everything.' They hooked me up with that...Like they were asking if I'm eating, and stuff. I don't know why, but they just asked it out of nowhere...Yeah, it feels good. Just to know they're looking out for me.”

Alex (age 19)

Receiving several types of support (e.g., the instrumental and emotional support Alex describes) from multiple individuals appears to remove barriers to engagement, such as lack of transportation or insufficient nutrition, and helps young people feel more connected and stable. Alex's comments also show how a modest solution made a huge difference; what mattered was taking the time to ask questions, to notice that there was a problem, and then to take action to resolve the tangible barrier.

FINDING 3

Social supports from multiple sources buffer the effects of adverse life experiences for most young people. However, those facing the greatest adversity need more intensive support than family, school and friends can provide.

To examine multiple sources of support, survey respondents were asked a series of questions about how often four different groups of people in their lives provided different kinds of support when the young people were between 14 and 18 (e.g., cared about me, treated me fairly, showed me how to do things, helped me solve problems, made sure I had what I needed for school).

Using latent class analysis, a statistical method for creating groups out of multiple measures, we determined that there are six “classes” or categories of youth that emerge from these assessments:

Class 1. Multiple supports, high overall support

Class 2. Multiple supports, parents and adults outside school

Class 3. Multiple supports, adults in school, adults outside school, friends

Class 4. Single support, parents

Class 5. Single support, friends

Class 6. Low overall support

We next conducted a logistic regression to understand whether class membership buffered the effect of adverse life experiences. This approach allows us to examine whether certain constellations of sources and types of support are implicated in the likelihood of graduating without interruption, even when faced with substantial adversity.



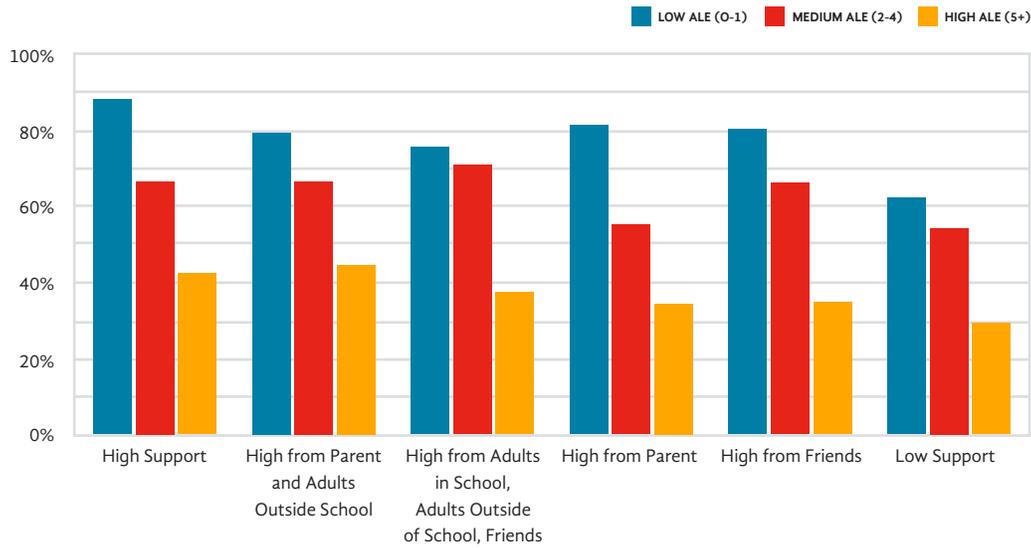
The more support, the better for graduation — even in the face of adversity.

Across all classes, being exposed to **low risk** (zero or one adverse life experience) was related with the highest rates of uninterrupted enrollment. In addition, the classes with at least **one source of support** (Classes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) displayed higher likely graduation rates than the class with the lowest overall support (Class 6).

Students who were exposed to medium risk (two to four adverse life experiences) displayed lower graduation rates, although Class 3 showed a smaller reduction in graduation rates than the other classes (see Figure 3). Even at medium risk, students in classes with more than one source of support (Classes 1, 2 and 3) as well as students who relied on support from friends only (Class 5) were able to maintain **above a 65 percent graduation rate**. However,



Figure 3. Interaction of support class and risk level predicting graduation



at high risk (more than five (5+) adverse life experiences) graduation rates dropped **below 45 percent** for all classes and **below 30 percent** for the low support class (Class 6).

Overall, these findings indicate that multiple supports may be able to help youth overcome the challenges presented by up to four adverse life experiences. However, as the events multiply, it is less likely that typical support from adults and peers will be able to make up for the impact that extreme adversity has on graduation.

What Figure 3 shows is that — not surprisingly — youth experiencing few adverse life experiences are doing better across the board than those experiencing a greater number of adverse life experiences. Support still matters, however, to youth at higher risk. (See, for example, Class 1 vs. Class 6 for the High ALE youth — the orange bar.) Support appears to play an important buffering effect for the medium-ALE youth; that is, those with two to four adverse experiences and multiple supports (the red bar in Class 1, Class 2, Class 3) are doing better than the low-support group or those with only parent support. We then

see an important story unfold for those experiencing the most adversity (the high ALE group): There is potentially a threshold of adversity where typical support from parents, other adults and peers will not be sufficient.

Young people facing the greatest adversity need more than social support.

Social supports from multiple sources partially buffer the effects of adverse life experiences for most young people. But those facing the greatest adversity often need more intensive support than family, school and friends can provide.

- For young people with **two to four** adverse life experiences, a Web of Support from parents, adults in school, and peers reduces the probability of interrupted enrollment — that is, it provides a partial buffer between adversity and leaving school.
- For young people with **five or more** adverse life experiences, social support does little to buffer the effects of adversity; the hurdles are too high for support alone to keep students in school.

Overall, these findings indicate that multiple supports may be able to help youth overcome the challenges presented by up to four adverse life experiences. However, as the events multiply, it is less likely that typical support from adults and peers will be able to make up for the impact that extreme adversity has on graduation. While these results may appear discouraging, the survey responses likely reflect the general supports that young people typically receive in their families, schools and communities and not the more intensive supports the participants in the qualitative sample might receive when enrolled in a re-engagement program like the ones listed in Appendix II.

We hypothesize that the survey respondents facing the greatest adversity are similar to the youth in our qualitative sample, and therefore they would benefit from the much more intentional and intensive support that interview participants describe as characteristic of re-engagement programs. (This type of intensity is not measured, however, in our survey questions.) Those supports would include mental health and social services, which are still based on trusting relationships but provide a more specialized set of interventions than those offered by most caring adults or by peers.

“ *Right now to [program], it's going good...I associate more for like the staff people. I had a — not a date, but I had lunch. I had lunch with — and I'm actually scheduled to go to lunch with her again. She's gonna be great. She's a lawyer at [program] and like I said, I do want to be a lawyer.*

So she came in actually for our social studies lab and she gave that lab. She was talking about the new laws and how our parents can actually submit so that they can become citizens if they've been in domestic violence before they actually filed a police report. To me that was like, my mom, man. She qualifies for that...

So for them to actually, even if it's not far away, for them to come from their job here to the students is like dude, that's amazing. Yeah, because I've never received that. You get a lot of information off of this and they have a lot of people, like I said, supporting them. So they literally have all the help that they can give to you.”

Rosita (age 18)

FINDING 4

Young people are more likely to graduate if they have access to a web of supportive relationships, which may include parents, adults inside and outside of school and peers. At least one stable, anchoring relationship can act as a gateway to this wider Web of Support.

“ They’re like the family I didn’t have. I consider that a second home because they’re caring and they’re willing to reach out to us. They’re not scared to tell me, ‘Oh you’re falling off, you’re acting this kind of way, you’re not doing the best that you can.’ When it ...came to assignments that were required for graduation, one particular teacher helped me out, her name was Ms. W—that was my literature teacher, she sat down with me a few times explaining the ethnography we had to do.”

Tyrell (age 20)

Our data reinforces previous research about the cumulative and interactive power of relationships.⁶¹ In both group and individual interviews, three types of people predominated young people’s discussion of those who made a difference in their lives:

THE ANCHOR: A person who is not a family member and not a paid youth worker who provides deep, unconditional support.

When describing the Anchor, young people emphasized notions of “being there,” “caring” or “another mother.”

“ [Ms. Breen] guides everybody through. She makes this her home, like for Thanksgiving, kids that didn’t have nowhere to go for Thanksgiving, she made Thanksgiving dinner for everybody. Everybody brought something.

She’s like the mother of the building, and we her kids. Because it’s like some kids that don’t have money for something, she’ll just give it to you like that. And they be like, ‘Oh, I’ll give it back’ and she’ll be like, ‘No don’t worry about it, just keep it.’ But you can’t even go to your mom and ask her some of the stuff but you can go to [Ms. Breen] with. You can’t even talk to your mother about some of the stuff you can talk to somebody like [Ms. Breen] with, for example. And you tell her stuff and she won’t tell everybody.”

Ayesha (group interview participant)

