



Youth-Defined Solutions to Achievement 11-27-06

Full Working Draft of 23 Barriers & Solutions – First Take

Note: All of the following need to be understood in terms of a spectrum of needs among individual students as well as their cultures.

- * These themes were represented in all the Focus Groups
- + These themes were represented in the majority of the Focus Groups
Appeared in March focus groups only
- (I) Internal motivation
- (E) External motivation

I. Solutions – Personal

A. *Negative peer influence

1. Peer pressure

- *Support & encouragement from peers, teachers, counselors, etc. (E)
- Rise above the negative response of “acting white” (I)
- Using outlets to get away / reduce stress (E)
- Being around motivated people (accelerated classes) (I/E)
- Be nice to everyone (E)

2. Competition

- Strive for self-improvement (I)
- Living up to your potential (I)
- *Try your hardest to get your stuff in order* (E)
- *Draw upon success from siblings or other role-models*

3. Social distractions

- Taking school seriously and focusing on graduation (I)
- Set example for others – don't be a statistic / work hard (E)
- *Have your priorities straight* (E)
- *If you aren't your own person, peers make or break you*
- *Don't allow romances, pranks, fights to distract you*

4. Expectations

- *Parents advice / support / rewards (E)
- Shape your own life / future / more independence (I)

- Believing in yourself (I)
- Healthy competition (I/E)
- *Be smart and know drugs/alcohol bring you down*

5. Teasing for achievement

- Parent, teacher awareness, encouragement and *standard setting* (E)
- Presence of goals / deadlines / priorities (I/E)

6. Bandwagon effect / following the crowd

- Rise above the negative response of "acting white" (I)
- Find (same culture/race, sibling) role-models to develop study skills (I/E)
- *I want to do what I have to do for myself* (I/E)
- Monitor/separate from peers who motivate/dissuade (E)

B. *Stereotyping/ lack of cultural understanding

- *Be your own person / believe in yourself (I)
- *Don't worry what people think about you / rise above it (I)
- *Parents, ethnic groups promote cultural understanding and positive intra-group relations/interactions to increase tolerance and comfort with each other (E)
- Focus on your priorities, self-efficacy, and self-determination to break stereotypes (I/E)
- Participate in diverse groups and educate others (I/E)
- Prove others wrong when they say you can't do it (I/E)
- Confront people and talk with them (I/E)
- *Change the bad stereotype for good stereotype* (I/E)

C. Low self-esteem

1. No morals

- Learn from past experience (I)
- Get values (ex. Including the desire to do better) (I)
- Consider religion (E)
- *Choose to be a role-model*
- *Stick to what is right*

2. No success

- Being more involved in class (I)
- Having success motivates you to keep going (I)
- Working hard (I)
- Wanting to be smart (I)
- Have future goals (ex. To be rich) (I)

- Adults pushing you hard and encouraging you in all areas (sports, volunteering, school) (E)
- Positive encouragement from coaches (E)

3. No confidence

- *Self-motivation (I)
- +More immediate positive results/rewards and money (E)
- Ignore negativity (I)
- Help others with language (E)
- Knowing when you are at your best (I)
- Adults pushing you hard and encouraging you in all areas (sports, volunteering, school) (E)
- Positive encouragement from coaches (E)
- *Mom and dad push me up*
- *Maintain good close friends/relationships that don't put you down*

D. Personal perceptions of obstacles (ex. Lack of challenging curriculum)

- For language issues, get help from others (E)
- See legacy of high school programming in family before graduation and avoid it at all costs (I)
- Develop routines (I)

E. External structure

F. Disabilities

- Speech clinics (E)
- Computer accessibility (E)
- Mental health resources (E)

G. Lack of self-motivation/procrastination

- Goal setting/organization (I)
- Get classes in your area of interest/career (E)
- Acknowledge fear of failure (I)
- Don't procrastinate/ do homework right away (I)
- Structure to organize time (I)
- Coaches looking at grades (E)
- *Sports drive you to keep a certain grade level*
- *Set higher standards for yourself*

H. Adult pressure/expectations

- More structure and/or consistency (E)
- Use sports and extracurricular activities as an outlet (E)

