

Breakout Session Notes:

Opportunity Youth: Preventing and re-engaging disconnected youth in Santa Fe. A case study approach to developing collaborative solutions

A. Highlights/Themes

1. Learning is the single most important thing anyone will do in his or her life. But it is really hard to learn when you worry about your next meal and where you will sleep at night. The key is support; the students have the motivation.
2. Priority is not allowing the disengagement in the first place - happy teachers, excited students, and hands-on programs will keep students engaged. When you lose the interest of the students, you lose the students.
3. Peer mentoring programs could help, for example one grade to the lower grade instead of authority figures.
4. Support the growth of more alternative education and engagement programs.
5. Importance of respectful and equal adult-youth relationships.

B. Notes from Session (Includes Flip Chart Notes)

What are the elements of success in working with youth related to the following areas: Welcoming youth; Taking responsibility, Community connections; Mentoring and tutoring; Human factor – peers, families, and teachers?

Welcoming Youth

- Peer connections valuable
- An engaging program
- Listen, Listen, Listen
- Don't call them kids
- Develop trust
- Help each youth learn how to accept failure and learn and grow
- Immediate welcome expressions to youth and their family and friends if there
- True engagement
- Youth lead discussion on their individual needs

Taking Responsibility

- Being open to change; recognize the need for change
- Self-awareness and self-initiative
- Taking responsibility for yourself with help
- Self-reflection – learn from experience
- Determination
- Discover that learning can be fun

Community Connections

- Follow through by adults
- Knowing about resources
- Involve youth
- Transportation
- Networking and support
- Various agencies that support youth work together rather than apart

- Better connection to other community-based organizations; connecting young people to other programs outside of Youth Works
- Volunteer work

Mentoring and Tutoring

- Mentoring doesn't have to be formal (any time, any way)
- Talking/conversation between young people and adults
- Focus on the individual, different than school
- College help from Youth Works
- Great learning environment at Youth Works
- Environment important
- Adults he could trust

Human Factor (peers, families and teachers)

- Mixed age learning environment
- Engaged staff at Youth Works
- Listen to the wisdom of elders
- Finding your group of "kindred spirits" place you feel like you belong
- Support from adults
- Unconditional love of family member
- Lower student/teacher ratio
- One-on-one personal connection
- Immigration lawyer

Recommendations/Ideas Learned from Case Studies and Other Ideas:

- Campus with housing, education and wrap-around services
- Alternative credit attainment options (e.g. work experience, academic, accelerated credit opportunities)
- Childcare cooperatives (job share and living wage positions for school)
- Career Academies and training opportunities integrated into the curriculum
- School district support of youth
- Wrap-around, case management services needed to address most pressing challenges
- Creating opportunities for disengaged youth to shine
- Forming a collaborative group of community groups and higher level school district employees to communicate and work together to identify and address gaps and needs (Comprehensive systems to address policy, academics, wrap-around services and system navigation)
- There are a lot of programs in schools to help students but it's difficult for students to know who to go to and how to find them; Need to streamline access to information for students
- There is not a one-size fits all situation in the schools with youth. Programs like Youth Works are necessary for this reason.
- Peer influence; Need real communication from students to administrators
- No need to reinvent the wheel; invest in the programs that are successfully meeting the needs of the population you are reaching out to
- Parents and teachers should encourage and support students even after dropping out (support groups and classes)
- Create a Youth Works satellite for Pojoaque and Espanola
- More one-on-one help

- Smaller class sizes are more effective; more personalized care and education
- Have more programs earlier on (elementary, middle and high school) about how to function, live and what to expect in the real world
- More friendly teachers instead of them acting above you would get youth to come to school
- People need to make more time for other people who need help instead of putting them down
- More organizations that provide help to youth (food, shelter)
- The high school education is corrupt. I've had some teachers that just bring negative energy towards your life. Maybe they are just stressed out by their job but that doesn't mean they can let it out on your students.
- Flexible learning environment
- Success is defined by the individual
- Treat youth with respect
- Eliminate standardized testing as a measurement of success
- Include experiential learning in educational environment
- Break caste system between youth and adults; Create trust and safe/equitable spaces
- An education is not merely what is learned in a classroom. It is greater than that and includes cultural background, sexual identity and many other elements.
- We are different and should acknowledge our differences but don't treat us as less because of our differences.