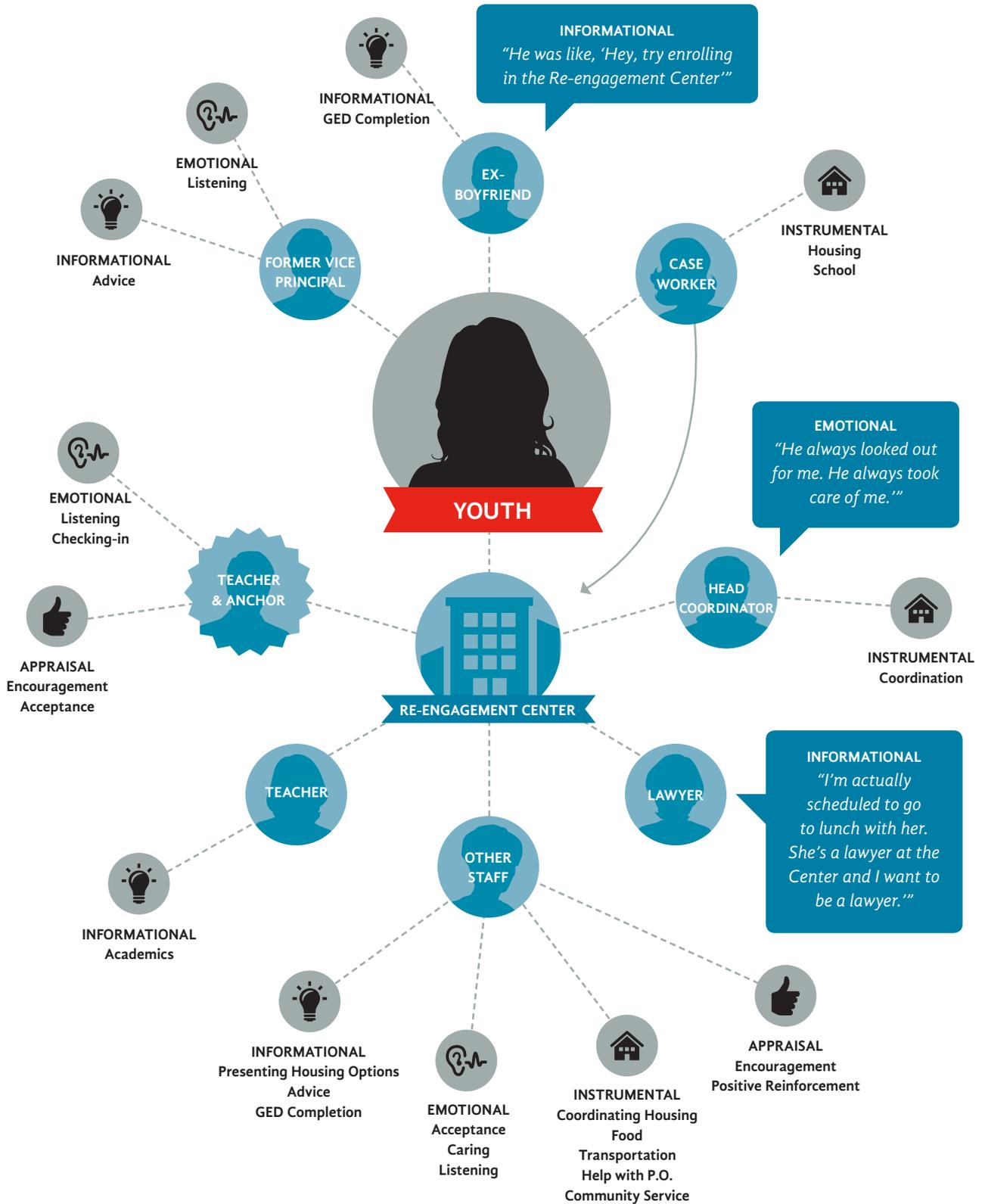
THE YOUTH WORKER: A staff person within a program or organization, such as a paid youth worker, who provides wrap-around support as a function of his or her assigned role.

When describing the Youth Worker, young people highlighted persistence, tenacity and high expectations, among other necessary traits.

61 Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen, 2000; Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2008



Figure 4. Rosita's Web of Support



“ He was just like, ‘I’m willing to help you as long as you’re willing to help yourself.’ Trust me. I done had rough bumps and everything and breakdowns, but [he] just helped me pull through it. [He’ll] come get me in the middle of the night if I’m stressin’ out. [He’ll] really come out there way 12:00 in the morning, 1:00 in the morning just to come see what’s up with me and it’s done happened a couple times already. So [he] really motivated to help me changin’ myself.”

Terrence (age 20)

THE WEB OF SUPPORT: A collection of individuals within and outside family who provide the young person with varying levels and types of support.

When describing the Web of Support, young people highlighted many different individuals, each of whom provided something essential to them. For example, James (an 18-year-old male) describes the many people around him who keep him motivated and on a re-engagement path:

“ James: So they said that I should do that and I just have to follow the GED path.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, who’s ‘they’?

James: Support, supportive people like when I was locked up, my caseworker, one of these probation officers, [name]...Yeah [and there] was [name of another helpful person] and my therapist over there, ...and then at the group home the PD, [name] and then my roommate he, ...he says I’m too smart and that I should already have it. And yeah, support people, mentor, student aid, he’s one of them... Just supporting me like if I need somebody, talk to someone then they’ll talk to me, keep my mind from going back to old habits and just yeah, stuff like that.”

The Anchor and the Youth Worker play a similar role in young people’s lives — that of a trusted adult who could connect them to other sources of support. They offer different points of entry, and young people may encounter

them in different ways, but the qualitative analysis did not show differences in the types of support they offered or the importance they had to the young people who described them.

For young people to successfully utilize support to stay in or re-engage in school, they need to trust that support is present. A mentor, a parent, a friend, a youth worker or a caring adult in a young person’s neighborhood can be a trusted resource and an important anchor for staying in or returning to school. This young person gives one example of an adult in a formal role (a Youth Worker) who becomes “like a friend:”

“ It was because of [Matt]. Because like, ‘cause, I feel like the mindset I had before [program] was that no relationship with a teacher, as in like, contact with a teacher or — you were just there — they were just there to do their thing and you were there to do your thing. But with [Matt], he, like I said, he would tell me stuff to improve in and skills that I’m missing. And stuff like that. So he showed me that a teacher could also be like a friend.”

Julia (group interview participant)

A trusted peer can also play the role of an Anchor:

“ When I was in eighth grade I had met, he’s like my brother, I call him Chief, when I was skipping school and stuff, he just kept telling me, ‘This not you, you got a bright future but you just need to stop doing what you doing.’ And since I wasn’t humbled at the time, I was like, ‘No that’s not me, I don’t got a bright future.’ And by the time I had came to [program] and I was going good, he’s like see I told you. If it wasn’t for him believing in me when I didn’t believe in myself, I don’t think I would be where I am at.”

Tyrell (age 20)

A single individual can be an Anchor or Youth Worker — someone who will do anything and everything for that young person, but, most importantly, someone the young person perceives as providing the trust and stability that

may have been missing in previous relationships. Young people most at risk for not graduating on time need both an anchoring relationship (whether in a paid role, or a more informal relationship) and a wider array of supports.

Young people's reflections on re-engagement show that a variety of individuals in their lives offer different types of support to buffer risks and to promote positive developmental outcomes. These individuals may be present in school, at work, in the neighborhood and/or at home. In many cases, community assets and interventions already exist to create or comprise a Web of Support, but young people don't know how to access them.

The presence of a single trusted adult appears to be a necessary component of support, alongside or in conjunction with the Web of Support. Neither is effective alone. While our analysis does not allow us to say whether the Anchor and Youth Worker are precursors or catalysts, young people's stories suggest that these relationships may need to be in place before the Web of Support is evident to or effective for them.⁶² Understanding this process more deeply is a direction for further research.

That is, some young people may be standing in a room that contains all the support they need, but they need someone else to turn on the lights so they can see what's there and reach for it.

In coding the interviews, we found that Web of Support was mentioned in young people's life experiences more frequently (74 experiences in group interviews and 93 in individual interviews) than either Youth Workers (mentioned 51 times in group interviews and 12 times in individual interviews) or the Anchor (mentioned 54 and 25 times, respectively). (See Appendix III, Table 53.)

Given that there can be considerable overlap in coding, we looked to see if youth mentioned one or many of these relationships in recounting their stories of school engagement. Then, if the participant mentioned more

than one relationship, we examined the one that they mentioned the most. From this analysis we found that the Web of Support was the predominant source the participants mentioned. (See Appendix III, Table 54.)

Although we cannot speak to predictive ends, we found that youth recounted experiences of **instrumental** (119 in individual interviews and 110 in group interviews), and **emotional** support (112 in individual interviews and 87 in group interviews) more than any other type of support (see Appendix III, Table 47 and Table 48). We did not see a variation in the type of support offered by the Web of Support, the Anchor or the Youth Worker. That is, there was no evidence of source and type specificity.

“ I connect with everybody. My relationships are different with everybody here, but I connect with all of them like family, especially the staff. Me and [Lamar]; [Lamar] is like I look at him as super mentor man. He's got a lot of knowledge and wisdom that he's definitely helped me out a lot.

[Lamar] is a big one, [Dwayne] is a big one and [Mr. Wilson], I mean all the staff. I can't even just - they all have played their part and been fundamental in my change.

[Lamar], all of them. Then just even just the guys, the [name of program] guys around here; they embrace you, they see in your face 'So, how you doing? Yeah, man, my name is so and so and...' then they start telling me about [name of program] and so that always felt comfortable.”

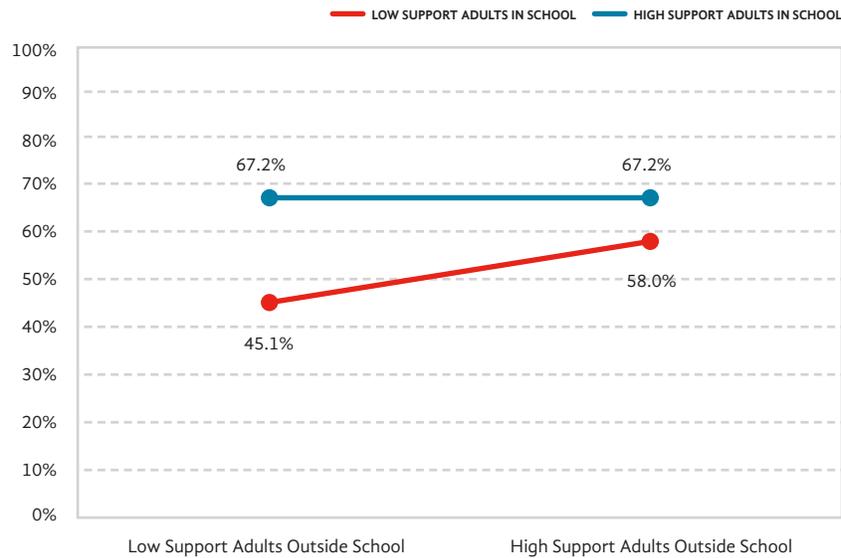
Justin (age 25)

It appears necessary for a young person to perceive and access several sources and types of support to overcome the effects of living in toxic environments. A foundation, or gateway, relationship with a trusted adult allows young people to engage with the Web of Support. That is, some young people may be standing in a room that contains all the support they need, but they need someone else to turn on the lights so they can see what's there and reach for it.

Further, just as no single person acts as the ultimate source of support for a young person, there is no single

62 Some existing research supports this hypothesis. See, for example, Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, 2000; Chan, Rhodes, Howard, Lowe, Schwartz & Herrera, 2013.

Figure 5. Interaction of support from adults in school by adults outside school predicting graduation without interruption



gap in support that needs to be filled. That is, the young people we interviewed indicated that all four types of support—emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal—were important to positive re-engagement.

We see, though, from our quantitative analysis, that effects of having low support from one person in a young person’s lives can be significantly buffered by high supports from another. This suggests that a web of sources of support offers multiple opportunities for buffering gaps in support and promoting positive educational outcomes. As one example, in Figure 5 we can see the buffering and promoting effects of support from two different sources, **adults in school** and **adults outside school**. High supports from adults outside of school can help make up for low support from adults in school.

Given what it takes to overcome the adverse experiences many of the young people in our qualitative sample experienced, we wanted to see how a combination of supports might work together to encourage positive academic and community engagement. Therefore, we examined the qualitative data to see how often young people said they experienced each of the four types of support by itself, and how often each co-occurred with the other types of support. We found that approximately **one-third of the experiences that included emotional support also included instrumental support**.

For example, one young person in the Midwest said that the individuals in his program provide him with both instrumental and emotional resources necessary to thrive.