I. Family pressure/expectations

1. Lack of support

- High adult expectations (E)

2. Home life

- Recognize parents' happiness and *influence coming from third world countries* (E)
- Acknowledge that opportunities increase by moving to America (E)
- Develop routines (I)
- *Not wanting to squander the hard work of older family members* (I)
- Good family dynamics (E)

3. Distractions & trauma

- Less severe consequences (E)
- *Self-control* (I)
- Moving to an environment with a better learning experience (ex. Coffee shop, headphones) (I)

4. Social status

- *Not wanting to be like your parents or siblings* (I)
- Don't act like someone you're not (I)

5. Money, job, and time management issues

- Get/save money (E)
- Security—good colleges/jobs (E)
- Scholarships (E)

J. Language barriers/being an outsider

- *Getting teachers help* (I)

K. Isolation

- +More people caring and attending to kid's needs
- Moving to an environment with a better learning experience (ex. Coffee shop, headphones) (I)
- Positive encouragement from coaches (E)

L. Lack of friends

- *Introducing friends to one another* (E)
- *Maintain good close friends/relationships that don't put you down*

M. Lack of understanding each other/conflict of ideas

- Peer support (E)
- Nicer hall monitors with racial / cultural sensitivity
- Be willing to hear different perspectives (I)

II. Solutions – School

A. * Lack of encouragement and support from teachers, counselors, administrators, ALL STAFF, (contract limitations and limited time during school)

1. **Limited level of relationship between students and staff*

- Teachers should spend more time after school
- Student email updates
- More encouraging/supportive adults

2. *Teachers are inaccessible, not enough help

- Teachers should spend more time after school
- More class meetings and guest speakers
- *More general information and content explanations to students*
- *Don't pack students like sardines*

3. +Lack of administrator interest in students

- Someone should be checking on all students' progress
- *More information about eligibility requirements for various things*
- *More information about where to volunteer in the community*
- *Public recognition for success for many things (not just athletes)*
- Student email updates
- Make it easier to make an announcement and/or make fliers
- *More available information to students*

4. Disinterest from teachers

- Teachers need to offer more consistent feedback
- Teacher mentors/college students to help
- *More information about eligibility requirements for various things*
- *More information about where to volunteer in the community*
- *Make classes and curriculum more interesting and fun*
- *Teachers fully explain content to students*

5. Unrealistic expectations by teachers and counselors

6. Teacher favoritism

- Enforce policies or change them

7. Feeling unwanted

- More dialogue (I)
- *Uptight, strict teachers can relax teaching style*
- *Teachers don't put students down*
- *Teachers don't "call-out" / embarrass students, especially African American students*

8. Lack of friends in classes/no social support

- Teacher mentors / college students to help
- *Academic achievement mentoring programs by and for African American males (ex. PAC @ Pioneer, MAC @ Huron)*

9. Lack of welcoming classrooms/teachers not engaged in student learning

- *More consistency in same course curriculum implementation*
- Make it easier to make an announcement and/or make fliers
- Teachers need to balance time better, being friend and authority
- *When calling on students for answers, and student gets answer wrong, teacher takes time to explain why it's wrong*

B. *Lack of understanding & sensitivity for cultural factors (religion, gender, ethnicity, race, income, etc.)

1. +Stereotyping and discrimination

- *More diverse teaching styles*
- Be willing to hear different perspectives (I)
- *Draw lessons and inspiration from patterns that defy stereotypes*
- *Support programs by and for African American males (ex. PAC @ Pioneer, MAC @ Huron)*
- *Increase number of teachers with diverse cultural and linguistic background*
- *Staff do not stereotype students into categories (ex. troublemaker, lazy, clown, jock)*
- *Student actions speak louder than talk about stereotypes*

2. +Lack of respect for students from many staff

- Make it easier to talk to the principals
- Teachers are needed who respect and bond with students
- Administrators make effort to get to know students

3. Teachers uninformed of challenges faced by immigrant students

- More adult and peer support
- Schools should be more accepting (hall monitors not so scary)

4. Language barriers

- Need more counselors with better training for consistency
- Teacher encouragement/friendly/offering time