“*They’ve got the resources I need; you know what I’m saying? They’ve got the respect that I need, you know what I’m saying? ...Resources and respect... when they open their doors, they open their arms too. You feel it. They don’t just open the doors like here there is a class, you be there...They don’t do [just] that, they’re hands-on and they talk to you and they try to understand you. They do what they can usually.*”

Carson (age 25)

Carson found this combination of instrumental and emotional support to be the “special sauce” for getting him back on track. Carlie offers a similar example:

“*When it comes to transportation, it’s Ms. C__ and Ms. D__ and Ms. J__. When it comes to education, it’s all of them. When it comes to, like I just want to get stuff off my chest it’s all of them. And then when*

it gets really personal, to where I would get upset and shut down and block people out at some points, it would be Ms. W__ and Ms. J__.”

Carlie (age 19)

Likewise, we found that **instrumental and informational** support co-occurred in the life experiences of youth 49 times across 15 interviews. For example, Dolores (a 19-year-old female) a young person we interviewed in the Southwest, indicates that people at the program she attends help her, among other things, pass the courses needed to fulfill the graduation requirements.

“*They’ll make sure you pass. They’ll do anything to make sure you get yourself to pass. For [program name], they review our grades every week, and then if we’re failing the class, they’ll put us into tutoring, or homework—what is it called? Math ed, too, if we’re failing math. And then the lab, you can stay after school for an hour and they will help. You could ask any teacher for help in any subject. The social workers help, too.*

[Youth Worker] was talking to me, today, about how she has a bachelors in English and biology. She was just saying that if I needed any help, just to ask her. She even said that we’re gonna start doing—for our little [school-to-work transition program], teen dating violence program, we’re gonna have little meetings where we do our homework.”

Delving deeper, we examined whether young people described differences in the types of support offered by their sources of support (Anchor, Youth Worker and Web of Support). Through an analysis of the individual interviews, we found that all sources were credited with providing all four types of support. Therefore, we conclude that a **diverse array of caring adults and peers can be potential sources of the types of support young people need for academic and social success.**

“*It’s ... fantastic, outstanding school...The teachers are great, the staff’s great, everybody’s, they’re, everybody’s great, you know? And so after going to that school for a while, helping me get my grades up. Helping ... you know, me gain knowledge, more than anything. You know, I’ve learned a lot, you know, going to that school. You know, I actually enjoyed learning. You know, hey, who knew it’d be, like, actually enjoyable?*

But towards the last stages of where I was living with an ex-girlfriend, and so it really wasn’t well, but it was the only place that I could live at. But the school informed me of [name of program], the place that I started living at. I’ve lived there for a year, now, almost. And ... [name of housing program] has been one of the best things that happened to me, actually, honestly. I cannot emphasize enough the help that they have done, you know. They encouraged me more than anything to go to school. They’re ... what is it called, they interact with the school, I mean, you know? Like, my parents never went to, like, a choir concert or soccer game, or any of that. And if I need [name of housing program], the people will, to go, you know, I mean, they will. You know, that’s the best part, you know, they’re really like family. They really care.

They really push me forward, you know, if I need anything. Hey, do you need anybody to help you get your driver’s license? Do you need, you know ... they give you the resources, they give you everything that you need. They’re really good people. They pushed me.”

Kamal (age 20)

Coupled together, the qualitative data and quantitative analyses suggest that support for graduation cannot be filled by one person alone. We see powerful effects when there is a Web of Support around a young person that provides the four types of supports from multiple sources.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on our findings and their relationship to previous research, we recommend further study on four topics: (1) the mental health concerns of young people with interrupted enrollment in school; (2) social supports from adults in school settings; (3) parents' capacity to support young people experiencing difficulty at school; and (4) strategic prevention and intervention efforts for young people experiencing high levels of adversity.

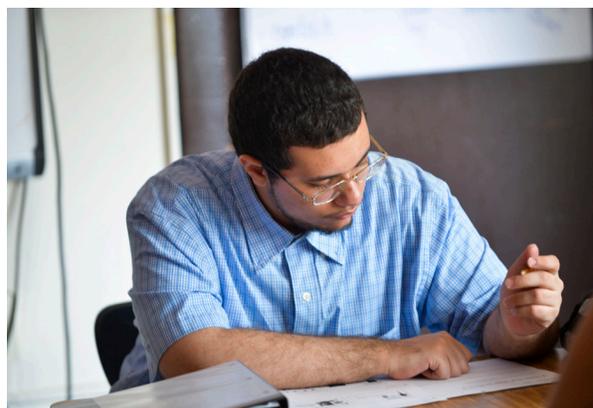
The prevalence and impact of mental health concerns.

We find that interrupted-enrollment youth self-report mental health concerns at a much higher rate than continuous-enrollment youth. Our measure (one question) was too simplistic to assess the psychological well-being of youth with precision. We know, however, from previous research,⁶³ that trauma and mental health concerns greatly increase the likelihood that a young person will leave school without graduating.

To date, there have been few studies examining how trauma and mental health concerns relate to academic trajectories over time. More studies are needed on this topic and on the role that social supports play in buffering the effect of mental health on school outcomes.

To gain an accurate picture of the mental health needs in a given youth population, high-quality assessments are needed. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)⁶⁴, a self-report questionnaire, is designed to provide representative assessments of an array of issues that young people face, including mental health issues, but the precision of

available assessments is still lacking. In particular, very little is known about the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder among youth, especially among youth growing up in communities with high rates of violence. This clearly warrants more attention.



Social support in school settings.

Our survey data shows that young people who interrupt their enrollment **turn to teachers first** to help with difficulty in school **half as much** as young people who stay continuously enrolled. Echoing this finding, we heard in the group and individual interviews that young people did not perceive adults in school to be especially supportive.

63 For example, see Porche et al, 2011

64 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>. Accessed on August 10, 2015.

Future research could look more deeply at social and academic supports in schools, and how these can be strengthened to help young people facing adverse circumstances. In addition, researchers could examine how social supports outside of school could buffer the lack of social supports within school; e.g., in afterschool activities or from service providers.



Parents as navigators of difficulty at school.

More than a third of young people, regardless of enrollment status, named their **mothers as a first source of support** when they encountered difficulty in school. Yet for some young people, accessing this source of support does not prevent interrupted enrollment. Why? Previous research suggests that parents are strongly invested in their children's success but may not know how to help if their own educational experiences are either limited or negative or if they come from cultural traditions that lead them to defer to teachers.⁶⁵ Particularly at the high school level, schools may also struggle with how to design and implement meaningful family engagement. Further research with parents, particularly mothers, of young people who have left school before graduating could help develop culturally appropriate interventions that strengthen peer relationships among parents, parent-adolescent relationships and teacher-parent relationships.

Strategic prevention and intervention for young people facing high adversity.

Among our survey sample, more than half of young people who interrupted enrollment in school experienced five or more adverse life experiences (ALE), compared to only 21 percent of young people who stayed continuously enrolled. Further analysis showed that social support — what parents, adults in and out of school, and peers could normally provide — does not significantly relate to improvements in graduation odds for young people experiencing five or more ALE. That is, the hurdles this group of young people face are too high for support alone to make a difference. In order to make our country a GradNation for all young people, we must continue to study what prevention and intervention efforts are effective for the young people facing the greatest threats to graduation. Further, we need to understand more about the nature, not just the number, of the adverse experiences that affect graduation. Deeper knowledge about what can keep this group of young people in school, or enable them to complete high school after an interruption, is essential to inform strategic investments that will lead to higher graduation rates.

65 Mistry, Contreras, & Pufall-Jones, 2014

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides new insights into how relationships can play an even more powerful role in engaging and re-engaging young people in education.

The young people we interviewed and surveyed showed us that the **strength, number, and nature of relationships** in their lives are important factors that influence their engagement with school. What we learned, in part, is that small interventions can make a big difference for most youth. You don't need to be everyone to be someone for a young person.

If supportive relationships are a powerful lever for raising graduation rates — what can each of us do? Here are our recommendations for individuals and for school- and community-wide systemic change.

INDIVIDUALS

Listen.

Listen to what young people who have left school and made their way back are telling us. Young people are looking for stable connections they can depend on not just to care about them, but also to do something for them so they can do more for themselves. They also say they're looking for support from people who respect what they're facing and offer a helping hand without judgment. How can we ensure that this happens for more young people, in more places, more of the time? That's the conversation this report encourages.

Connect.

All types of support can benefit young people — from a caring word to four quarters at the laundromat. Simple, sincere questions, like “How are you today?” or “How's your family?” can show a young person that they matter to you and that you care about their life. Young people told us they much prefer to be asked what they need, so ask how you can help and listen to the answer. If a young person is struggling with school, you can offer help with

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF GRADUATION?

Students experiencing one or more of these adverse situations are less likely (statistically speaking) to stay continuously enrolled in school, and more likely to need social support.

- Suspension or expulsion
- Giving birth or fathering a child
- Being part of a peer group in which most friends didn't graduate
- Experiencing a major mental health issue, e.g., depression or anxiety
- Not feeling academically prepared for school
- Homelessness
- Moving homes

Leaders in community and school settings can make extra efforts to prevent these threats to graduation (e.g., expulsion, homelessness) or to provide tangible resources to help young people handle them.

a homework assignment. If she can't afford lunch or public transportation, you can help her navigate the free and reduced-priced lunch system or the process to get a free bus pass. Young neighbors may appreciate a few hours of free child care. [Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework](#) provides more specific actions.

Start a conversation.

Share this report as well as selected pages of the 2015 **Building a Grad Nation report** with your faith leader, your book group, your local high school principal, your mayor, your community's school board. Ask what your group can do to help more young people graduate on time. Choose just one thing that makes sense for your group's interests and resources and do it.

Be a mentor, tutor or coach.

If you have the qualities young people say they look for in their Anchors, their Youth Workers and their Webs of Support, apply to be a mentor through a formal program like the ones that are part of **MENTOR's network**, volunteer through your faith community or ask your local high school about opportunities to get involved.

SCHOOLS

Bring the Web in.

Remove barriers to graduation by inviting community organizations that offer a variety of social services, including support for physical and mental health, into the school building. Two national nonprofits, **Communities In Schools**, and **Coalition for Community Schools** offer holistic ways to do this. Extra academic support can also be provided through national service programs like those funded through **Operation AmeriCorps**.

Invest in building relationships and leveraging students' strengths.

Review these key dimensions of investing in relationships, including **time, people and training**. Use free materials and technical assistance from the **National Mentoring Resource Center** as well as these free **webinars** on specific aspects of mentoring. Consider professional development resources like **My Teaching Partner**, a specific intervention that coaches middle and high school teachers to enhance the quality of their interactions with students, as well as efforts related to socio-emotional learning such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL's) **Collaborating Districts Initiative** or

Transforming Education's Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits. These tools can be more widely utilized in school settings not only with teachers, but with other school staff and with school-based volunteers.

Small interventions can make a big difference for most youth. You don't need to be everyone to be someone for a young person.

End zero-tolerance disciplinary policies.

Being suspended or expelled more than doubles the odds that a young person won't graduate on time. Multiple research studies strongly support this finding. What's more, several studies emphasize that significant racial and economic disparities affect school discipline. (See, for example, this 2011 **journal article**. For a more personal view, see this July 2015 **op-ed** in the *Baltimore Sun*.)

School system leaders should employ evidence-based alternatives to suspension and expulsion that keep everyone safe, create a positive learning environment and untangle the underlying causes that might lead to disciplinary action. Switching from out-of-school to in-school suspension, and giving young people the chance to make up the work they have missed, is a better way to help young people stay on track. Check out relationship-focused interventions like **Collaborative & Proactive Solutions** (CPS) or **restorative justice** practices. All of these are more graduation-friendly options than requiring a student to leave school without the opportunity to make academic progress.

Engage young people as peer supporters.

In both our qualitative and quantitative samples, we see evidence of peers and near-peers serving as Anchors and as part of the Web of Support. Ask young people what they and their peers need in order to stay in school or to return. Let students know that their interest in attendance, academic achievement and graduation makes a difference to their peers. With a bit of coaching about how to give constructive feedback (appraisal and informational support), students can support each other's learning in

both classroom and after-school settings. Want to learn more? The Center for Supportive Schools offers several different types of [programs and trainings](#) for K-12 settings.

Make it harder to leave and easier to return.

Several cities—including Boston, Chicago and Portland, Oregon—have re-engagement or re-connection centers that help young people consider their options for returning. Instead of waiting for young people to be ready to return, district and school leaders should develop systems for intervening at or before the point of departure. Schools and districts should change policies that allow young people to leave school without an exit conversation, create early-warning systems (for example, that routinely examine and respond to attendance patterns), and connect students with supportive resources that might allow them to stay in school. Further, all districts and states should create stronger systems for sharing students' high school credits across jurisdictions to mitigate the effects of changing schools.

With a bit of coaching about how to give constructive feedback, students can support each other's learning in both classroom and after-school settings.

COMMUNITIES

Assess the risks and resources of young people in your community.

Developing a clear picture of both the risks and the resources in young people's lives is an essential foundation for strategic intervention in graduation rates. Leaders can begin by reviewing available data from a variety of sources, conducting needs assessments, and undertaking community asset mapping.

Need some ideas for how to get started? The [Building a Grad Nation](#) report, which contains numerous interactive maps and charts, is an excellent starting point for understanding who's graduating and who isn't in your

state. Search Institute's [Developmental Assets Profile](#) offers one approach to asset mapping. To look at health-related risks, see whether your state participates in the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#); data is available from the Centers for Disease Control in several different formats. For examples of state-level surveys, take a look at the [Iowa Youth Survey](#), The [California Healthy Kids Survey](#) (which looks at resiliency and protective factors as well as risks), or the [Oregon Healthy Teen Survey](#). Your local [Mentoring Partnership](#) can help you look at the mentoring landscape in your area. Finally, if your community has already conducted a GradNation [Community Summit](#), you may be able to build on discussions and data from that event.



Improve the odds that all young people have access to an Anchor or a Youth Worker—a caring adult who can connect them to a Web of other Supports.

Decision makers at all levels can contribute to stronger school and community support systems for the young people they serve. All of the re-engagement programs in Appendix II of this report offer community-based examples of this recommendation in action. Orlando, Florida, is taking this idea citywide, replicating lessons learned from the [Parramore Kidz Zone](#). [Friends of the Children](#), an intensive national mentoring model, assigns an “all in” adult to a community's highest-need kindergarteners, and stays with each child through high school graduation.

School-based examples include national service programs like [City Year](#), whole-school-and-beyond models like [Self Enhancement, Inc.](#), and school-community connectors like [Communities In Schools](#) or [City Connects](#).

Engage health care professionals as allies in boosting graduation rates.

Exposure to multiple adverse experiences in childhood and beyond doesn't just affect graduation statistics. A growing body of research emphasizes the detrimental effect of adversity on physical and mental health. Someone who experiences four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (**ACES**) is at significantly greater risk for health threats like heart disease, lung cancer, hepatitis, depression and suicide. The **Center for Youth Wellness** in San Francisco has developed a holistic model for screening, prevention and intervention in the toxic stress and poor health outcomes that multiple adverse experiences provoke. The Center has developed a free **screening tool** that health professionals can review and adapt. It also provides **training and other resources** for parents, educators and youth-serving professionals. We urge more widespread use of similar tools in community health settings, which could make a big difference for both on-time graduation and re-engagement efforts.



Include social support systems for young people in the design of Comprehensive Community Initiatives.

Strategic plans for comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) should include a focus on ensuring that each young person has multiple opportunities to connect with the sources and types of support he or she needs. This can include culturally appropriate family engagement strategies and peer-to-peer support networks, as well as greater collaboration among agencies and organizations. Public and private funders of efforts like Promise Neighborhoods and Choice Neighborhoods can encourage attention, beginning with the planning phase, to the role

that youth-serving relationships play. For more information about CCIs, see these **case studies**.

See education and youth services as an economic development investment, not a cost center.

When more young people graduate high school, they've reached one critical benchmark toward adult success. What's more, their communities gain in multiple ways—a stronger workforce, more civically engaged residents and fewer social service costs. Evidence-based programs and practices like mentoring or **national service** offer cost-effective, high-impact ways to invest in relationships that can support young people both in and outside schools. What if every agency that serves young people and their families pooled all their resources to create an integrated youth investment strategy—with raising the graduation rate as one key indicator of success? Syracuse, New York's citywide partnership with **Say Yes to Education** offers a creative and promising approach to investing existing assets in new ways. Take a look at their **results** so far.

We believe that attention to the findings and recommendations in this report will help us get closer to our goal of a GradNation for all of America's youth. Do you have ideas about other approaches? We'd love to hear from you at **gradnation.org**.

What if every agency that serves young people and their families pooled all their resources to create an integrated youth investment strategy—with raising the graduation rate as one key indicator of success?

CONCLUSIONS

The more sources of support young people have, the better their chances to graduate high school. Where can they find this support?

At home, at school, among their friends, in community settings like churches and after-school programs and in social service systems like juvenile justice or child welfare... even in the barber's chair. What's important is that adults who encounter young people see themselves as potential supporters, and they know that **caring and action work in tandem** to boost likely graduation. School and school system leaders, directors of public and community-based agencies, elected officials at all levels, conveners of comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs), collective impact efforts, funding collaboratives and individual caring adults can all play a role in making sure all young people encounter multiple types and sources of support.

Building on previous research about relationships, we find that social supports allow strengths like self-control to be expressed, buffer adversity, and reduce the likelihood that a young person will leave school.

Although high-quality institutions (schools, after-school programs, summer programs and social services) provide supportive environments and opportunities for cultivating positive developmental outcomes, **social relationships with supportive individuals are potentially the key leverage point for optimizing young people's development.**

Strengthening social relationships within these proximal contexts can enable policymakers and practitioners to cut through the complexity of human development and positively impact the lives of young people.

The relationship itself is a powerful vehicle for change. Building on previous research about relationships, we find that social supports allow strengths like self-control to be expressed, buffer adversity, and reduce the likelihood that a young person will leave school. Promotive and buffering effects vary based on the source of support and the type of support being conveyed.



Without social support, young people facing many risks are all too likely to leave school before graduating. But we can see the transformative power of relationships take hold when there is a Web of Support around a young person, one that offers multiple types of support from multiple sources. To access that web, young people need to trust in its strength as well as their own.

Encountering a caring adult who provides a deep level of trust, stability and responsiveness — “whatever it takes” — begins to rebuild the stability that is missing in many young people's lives. So while one caring adult is not sufficient, that one person may be a necessary connector who enables a young person to receive support from multiple sources, re-engage with school, and begin to thrive.

Attention to the findings and recommendations in this report will, we hope, help us get one step closer to our goal of a GradNation for all of America's youth. Do you have ideas about other approaches? We'd love to hear from you at gradnation.org.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a convergence mixed-methods triangulation design.⁶⁶ Mixed-methods designs recognize that not all research questions can be answered using a single formulation of data. However, the primary purpose of a convergence model is to form a well-substantiated, valid conclusion about a certain phenomenon. Our 2014 report, *Don't Call Them Dropouts* (DCTD), found that relationships with adults and peers are fundamental to high school graduation and attrition. Therefore, the current report was designed to further explore this phenomenon and understand the nature of these relationships.

For this report, we collected and analyzed our qualitative (individual interviews and group interviews) and quantitative (survey) data separately, yet simultaneously, then converged our findings during our interpretation of the analyses. Our quantitative and qualitative analyses were informed by the qualitative and quantitative findings included in the *Don't Call Them Dropouts* report. The focus of the qualitative analyses remained focused on young people's voices and the quantitative analyses were designed to understand their life experiences.

When reading the findings, it is important to note that the interview participants (both groups and individuals) and the survey respondents were drawn from different populations. The more than 120 young people who participated in the group and individual interviews live in urban communities and were connected in some way to organizations that re-engage young people who have left high school. The 2,830 survey respondents came from 48 states and the District of Columbia.

QUALITATIVE METHOD

From February through June 2015, the Center for Promise team conducted 16 group interviews with 102 youth in eight cities and 19 individual interviews in five of these cities (given scheduling there was not enough time to conduct individual interviews in three of the cities). Group interviews included approximately eight participants per group; facilitators conducted at least two groups in each community (in two of the nine cities time only allowed for one group interview, and one of the nine communities was not included in the analysis because the size of the group—18 participants—was too large to allow for a productive conversation). Each participant was given a \$40 gift card for his or her participation in the group interview/individual interview. Two individuals facilitated the group interviews, one female and one male. One facilitator took the lead in conducting the group while the other took notes, encouraged participation and handled the consent and debrief processes. Group interviews were audio recorded, and facilitators also took copious field notes during and after the group interviews for later analysis. Individual interviews were also audio recorded and field noted, then transcribed for analysis.

Individual interviews were facilitated by the same two individuals who conducted the group interviews, with one facilitator taking the lead and the other acting administratively. The focus of the interview was on the youth's life story and the relationship questions from the group interviews were used as probes (see the end of this section for the questions used during group and individual interviews). Individual interviews were conducted with participants who were from the same program/urban area as the youth in the group interviews; however a single youth could not participate in both forms of data collection. By engaging different youth, we protected against exhaustion of any given youth who might therefore be less forthcoming about their narrative.

66 Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007

The group interview method drew upon facilitation techniques developed by Teen Empowerment, an organization whose focus is on raising the voices of youth and young adults in a community in order to effect social change.⁶⁷ The two individuals who ran the group interview have extensive experience and training in these techniques, as well as extensive experience working with and organizing youth who have disengaged from school. After the participants completed the informed consent form and demographic information worksheets, facilitators started each group with a brief introduction, outlining the expectations and purpose for conducting the group interview. Along with the facilitators, participants engaged in several group exercises to engender trust, establish norms, and build connection and comfort among participants. Once rapport was established, facilitators built from information gleaned during the group exercises to begin a conversation regarding relationships, what relationships mean to these youth and how they interpret relationships influencing their choices to engage or disengage in school. Facilitators closed the group interviews with participants' reflections and thoughts about the session.