5. Receptivity of all staff to students / acceptance of dissenting opinions

- More social / cultural awareness
- Closer relationships between students and adults (I)

6. Judgment based on sibling precedence

- *Teachers need to have high expectations of all students*
- All teachers really care and work all students hard

C. *Limited communication and info from counselors

1. Counselors hard to see/have too many students/inaccessible

- Mental health resources
- One-on-one attention
- Someone should be checking on all students' progress

2. Unorganized counselors

- More information from counselors (on SAT/ACT, scholarships, informed schedule choices)
- More information on Community Resource (CR's) contracts
- *More information about job opportunities and scholarships*
- *More information about eligibility requirements for various things*
- *More information about where to volunteer in the community*
- Make going to career center mandatory
- Taking classes to graduate earlier
- Job and career fairs
- *More informed staff that understands and shares information with students*

D. +Lack of respect for youth culture

1. Lack of inclusion of students

- More dialogue
- Communication with students
- Student e-mail updates

- *Tutoring and mentoring programs for everyone*
- *Public recognition for success for many things (not just athletes)*
- Central location for resource information
- Advertise / announce things more often / longer / more and better
- *More informed staff that understands and shares information with students*
- *More policy information / procedure information / etc.*
- *More available information to students*

2. Lack of request for student input on policies

- More student perspective / more say so
- Poll students on school spending priorities (needed for resources)
- Make it easier to make announcements and/or make fliers
- More places for fliers
- City council involvement with youth and teens

3. Lack of involvement of youth in own education choices

- "Free speech" centers, website bulletins
- More "leisure" books as well as recently published textbooks
- More access to college visits

E. +Limited curriculum and instruction issues

1. +Teacher lack of subject knowledge

- Long term substitute teachers that actually teach the subject
- Better, newer books, *more books on African-American history, get rid of books that don't help the courses*
- Teacher mentors / college students to help
- *More regular teacher evaluations*

2. Teachers are cocky

- Teachers need to balance time better, being friend and authority
- Teachers should have regular chat time with class before teaching
- *More regular teacher evaluations*
- *More informed staff that understands and shares information with students*

3. Value own abilities more than helping students

- We need inspirational guest speakers
- Teachers should spend more time after school

4. Not enough notice / time constraints for studying / lack of test coordination

- One-on-one attention

- Teachers need to offer more consistent feedback
- Explain things in class instead of afterwards
- *More consistency in same course curriculum implementation*

5. Students have different learning styles & need different teaching methods

- Quiet / equipped study spaces
- Inspirational guest speakers
- Teachers should spend more time after school
- Teachers need to offer more consistent feedback
- Teacher mentors / college students to help
- More college and career prep classes
- Schools should start later / offer different schedules (ex. block scheduling)
- Explain things in class instead of afterwards
- More older students mentoring younger students
- More class meetings and guest speakers

6. Classes not challenging / too easy or too hard (placement issues)

- Someone should be checking on all students' progress
- Teacher mentors / college students to help
- More college and career prep classes
- More & better run classes to prepare for jobs, vocational, technical, trades
- Offer more challenging classes before senior year
- Taking classes to graduate earlier
- *Make classes and curriculum more interesting and fun*

F. +Limited Resources

1. +Inaccessibility of technology/computers and library resources

- Laptops for high school students
- Quicker internet
- Announcement technology
- Quiet / equipped study spaces
- More computers at libraries/Longer library resource center hours before and after school / computer accessibility/ *more leisure books as well as recently published textbooks*

2. Money

- Need more money for school expenses
- Raise temperature for better learning

- Better equipped school staff
- *Realize/acknowledge all that schools do have (clubs, opportunities)*

3. Inadequate school supplies

- Smaller classes and more desks
- Better, newer books, *more books on African-American history, get rid of books that don't help the courses*
- *Bigger lockers*
- *More comfortable chairs and desks*
- Fix PA system

4. Inability to meet financial expectations to purchase supplies

- Need more money for school expenses

G. +Lack of structure and firm standards; counter-productive/ineffective policies

1. +Weak external structures (easy to skip, tardiness policy, cheating, suspension)