Group interview and individual interview participants were recruited through community partners who serve youth who have interrupted school enrollment. (See Appendix II for the cities in which we conducted interviews, and the program(s) in each community who helped with recruitment.) A total of 102 youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years ($M = 19.48$, $SD = 1.83$) took part in the group interviews, and 19 youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years ($M = 20.27$, $SD = 2.56$) took part in the individual interviews. Overall, there were more males (72) than females (49), as well as youth from a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds (see Appendix III, Table 12).

As a part of our recruitment process with community partners, we planned site visits with each of the programs, and asked members of the administration in each program to gather approximately 16 youth to participate in group interviews, and an additional two to three youth to participate in individual interviews, to meet with us during these visits to discuss their life experiences both in and

out of school. All participants were recruited based on self-reports that they had interrupted enrollment in school for some period of time and their self-reported age (18- to 25-year-olds). They were not recruited based on the risk expressed in their life experiences. That is, although qualitative sampling methods are not designed to create a representative sample, we have no reason to believe that the experiences of these participants are more or less severe than others in their communities. However, these young people's willingness and capacity to participate may mean that they differ from some of their peers on some individual characteristics, such as their levels of optimism, ability to cope effectively with adversity and existing, positive adult relationships in their lives.

Participants from two additional cities were recruited to use as validity checks for the initial groups. These group interview and individual interview participants were also recruited through community partners who serve youth who have interrupted enrollment in high school. A total of 17 youth took part in the group interviews, between the ages of 18 and 22 years ($M = 19.06$, $SD = 1.34$), and three (3) youth took part in the individual interviews, between the ages of 18 and 20 years ($M = 19$, $SD = 1.00$). There were more females (11) than males (9). The sample was largely African-American/Black (65 percent), followed by Hispanic/Latino (25 percent), and White (10 percent). All participants were recruited based on self-reports that they had dropped out of school for some period of time and their self-reported age (18-25 years of age).

QUANTITATIVE METHOD

The *Raise Up 2* survey was developed in the winter of 2014-15 based on input from the results from DCTD, group interview facilitators and researchers at the Center for Promise, extant empirical literature on how relationships promote academic achievement, and prior surveys of high school dropouts and re-engaged youth. The survey was designed to capture information on youth demographics; the background of their parents; relationships with parents, peers, teachers, and others in their communities; individual strengths; and experiences in school and other areas of their lives. The final survey consisted of 96 questions related to these characteristics. More than half of the survey questions were drawn from previously validated measures of neighborhood

67 See the Teen Empowerment website for more information on the organization (<http://www.teenempowerment.org>); and the Moving Beyond Icebreakers website for more information about the facilitation techniques used (<http://www.movingbeyondicebreakers.org>).

characteristics and individual strengths.⁶⁸ The remaining questions include common demographic characteristics, life history experiences, and reasons for dropping out derived from existing literature. The survey that the comparison group completed was the same except that questions related specifically to dropping out of high school were excluded. The median Flesch-Kincaid reading level for the surveys was 6.7. Detailed descriptions of our measures are included in the [Technical Report](#).

Participants were recruited via email. Potential participants were invited to complete the survey if they were between the ages of 18 and 25. Potential respondents were initially asked about their education background and only participants who reported that they stopped attending high school for at least one semester (or approximately four months) were able to take the full survey. The survey was broadly distributed through email by a survey research firm, Lincoln Park Strategies, in English.

Lincoln Park Strategies (LPS) contacted 134,520 individuals nationwide, including 49,772 people between the ages of 18 and 25. In the end, 2,830 qualified individuals completed the entire survey, 1,190 from the “interrupted-enrollment” sample⁶⁹ and 1,640 from the “continuous-enrollment” sample. No nationally representative surveys of students who have dropped out of school have been conducted, thus, it is impossible to say whether the response rates for our sample are within the norm. That said, a response rate of 3-5 percent for online polls is the norm, and our response rate of 5.7 percent of age-eligible youth falls slightly above this range. Although we did not collect a nationally representative sample, the numbers of youth sampled from each state generally mirror the percentages of young people who have dropped out of high school in each state (see Appendix III, Table 40).

While there were no differences in gender across the interrupted-enrollment and continuous-enrollment groups, there were differences in racial/ethnic background of participants across the groups; though these were small in

magnitude. There were slightly more Hispanic/Latinos in the interrupted-enrollment group (9.2 percent) compared with the continuous-enrollment group (7.1 percent). More participants of Asian descent also completed the continuous-enrollment survey (6.7 percent continuously enrolled vs. 3.9 percent interrupted), which was the largest discrepancy. Furthermore, maternal education differed by the continuous-enrollment and interrupted-enrollment groups such that the continuous-enrollment group was more likely to have a mother with higher educational attainment. Specifically, participants in the interrupted-enrollment group were more likely to have mothers with less than a high school education (18.4 percent) than the continuous-enrollment group (8.5 percent), and less likely to have mothers with a college education or more (16.0 percent) than the continuous-enrollment group (23.3 percent).

Supplemental analyses of the interrupted-enrollment sample and nationally representative samples of U.S. high school students conducted in 2002 and 2009 revealed differences between the interrupted-enrollment sample and students who dropped out of school in the U.S. found in other national surveys. For example, the interrupted-enrollment sample is more heavily weighted toward White youth. Differences in parental education were also evident. However, differences between the 2002 and 2009 samples were also evident. Lastly, the survey over-sampled female participants, who are less likely to drop out, according to national figures. To compensate, we weighted our analyses such that results reflect findings where males and females were each 50 percent of the sample.

ANALYSIS PLAN

We viewed our interpretation of the data as a funnel, where the survey was the broadest part, and the individual interviews were the most focused point. The survey results offer us broad ideas regarding the relationships and their composition and impact in the lives of youth who disengaged from or never left school. Bringing the group interviews into our interpretation provides voice to the broad ideas generated from the survey, and themes illustrating the importance and impact of relationships begin to take form. We then took these themes and checked them against the experiences highlighted in the individual interviews. In this way we built up a well-

68 Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Hill & Roberts, 2011; Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Goldberg, 2005; Wrosch, Heckhausen, & Lachman, 2000

69 We chose not to call the survey samples “dropouts” and “graduates” because many of the students who stopped going to school for a semester or more had re-enrolled by the time they completed the survey.

substantiated, valid conclusion about the phenomenon of relationships in the lives of youth who have disengaged and then re-engaged in school.

Quantitative

As a first step, we analyzed the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) of the interrupted enrollment and comparison group survey data to gauge initial differences between the samples. Comparisons between these samples were made by conducting t-tests or Chi-square tests. Detailed findings from this set of analyses can be found in Appendix II. In terms of demographic characteristics, the interrupted enrollment participants (vs. continuously enrolled) were less likely to be employed or in school, and had a slightly different racial/ethnic profile. Interrupted-enrollment participants also demonstrated somewhat less positive self-control and persistence than on-time graduates.

Their parents, adults in school, adults outside of school, and friends showed less emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support than the on-time graduates. Finally, their life history experiences, as reflected in the group interviews, were quite different with interrupted-enrollment participants being more likely to experience challenging life events (homelessness, serving as a caregiver) or engaging in risky behaviors like drug use or being in a gang. Interrupted-enrollment participants were also more likely to have moved or changed schools than the graduates.

Next, the research team used data from the interrupted-enrollment and continuous-enrollment samples to examine how specific characteristics, relationships, and strengths were associated with the likelihood of dropping out of high school. We conducted multiple, multivariate logistic regression models, which predicted the likelihood of leaving high school without graduating from the factors and contexts examined in the survey. We developed separate logistic regression models for social support, adverse life experiences, and strengths. All statistical models took into account the background of the youth. That is, the models included demographic characteristics including age, sex, and race/ethnicity, and maternal education level were included as covariates because of differences found in descriptive analyses. Detailed reporting of the logistic regression models can be found in the [Technical Report](#).

Qualitative

For our analysis, we took a phenomenological approach, uncovering themes (“phenomena”) through the perspective of those who are the focus of study; in this case, through the voices of those young people who have interrupted enrollment in school. The process of analysis follows three stages applied iteratively: description, thematization and interpretation.⁷⁰

Description is the collection of, and reflection on, the narratives during the group interviews and individual interviews, the dynamics of groups and interviews, and field notes taken. During this part of the analysis process, we reflected on the narratives we were hearing from the youth, making note of how the youth described their life experiences. We did this during scheduled reflections held regularly during data collection. During these reflections, we made note of similarities and differences among the life experiences of these youth. Members of the research team (the two group interview facilitators, the director of the project and the two post-doctoral associates) took copious notes, which were collated by the qualitative research scientist.

Next, for thematization, the qualitative research team (consisting of three graduate students and the qualitative research scientist) organized these reflections into themes related to the life experiences of the participants. In addition, the qualitative team reviewed the group interviews and individual interviews that had already been collected (7 group interviews and 12 individual interviews from 4 cities) to see if and how these themes were presented and if other themes emerged. The collated themes were then discussed among the qualitative research team, along with the principle investigator, and revised and organized in order to be most reflective of the life experiences of the participants.

The qualitative team then had a discussion until agreement on these initial themes,⁷¹ with agreement being that these themes are representative of what youth were saying regarding relationships and we had not missed any critical components of their lived experiences. Most of these initial themes were descriptive in nature. The themes help describe how the youth view relationships and the

70 Orbe, 2000

71 Saldaña, 2009

importance of relationships in their lives, in particular how one might describe a good or a bad relationship (see Appendix IV, Table 44 for these themes and their description).

Once the qualitative team agreed upon these themes, a coding scheme was developed so that we could record where those themes presented in the youth narratives, and thus develop our understanding of how relationships developed in and influenced the lives of these youth. For this portion of the thematization process we initially focused solely on the individual interviews. Recalling our funnel model for our plan for analysis, the information was generated and collected from group interviews was most relatable to the larger themes regarding relationships in the lives of youth who disengage and re-engage in school. The individual interviews were conducted to collect the narratives of individual youth to see the manifestation of relationships in their lived experiences. However, while the group interviews were not intended to delve deeply in to the lived experiences of individual youth in order to create narratives, we found that they evolved into the sharing of personal narratives, i.e. a sharing of the lived experiences of the youth. As such, we decided to code the group interviews and include them in our final analysis.

For the initial iteration of coding, the three graduate students on the qualitative research team coded the individual interviews in order to collate the experiences by theme. We coded how the youth's narratives conveyed the types of support they were receiving (instrumental, informational, emotional), from whom they were receiving support (an individual program staff, an informal mentor, a web of individuals), how their personal narrative conveyed stability in their relationships both overall and in their family in particular, and for the timing and valence of a theme's presentation. Additionally, we coded for a phenomenon that we heard in both group interviews and individual interviews — "chosen family." For the purpose of reliability, all three of the graduate students on the team coded the same two interviews. The qualitative research scientist on the team then checked for agreement across coding in terms of how the code was applied.

Convergence

We conducted a convergence meeting with all who had taken part in the quantitative or qualitative data collection and analysis. The process for this meeting included four steps:

1. Delineate and discuss the quantitative findings;
2. Delineate and discuss the qualitative findings;
3. Reflect on each analysis and determine when the findings converged; i.e., when the findings from each component expressed a similar theme; and
4. Reflect on the components of each analysis that did converge and discuss whether these analyses expressed distinct, important themes that should be included in our findings. Our core findings emerged from this process.

As a follow-up to this process, additional analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data were conducted to further explore the themes to confirm them as themes and gain a deeper understanding of what the themes mean.

GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell broadly about the relationships in your life

PROMPTS:

Family, school, community

Are these relationships supportive/toxic/neutral?

Do these people motivate/inspire you? If so, how?

What is the role of caring adults and peers in your life?

PROMPTS:

When/How did these relationships begin?

How did you know these people really cared about you?

Do these people connect you with the resources you need?

What happens when you disagree with someone that you have a close relationship with?

(family member/friend/mentor)

PROMPT:

How do you work through disagreements?

If dropped out — Why did you drop out of school?

PROMPTS:

Tell us about your relationships in school with adults before dropping out

Tell us about your relationships in school with peers/out of school with peers

(Prompt on positive and negative relationships)

Was there anyone who could have kept you in school?

If re-engaged — What were the relationships that mattered most for your decision to re-engage?

PROMPT:

Adult relationships? Peer relationships?

If still enrolled — What keeps you coming back to school?

PROMPTS:

Is there a particular adult/friend that makes you want to come to school?

If you could change one thing about school, what would it be? Why?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How have relationships shaped your life?

Talk about the three most influential relationships in your life thus far

PROMPTS:

Did these people have anything in common?
Were these relationships supportive? Toxic? Neither?

Tell broadly about the relationships in your life

PROMPTS:

Family, school, community
Are these relationships supportive/toxic/neutral?
Do these people inspire you? If so, how?

What is the role of caring adults and peers in your life?

PROMPTS:

When/How did these relationships begin?
How did you know these people really cared about you?
Do these people connect you with the resources you need?

What happens when you disagree with someone that you have a close relationship with? (family, member/friend/mentor)

PROMPT:

How do you work through disagreements?

If dropped out — Why did you drop out of school?

PROMPTS:

Tell us about your relationships in school with adults
Tell us about your relationships in school with peers/out of school with peers
(Prompt on positive and negative relationships)
Was there anyone who could have kept you in school?

If re-engaged — What were the relationships that mattered most for your decision to re-engage?

PROMPTS:

Adult relationships? Peer relationships?

If still enrolled — What keeps you coming back to school?

PROMPTS:

Is there a particular adult/friend that makes you want to come to school?
If you could change one thing about school, what would it be? Why?

APPENDIX II: COMMUNITY PARTNER DESCRIPTIONS

Program Name and Web Address	City/State	Short Description
<u>ROBERT F. KENNEDY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL</u>	Albuquerque, NM	RFK offers a unique high school experience for students seeking alternatives to traditional secondary schools. One of the founding principles of RFK is its belief in the strength of relationships among all the participants. Classes are small, and students receive lots of individual attention.
<u>YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, INC. (YDI)</u>	Albuquerque, NM	Youth Development, Inc. (YDI), is a nationally recognized youth service organization that provides educational, developmental and humanitarian assistance to children, youth and families in central and northern New Mexico.
<u>YOUTH OPPORTUNITY (YO!) BALTIMORE</u>	Baltimore, MD	YO! Baltimore serves out-of-school youth and young adults citywide at two youth-friendly centers. Caring adults provide wide-ranging support services and opportunities for participants to reach their academic and career goals. YO! Baltimore sponsors several dynamic programs for in-school, as well as out-of-school youth. With a proven track record of helping young people increase their wage earnings and educational attainment while reducing recidivism among juvenile justice connected youth, YO! Baltimore has received national recognition as a model youth-development program.
<u>BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS RE-ENGAGEMENT CENTER (REC)</u>	Boston, MA	The Boston Public Schools Re-Engagement Center (REC) provides the resources and counseling that young people need to re-enroll in school after disengaging, and to get back on track to graduation. The REC's mission is to empower students to accomplish their goals, to fulfill their dreams, and to become productive members of their families and communities by welcoming and engaging youth and families.
<u>STUDENT OUTREACH AND RE-ENGAGEMENT (SOAR)</u>	Chicago, IL	<p>SOAR serves young people seeking support to re-enroll in school and provides comprehensive supportive services for youth and their families to provide them a chance to succeed.</p> <p>This initiative addresses the staggering number of youth who are disengaged from their home school without pursuit of completing a high school education.</p> <p>The anticipated impact to the community includes, but is not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce violent crime by shrinking the number of youth roaming the streets during school hours; • Decrease dropout rates by providing re-enrollment services; • Decrease chronic truancy by providing case management services to youth.

Program Name and Web Address	City/State	Short Description
<u>PROJECT VOYCE (PV)</u>	Denver, CO	<p>Project VOYCE was founded to ensure students have the opportunity to make student voice real in schools. PV has evolved into a leadership program that increases student engagement in school, improves graduation rates and promotes youth success, especially for students in Denver. Through in-depth leadership and advocacy training, PV inspires young people to be the change they wish to see in the world.</p>
<u>LEARNING WORKS AT HOMEBOY INDUSTRIES, INC.</u>	Los Angeles, CA	<p>Homeboy Industries provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of the community. Homeboy has learned that jobs are probably 80% of what these young people need to redirect their lives. The other 20% is a mixture of therapeutic and support services. Thus, in addition to paying young people to receive job training, they also require that the young people spend part of their working day working on themselves. In addition to job training, Homeboy offers education, therapy, tattoo removal, substance abuse treatment, legal assistance, and job placement services.</p>
<u>UJAMAA PLACE</u>	Minneapolis/ St. Paul, MN	<p>The mission of Ujamaa Place is to assist young, African-American men primarily between the ages of 18 and 30, who are economically disadvantaged and have experienced repeated cycles of failure. This mission statement is rooted in the philosophy of African-American culture and empowerment — that everyone is important, valuable, worthy, and loveable.</p> <p>To graduate from the program, an Ujamaa Place participant must demonstrate job skills, empowerment skills, and life skills through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of his GED • Demonstrated use of Empowerment • Remained drug free Skills in his daily life • No recent criminal offenses • Secured stable housing • Held job for a minimum of three months
<u>LEARNING WORKS CHARTER SCHOOL (LW)</u>	Pasadena, CA	<p>The mission of the Learning Works Charter School (LW) is to provide a personalized, rigorous academic program and relevant life skills to traditionally underserved, at-risk students in grades 9-12 who have withdrawn or are in danger of withdrawing from mainstream education without attaining a high school diploma. LW addresses the needs in the community by offering a program to give disengaged students an educational choice designed to meet their specific needs, distinct from the traditional programs that have not served them well. The LW model combines academic intervention and support, as well as acknowledging that this population requires wrap-around social support services.</p>

Program Name and Web Address	City/State	Short Description
<u>PHILADELPHIA YOUTH NETWORK (PYN)</u>	Philadelphia, PA	The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) is an intermediary organization dedicated to connecting systems and leveraging resources. PYN works to equip young people for academic achievement, economic opportunity and personal success. To achieve this mission, PYN coordinates and supports large-scale, cross-sector initiatives while developing targeted programs to expand access to services for underserved youth.
<u>YESPHILLY</u>	Philadelphia, PA	YESPhilly's mission is to develop a broad base of opportunities for Philadelphia's out-of-school youth to prepare them to become successful, self-sufficient adults. Since its inception, YESPhilly has provided opportunities to over 200 high school drop-outs per year. YESPhilly developed an educational model that prepares students for college and careers by tying together personal development, media arts and technology skills, and academic instruction to meet Pennsylvania standards for high school.
<u>GATEWAY TO COLLEGE</u>	Portland Community College, Portland, OR and Gateway to College at Lake Washington Institute of Technology, Seattle, WA	The Gateway to College National Network builds the capacity of colleges, school districts, and states to revolutionize education for students who dropped out of high school and underprepared college students so that all young people can achieve college credentials.
<u>YOUTHSOURCE RENTON</u>	Seattle, WA	YouthSource offers a full array of programs for young adults ages 16-21 who have dropped out of high school. These programs focus on education, employment, and leadership development. They also provide connections to youth programs, community resources for life stabilization, job readiness and placement services, and comprehensive case management.

APPENDIX III: TABLES

Note: Grad Status = Interrupted Enrollment (Stopped going to school) and Continuous Enrollment (graduated without ever having stopped going to school)

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. Age

Age of Participants	Grad Status	
	Interrupted Enrollment	Continuous Enrollment
18	7.5%	7.9%
19	9.8%	8.9%
20	9.4%	9.8%
21	12.0%	11.4%
22	12.7%	12.4%
23	14.2%	14.6%
24	18.0%	17.7%
25	16.4%	17.4%

Table 2. Immigration Status

Country of Origin	Grad Status	
	Interrupted Enrollment	Continuous Enrollment
United States of America	98.0%	96.6%
Other	2.0%	3.4%

Table 3. Age At Which Survey Participant Moved to the United States (if born outside of the country)

Age At Which Survey Participant Moved to the United States (if born outside of the country)	Grad Status	
	Interrupted Enrollment	Continuous Enrollment
1 yr	25.0%	17.9%
2 yrs	8.3%	8.9%
3 yrs	4.2%	7.1%
4 yrs	4.2%	7.1%
5 yrs	0.0%	5.4%
6 yrs	0.0%	3.6%
7 yrs	8.3%	5.4%
8 yrs	0.0%	10.7%

	Grad Status	
	Interrupted Enrollment	Continuous Enrollment
9 yrs	4.2%	10.7%
10 yrs	12.5%	1.8%
11 yrs	0.0%	0.0%
12 yrs	0.0%	1.8%
13 yrs	8.3%	7.1%
14 yrs	4.2%	5.4%
15 yrs	8.3%	3.6%
16 yrs	12.5%	3.6%

Table 4. Gender

Gender	Grad Status	
	Interrupted Enrollment	Continuous Enrollment
Male	30.2%	30.7%
Female	69.8%	69.3%

Table 5. Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Grad Status	
	Interrupted Enrollment	Continuous Enrollment
White	63.9%	64.7%
Black/African-American	11.1%	12.0%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	9.2%	7.1%
Asian	3.9%	6.7%
Native American	1.0%	0.5%
Other/Multi-ethnic	10.9%	9.0%