- Enforce policies or change them
- Less school bureaucracy

2. Lack of enforceable rules and school support

- Less red tape / relax (ex. signatures on posters)

3. Impact of large school population

- Smaller classes and more desks
- Available study area
- Schools should start later / offer different schedules (ex. block scheduling)
- Longer passing time

4. Insufficient teacher accountability

- Someone should be checking on all students' progress
- *More regular teacher evaluations*
- *More consistency in same course curriculum implementation*
- *More regular teacher evaluations*

III. Solutions – Community

A. *Lack of information about and access to resources and opportunities

1. Transportation issues

- More bike trails
- *Low cost driver's education training in school*
- *More parking downtown*
- *More student parking passes*
- *Better city bus system (more frequency after school and weekends, more extended routes directly to all libraries and routes to Pittsfield and Scio Township)*
- Bus money or passes especially for low-income kids

2. More sports

- Easier ways to participate
- More after school
- More business support for more youth programs

3. Need money

- Donate money to help kids use resources who don't have it
- More financial support for tutoring, mentoring, service, leadership programs and teen risk prevention
- *More scholarships for people who need them*
- *More jobs*
- *Flexible work schedule*

4. Volunteering opportunities

- *More information and advertising about opportunities
- More variety in volunteering opportunities
- More eye-catching advertisements to recruit
- At the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Public Schools, churches, and libraries
- Make COE office / Trailblazers more accessible and advertised

5. Library resources & computers

- +More available time

6. Time issues

- +School should offer more to bridge with community volunteering and tutoring resources
- +Block scheduling would make it easier for community involvement

7. Need jobs

- Job hotline

8. Tutoring

- More tutoring resources
- Homework Help Hotline
- Information from teachers for tutoring
- More places for tutoring and mentoring
- *More help with English, SAT, and ACT*

9. Other

- Public TV for high school kids
- Information through the mail

B. *Stereotyping by adults (stores, police, media, others)

1. *Low receptivity and respect from adults*

- *Religious leaders, friends, family more encouraging and open-minded*
- Merchants and police more responsive, encouraging and open-minded
- Adults who will listen to life stories

2. **Low receptivity and respect from media**

- Media more responsive, encouraging and open-minded
- Use their community position to set higher standards for how youth are viewed and treated

C. +Parental influence & family problems

1. *Parental punishment and restrictions

- Seek places that focus on young people and the positive
- *Sibling encouragement, who did not learn English or go to school*

2. +Lack of parental involvement and engagement

- *Parents encouragement / advice / support / rewards / setting standards
- +More people caring and attending to kid's needs
- More parent interest in their students' activities
- Access community centers, church

3. +Parents' lack of understanding of life today

- More encouraging/supportive adults
- Self-motivation (I)
- Access community centers, church

- Family members and *guardians and friends* encouraging and open minded
 - Parents should focus on intrinsic value of volunteering instead of superficial (ex. honors credit)
 - Adults who will listen to life stories
- 4. +Parents have negative points of view about students' activities outside of school**
- *Sibling encouragement, who did not learn English or go to school*
- 5. No interaction with extended family**
- More encouraging/supportive adults
- 6. Family detachment from community**
- 7. Parents over-committed with work**
- *Sibling encouragement, who did not learn English or go to school*
- 8. Parental expectation for students different than students' expectations**
- Rewards / recognition (ex. small acknowledgements for achievements)
- 9. Too much pressure from parents, school, sports, and jobs**
- Less tests in school
 - More rewards and appreciation
 - Less homework

D. +Low self-motivation / self-esteem

1. Age restrictions

- Lower age limits

2. Social intimidation/exclusion

- +More teen hang-outs *and for Hispanic teens*
- Peer support
- Rewards / recognition (ex. small acknowledgements for achievements)

3. Limited financial resources

- Better quality summer activities, community service opportunities and academic programs

4. Culture of boredom

- Older students need group activities not geared to younger students
- Youth rallies
- Self-motivation

- Better quality summer activities (ex. free swimming), community service opportunities and academic programs
- Adults pushing you hard and encouraging you in all areas (sports, volunteering, school)

5. Time management

E. Safety

- +More teen hang-outs *and for Hispanic teens*
- Youth rallies