Table 6. Mother's Education

Maternal Education	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Less Than High School	8.2%	17.1%
High School Diploma	26.3%	32.3%
GED	6.4%	4.3%
At Least Some College	48.9%	41.5%
Technical Training	2.7%	2.1%

Table 7. Father's Education

Paternal Education	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Less Than High School	8.2%	18.6%
High School Diploma	30.9%	28.3%
GED	4.6%	8.1%
At Least Some College	43%	28.8%
Technical Training	3.6%	3.7%

Table 8. Employment Status

Employment Status	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes – Full Time	31.2%	27.8%
Yes – Part Time	24.5%	20.1%
Not Employed at This Time and Not in School	20.1%	35.4%
Not Employed at This Time, Currently in School	24.2%	16.6%

Table 9. Education Level

Education	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Less Than High School	0.0%	21.3%
High School Diploma	34.8%	21.5%
GED	1.4%	15.5%
At Least Some College	62.1%	39.9%
Technical Training	1.7%	1.8%

Table 10. Age of Degree Completion

Age Completed HS Diploma or GED	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Under 18 yrs	29.5%	18.2%
18 yrs	61.6%	40.1%
19 yrs	6.4%	22.1%
20 yrs	1.0%	8.7%

Age Completed HS Diploma or GED	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
22 yrs	0.9%	3.5%
23 yrs	0.0%	1.7%
24 yrs	0.0%	1.3%
25 yrs	0.0%	0.9%

Table 11. Age Returned to School (Among Interrupted Students Who Re-engaged)

Age Returned to School	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
14 yrs	N/A	1.5%
15 yrs	N/A	2.2%
16 yrs	N/A	9.4%
17 yrs	N/A	17.0%
18 yrs	N/A	25%
19 yrs	N/A	19.2%
20 yrs	N/A	11.1%
21 yrs	N/A	5.1%
22 yrs	N/A	4.9%
23 yrs	N/A	1.7%
24 yrs	N/A	2.2%
25 yrs	N/A	0.8%

Table 12. Demographics of Group and Individual Interview Participants

	Group Interviews (N=102)		Individual Interviews (N=19)	
		%		%
Cities Represented	8		6	

SEX

Male	59	57.8	13	68.4
Female	43	42.2	6	31.6

RACE/ETHNICITY

White	10	9.8	0	0
Hispanic/Latino	32	31.4	10	52.6
Black/African-American	41	40.2	5	26.3
Asian	3	2.9	0	0
Mixed Race	13	12.7	1	5.2
Other	3	2.9	3	15.8

Table 12. Demographics of Group and Individual Interview Participants (continued)

	Group Interviews (N=102)	%	Individual Interviews (N=19)	%
AGE				
18-20	81	79.4	14	73.7
21-23	15	14.7	0	0
24 or older	5	4.9	4	21.1
Unknown	1	1.0	1	5.2
EMPLOYMENT STATUS				
Employed	40	39.2	6	31.6
Self-Employed	3	2.9	1	5.2
Unemployed looking	54	52.9	10	52.6
Unemployed not looking	5	4.9	2	10.5
EDUCATION LEVEL				
9th grade	2	1.8	1	5.2
10th grade	10	9.8	2	10.5
11th grade	16	15.7	3	15.8
12th grade	34	33.3	3	15.8
Jr. High School	2	1.8	0	0
GED	4	3.9	2	10.5
High School	12	11.8	5	26.3
Some College	7	6.9	1	5.2
College	4	3.9	1	5.2
Other	1	0.1	1	5.2
DEGREE TYPE				
High School Diploma	56	54.9	8	42.1
GED	26	25.5	5	26.3
HS Diploma/GED	2	2.0	0	0
Associates	2	2.0	1	5.2

Table 13. Group and Individual Interview Cities and Community Partners

City	Community Partner
Albuquerque, NM	Robert F. Kennedy Charter High School Youth Development, Inc. (YDI)
Baltimore, MD***	Youth Opportunity (YO!) Baltimore
Boston, MA***	Boston Public Schools Re-Engagement Center (REC)
Chicago, IL*	Student Outreach and Re-Engagement (SOAR)
Denver, CO	Project Voyce (PV)
Los Angeles, CA	Learning Works at Homeboy Industries, Inc.
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	Ujamaa Place
Pasadena, CA**	Learning Works Charter School (LW)
Philadelphia, PA*	Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) YESPhilly
Portland, OR***	Gateway to College at Portland Community College
Seattle, WA	Gateway to College at Lake Washington Institute of Technology YouthSource Renton

Note: * = city used for validity check. ** = city only individual interviews were included. *** = city only Group Interviews were conducted

SECTION 2: ADVERSE LIFE EXPERIENCES

Table 14. Gang Involvement

I Was Involved in a Gang	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	1.7%	5.8%
No	98.3%	94.2%

Table 15. Drug Use

Drug Use	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	17.8%	35.9%
No	82.2%	64.1%

Table 16. Incarceration

Been to Jail	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	97.0%	11.2%
No	3.0%	88.8%

Table 17. Loss of a Parent

Lost a Parent	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	7.5%	14.2%
No	92.5%	85.8%

Table 18. Regular Caregiver

Was a Regular Caregiver	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	21.8%	33.1%
No	78.2%	66.9%

Table 19. Participation in Foster Care System

In Foster Care	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	2.8%	8.0%
No	97.2%	92.0%

Table 20. Suspended or Expelled

Suspended or Expelled	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	9.1%	29.9%
No	90.9%	70.1%

Table 21. Lack of Preparation for High School

Not Prepared for High School	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	14.8%	36.1%
No	85.2%	63.9%

Table 22. Endured Abuse

Physically/Emotionally Abused	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	21.4%	39.8%
No	78.6%	60.2%

Table 23. Experienced Homelessness

Homeless	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	5.2%	18.7%
No	94.8%	81.3%

Table 24. Changed Residential Location

Moved	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	28.6%	47.8%
No	71.4%	52.2%

Table 25. Changed Schools

Changed Schools	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	25.1%	46.1%
No	74.9%	53.9%

Table 26. Number of Times Moved

Number of Moves	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
1	43.5%	19.2%
2	25.2%	18.6%
3	15.9%	20.8%
4 or more times	15.4%	41.4%

Table 27. Number of Times Changed Schools

Number of Changes	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
1	58.8%	39.7%
2	21.0%	22.0%
3	12.6%	16.0%
4 or more time	7.6%	22.3%

Table 28. Gave Birth/Fathered a Child

	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	5.4%	18.1%
No	94.6%	81.9%

Table 29. Major Mental Health Issue

	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	30.4%	52.5%
No	69.6%	47.5%

SECTION 3: SCHOOL

Table 30. Adults at School Cared

Teachers Cared	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Always	25.9%	18.0%
Almost Always	20.7%	15.7%
Most of the Time	21.6%	17.2%
Some of the Time	20.3%	23.3%
Almost Never	6.9%	12.0%
Never	4.5%	13.9%

Table 31. Most Friends Dropped Out

Most Friends Dropped Out	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	6.5%	21.6%
No	93.5%	78.4%

Table 32. Most Friends at School Used Drugs

Friends Used Drugs	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	21.7%	38.8%
No	78.3%	61.2%

Table 33. Most Friends at School Got into Physical Fights

Friends Got in Fights	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	23.8%	28.0%
No	86.2%	72.0%

Table 34. Experienced Bullying at School

Bullied	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	31.2%	44.3%
No	68.8%	55.7%

Table 35. School Personnel Urged Interruption in Enrollment

Encouraged to Dropout	Grad Status	
	Continuous Enrollment	Interrupted Enrollment
Yes	5.1%	10.3%
No	94.9%	89.7%

Table 36. Reasons for Returning to School

Reason for Returning to School	Percentage
Someone encouraged me to return.	38.0%
I needed more education to get a job.	25.0%
My family supported me	25.0%
I had the time to devote to school.	21.5%
I wanted to provide for, or be a role model to my child.	13.2%
My health returned/sickness ended.	12.4%
Other.	6.6%

Note. Participants were able to select more than one response, so the total percentage is greater than 100 percent.

SECTION 4: DEMOGRAPHICS AND LIFE HISTORY

Table 37. Socio-economic Status (Mother's Education) by Race/Ethnicity

Demographic Group	Mother's Education < HS	Mother received HS Diploma or GED	Mother's Education > HS	Significance
Female	13.4%	36.4%	50.1%	NS
Male	10.7%	37.6%	51.7%	NS
White	11.0%	38.2%	50.8%	S
Black/African-American	9.9%	39.1%	51.0%	S
Hispanic/Latino	28.8%	34.1%	37.0%	S
Asian	11.6%	24.0%	64.4%	S
Native American	15.8%	26.3%	57.9%	S
Other	13.4%	33.6%	53.0%	S

Table 38. Life History by Socio-economic Status (Mother's Education)

Life History	Mother's Education < HS	Mother received HS Diploma or GED	Mother's Education > HS	Significance
Gang Involved	4.8%	3.0%	3.3%	NS
Used Drugs	29.5%	25.4%	23.5%	NS
Incarcerated	9.0%	5.8%	5.9%	NS
Lost a Parent	14.2%	10.9%	8.6%	S
Became Caregiver	35.8%	27.1%	22.7%	S
Entered Foster Care	8.4%	4.8%	3.9%	S
Suspended or Expelled	24.0%	17.9%	14.7%	S
Unprepared for HS	32.1%	26.0%	19.1%	S
Experienced Abuse	37.2%	28.1%	27.0%	S
Became Homeless	16.1%	12.3%	7.7%	S

Table 38. Life History by Socio-economic Status (Mother's Education) (continued)

Life History	Mother's Education < HS	Mother received HS Diploma or GED	Mother's Education > HS	Significance
Moved Homes	47.7%	36.6%	32.6%	S
Changed Schools	44.0%	31.7%	31.6%	S
Most Friends Dropped Out	21.3%	14.0%	9.3%	S
Most Friends Used Drugs	33.8%	30.6%	25.5%	S
Most Friends Fight	28.0%	20.5%	15.7%	S
Gave Birth/ Fathered a Child	19.8%	12.3%	7.1%	S
Major Mental Health Issue	43.0%	38.6%	39.4%	NS

Table 39. Number of Negative Life Events by Socio-economic Status

Number of Events	Mother's Education < HS	Mother received HS Diploma or GED	Mother's Education > HS	Significance
None	9.5%	17.1%	21.3%	S
1	7.7%	15.1%	14.6%	S
2	10.1%	11.9%	13.7%	S
3	13.4%	11.7%	11.8%	S
4 or more	59.2%	44.2%	38.6%	S

SECTION 5: COMPARISON OF SURVEY SAMPLE TO NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE SURVEYS

Table 40. Comparing Status Dropout Rates by State to American Community Survey (2013)

State	2013 Status Dropout Rate (ACS)* **	Status Dropout Rate (CFP)***
Alabama	5%	0%
Alaska	6%	N/A
Arizona	6%	44.4%
Arkansas	5%	0%
California	3%	13.8%
Colorado	4%	0%
Connecticut	3%	60%
Delaware	3%	0%
District of Columbia	6%	30.8%
Florida	5%	23.8%
Georgia	6%	N/A
Hawaii	4%	50%

Table 40. Comparing Status Dropout Rates by State to American Community Survey (2013) (continued)

State	2013 Status Dropout Rate (ACS)* **	Status Dropout Rate (CFP)***
Idaho	6%	0%
Illinois	4%	27.8%
Indiana	5%	33.3%
Iowa	3%	100%
Kansas	3%	50%
Kentucky	4%	14.3%
Louisiana	8%	50%
Maine	2%	100%
Maryland	4%	0%
Massachusetts	3%	22.2%
Michigan	5%	38.9%
Minnesota	4%	16.7%
Missouri	5%	50%
Montana	5%	0%
Nebraska	2%	0%
Nevada	6%	0%
New Hampshire	1%	33%
New Jersey	3%	11.1%
New Mexico	6%	N/A
New York	4%	N/A
North Carolina	5%	21.5%
North Dakota	5%	100%
Ohio	4%	13.3%
Oklahoma	6%	0%
Oregon	4%	40%
Pennsylvania	4%	0%
Rhode Island	3%	0%
South Carolina	5%	20%
South Dakota	5%	N/A
Tennessee	3%	42.9%
Texas	5%	60%
Utah	4%	33.3%
Vermont	1%	100%
Virginia	3%	25%
Washington	4%	60%
West Virginia	4%	0%
Wisconsin	3%	33%
Wyoming	4%	N/A

*Percentage of youth ages 16–19 who are not in school and have no HS Diploma. Calculated from American Community Survey Data

**KidsCount. (2015). Table [Teens Ages 16 To 19 Not In School And Not High School Graduates]. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/73-teens-ages-16-to-19-not-in-school-and-not-high-school-graduates?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/380,381>

***Participants age 18 and 19 who have dropped out of high school and not attained a diploma.

Table 41. Sample Comparison: Gender

Gender	HLS09 - Dropouts		ELS02 - Dropouts		Interrupted-Enrollment	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Male	1101	55.8	623	56.5	357*	30.2*
Female	871	44.1	480	43.5	826*	69.8*

Table 42. Sample Comparison: Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	HLS09 - Dropouts		ELS02 - Dropouts		Interrupted-Enrollment	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Asian	80	4.1	67	5.6	46	3.9
Black/African-American	283	14.3	222	18.7	132	11.1
Hispanic/Latino	404	20.5	234	19.7	109	9.2
Mixed Race	161	8.2	70	5.9	N/A	N/A
Native American	29	1.5	15	1.3	12	1.0
Native Hawaiian	16	.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
White	909	46	470	39.5	758	63.9
Other	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	129	10.9

Table 43. Sample Comparison: Parent Education

Parent's Education	HLS09–Dropouts (Highest of Both Parents)		ELS02–Dropouts (Highest of Both Parents)		Interrupted-Enrollment (Mother's Education)		Interrupted-Enrollment (Father's Education)	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
N/A, Missing	705	33.5	96	8.1	79	6.6	149	12.5
Less than HS	223	11.3	157	13.2	204	17.1	221	18.6
HS or GED	670	33.9	330	27.7	389	32.7	433	36.4
Associates	170	8.6	113	9.5	98	8.2	43	3.6
Some College (2 and 4 year)	N/A	N/A	259	21.7	217	18.3	147	12.3
Bachelors	136	6.9	145	12.2	147	12.4	113	9.5
Post-Grad School	75	3.8	90	7.6	31	2.6	40	3.4
Technical	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25	2.1	44	3.7

SECTION 6: QUALITATIVE CODES, CO-OCCURRENCES AND FREQUENCIES

Table 44. Thematic Coding Scheme and Definitions

Family	Code	Definition
STABILITY	Family	Stability or instability in familial relationship(s) (for unstable, code with Negative; for stable, code with Positive)
	Relationships	Stability or instability in any relationships outside of family (for unstable, code with Negative; for stable, code with Positive)
SUPPORT SYSTEM	Chosen Family	Mentions of someone as family who isn't related by law
	Self	Mentions of reliance on self as resource
	Systemic	Mentions of relationships with institutions or life impacts due to policies at institutions
	Web of Support	Mentions of many individuals who they turned to
	Youth Worker/ Chaser	Mentions of the person whose job it is to keep track of them and support them
	The Anchor	Mentions an individual you provides support above and beyond what would be expected of their job position or their position in the youth's life
TIME	Disengagement	Things happening around the time of disengagement, either before or after
	Now	Things happening in their lives now
	Re-engagement	Things happening during the time period in which they were re-engaging
TYPE OF SUPPORT	Appraisal	Giving support by encouragement or providing motivation
	Emotional	Giving support emotionally, such as caring, trusting, being there
	Informational	Giving support by sharing useful information/advice with them
	Instrumental	Giving support that assists an individual in instrumental ways
VALENCE	Negative	Used to co-occur with negative experiences or relationship instability
	Positive	Used to co-occur with positive experiences or with relationship stability
OTHER	Abstract Relationships	Mentions of traits of relationships in the abstract/theoretical, not specific instances

Table 45. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Positive and Negative Valence and Time Period for Group Interviews

Time	Positive	Negative
Disengagement	18	43
Re-engagement	29	8
Now	34	4

Table 46. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Positive and Negative Valence and Time Period for Individual Interviews

Time	Positive	Negative
Disengagement	15	44
Re-engagement	93	16
Now	61	8

Table 47. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Time Period and Support Type for Group Interviews

Support Type	Disengagement	Re-engagement/Now
Appraisal	8	21
Emotional	15	29
Informational	4	25
Instrumental	15	35

Table 48. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Time Period and Support Type for Individual Interviews

Support Type	Disengagement	Re-engagement/Now
Appraisal	7	40
Emotional	16	57
Informational	9	57
Instrumental	20	76

Table 49. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Time Period and Support Source for Group Interviews

Support Source	Disengagement	Re-engagement/Now
Anchor	0	14
Youth Worker	4	49
Web of Support	13	76
Self	4	9

Table 50. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Time Period and Support Source for Individual Interviews

Support Source	Disengagement	Re-engagement/Now
Anchor	18	45
Youth Worker	2	13
Web of Support	22	52
Self	2	8

Table 51. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Relationship Stability with Valence and Time Period for Group Interviews

Code	Positive	Negative
FAMILY STABILITY	42	61
and Disengagement	9	27
and Re-engagement/Now	17	5
RELATIONSHIP STABILITY	24	18
and Disengagement	2	6
and Re-engagement/Now	7	1

Table 52. Frequency of Co-occurrences of Relationship Stability with Valence and Time Period for Individual Interviews

Code	Positive	Negative
FAMILY STABILITY	16	40
and Disengagement	7	25
and Re-engagement/Now	4	3
RELATIONSHIP STABILITY	100	43
and Disengagement	8	16
and Re-engagement/Now	78	9

Table 53. Frequency of Codes Mentioned in Individual Interviews and Group Interviews

Code	Individual Interview	Group Interview
TYPES OF SUPPORT		
Appraisal	68	97
Emotional	122	87
Instrumental	119	110
Informational	85	78
SOURCE OF SUPPORT		
Web of Support	93	74
Youth Worker	51	12
Anchor	25	54
Self	27	31
Family Stability	52	96
Relationship Stability	147	47
TIME PERIOD		
Disengage	58	76
Re-engage	115	68
Now	70	41
VALENCE		
Positive	200	136
Negative	95	107

Table 54. Source of Support Mentioned Most

Support Type	Number of Participants	Number of Groups
Web of Support	12	11
Youth Worker	5	—
Anchor	1	2
Web = Youth Worker	1	—
Web = Anchor	—	3

SECTION 7: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Table 55. Logistic Regression Analyses: Supports Predicting Dropout

Note: SA= Support from Adults in School; SAO= Support from Adults outside of School; SP = Support from Parents; SF= Support from Friends.

Predictor	Odds Ratio
MODEL 1: SUPPORT FROM ADULTS IN SCHOOL	
SA Emotional	.80**
SA Informational	.94
SA Appraisal	1.11
SA Instrumental	.81**
MODEL 2: SUPPORT FROM ADULTS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL	
SAO Emotional	.88
SAO Informational	1.10
SAO Appraisal	.98
SAO Instrumental	.83*
MODEL 3: SUPPORT FROM PARENTS	
SP Emotional	.83*
SP Informational	1.08
SP Appraisal	1.13
SP Instrumental	.79**
MODEL 4: SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS	
SF Emotional	1.01
SF Informational	.76**
SF Appraisal	1.01
SF Instrumental	1.02

All analyses control for gender, race, maternal education, age, persistence, and self-control. For full model summary tables, see the [Technical Report](#).

*p < .05; ** p < .01.

Table 56. Logistic Regression Results: Full Model Predicting Dropout

Variable	Odds Ratio
Risk Index	1.19**
Parent Support	1.01
School Adults Support	.75**
Adults Outside of School Support	.94
Friend Support	1.05
Persistence	.96
Self-Control	.83**

Control variables: Gender, Age, Race*, Maternal Ed*

* p < .05; ** p < .01.

Table 57. Mean Differences in Number of Adverse Life Experiences by Support Classes

Support Class	Mean	SD
1. High Support	2.95	3.71
2. High from Parent and Adults Outside School	2.94	2.91
3. High from Adults in School, Adults Outside of School, Friends	4.16	3.61
4. High from Parent	3.73	3.1
5. High from Friends	5.13	3.61
6. Low Support	4.54	3.61

Note. Significant differences were found between the following classes:

3 and 1**, 3 and 2**, 4 and 1**, 4 and 2*, 5 and 1**, 5 and 2**, 5 and 3**, 5 and 4; 6 and 1**, 6 and 2**, 6 and 3*

*p < .05; **p < .01

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THE FIVE PROMISES

All young people in America should be able to say that they can count on:

CARING ADULTS

parents and family members, teachers, mentors, coaches and others who believe in, challenge and nurture them.

SAFE PLACES

spaces at home, in school, in the community and online where they feel safe and have opportunities to learn, explore and grow.

A HEALTHY START

the right nutrition, exercise and medical care starting with their first years so they can thrive in school and in life.

EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

to develop knowledge and real-world skills so they can fully participate in our economy and our democracy.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

to share their time and talents with others, build their character and competence, and contribute to the civic life of their community.

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AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE leads a movement dedicated to making the promise of America real for every child. As its signature effort, the GradNation campaign mobilizes Americans to increase the on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and prepare young people for postsecondary enrollment and the 21st century workforce.



[GradNation.org/DontQuit](https://www.gradnation.org/dontquit)
[#NotDropouts](https://twitter.com/NotDropouts)