

In Their Own Words: **Academic Relevance and Rigor**

Many young people felt schools did not have equitable opportunities and expectations for students at all levels.

- "They should have better teachers who can teach on different levels."
- "Give kids more advanced material at earlier ages so they will be ready when they get to high school; a lot of kids drop because they don't understand."
- "If you aren't getting it you need someone who will help you out. Schools just pass you to get you out of there."
- "There was a world of difference between schools. Some schools are really loose on what they teach you and on discipline. The tougher school is about getting you ready. They should teach all students to work hard, even at different levels."
- "Make them (the schools) all equal, same opportunities for all students in all schools."
- "Schools need to be more equal – not some kids get high level classes, special programs and interesting activities but not other kids."

Of surveyed youth who dropped out of high school:

- 46.4% say falling behind in the class work contributed to their dropping out.
- 39.7% say the difficult of their classes contributed to their dropping out.
- 18.9% of students who dropped say their classes were too easy.

Other young people commented on how schools should guide students to the programs or schools that work best for them.

- "Kids should be told more about their options for high school when they are in 8th grade."
- "Students need more information on magnet and other program choices."
- "Make magnet options easier to understand, apply to."

Youth shared their experiences on the relevance of classroom material.

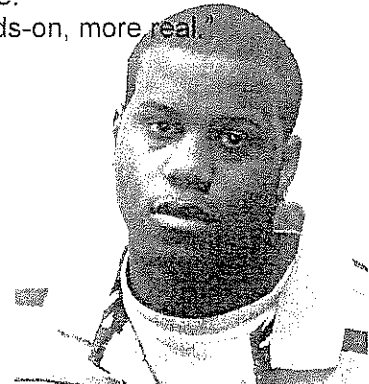
- "I think most of the classes they taught me were pointless. I didn't take any classes in high school that apply to what I learn in college."
- "Make learning more fun – less time in books, more hands-on, more real."

"My classes teach me things I'll use in life."

- 80.3% of students/graduates agree or strongly agree.
- 72.4% of dropouts agree or strongly agree.

"High school helped me get ready for college."

- 66.7% of students/graduates agree or strongly agree.
- 44.8% of dropouts agree or strongly agree.



In Their Own Words: **Large and Impersonal Schools**

Young people who dropped out of school were much less likely to be “connected” to their school or community.

- 13.5% of high school students/graduates surveyed reported they attended more than one high school while 73.7% of dropouts reported they had switched high schools at least once.
- 74.4% of students/graduates report they participate in extracurricular activities. Only 43.8% of dropouts report any type of extracurricular involvement.

The most frequent reason young people who dropped out cited for leaving school was “personal or family problems”.

- 70.7% of drop out say personal issues contributed to their leaving high school.
- “When they asked me about why I missed school, my problems were personal and I didn’t feel comfortable telling them.”
- However, most young people who dropped out could not think of anyone at school they would have gone to for help with their problems.

When asked, “what would make schools better”, young people had many suggestions that reflected a need for more individual, positive interaction from adults.

- “More one on one time with students who need help”.
- “If the teachers wanted to teach kids how to act right, they need more one on one time.”
- “I acted out because I wanted attention, not because I wanted to be bad.”
- “Teachers need to be highly skilled; they should be able to deal with kids’ issues.”
- “Teacher must persevere even with the struggling kids.”
- “Have teachers pay more attention to students.”
- “There is not enough time with teachers.”

Frequently, young people talked about feeling like it didn’t matter to anyone whether they were in school.

- 43.1% of all dropouts report the fact that “no one encouraged me to stay” contributed somewhat or significantly to their leaving school.
- “Let kids go to school in their neighborhood. It makes more of a community where people know each other and become more involved. You’re more likely to behave if people know you.”



In Their Own Words: School Environment

When asked why they dropped out of school, most young people described a general dislike for school. 60.3% percent of young people who dropped out do so in part because "school was boring".

- "I didn't like it at all."
- "School wasn't for me."
- "Wasn't feeling high school."
- "I hated school."
- "School is dull."



Of surveyed youth who dropped out of high school:
34.4% report the school environment contributed to their dropping out.
31.1% report they didn't "fit in" at school.

When asked for more specific impressions about school, young people reported:

- "High school is like an introduction to the real world and mostly you feel lonely there."
- "Its hard to keep attention on the learning, hard to stay focused."
- "The harder (more demanding) school had a better environment because the teachers cared and told you it mattered whether you cared."
- "You can tell if teachers are only there for a paycheck."

Many observations and comments were about discipline.

- "Schools pay more attention to discipline than on how you are learning; they check your clothes for dress code more than they check your homework."
- "It was all discipline and punishment, not much help."
- "They use detention too much; I got detention because the teacher shut the door as I was walking in class and all they do there is give you a packet and tell you to do it."
- "Schools should talk to kids about alternatives to their poor choices, not just punish them."
- "Teachers sometimes spread the word about kids who cut up and it makes it nearly impossible to get over that. If a teacher hears you are bad, they never look at you any other way."
- They send kids to detention too fast. They send you and then it's like much easier to drop out from there.

Other comments reflected difficulties with peers.

- "I didn't like being judged or stereotyped by the teachers or the kids."
- "Some people choose to be retarded even though they are smart."
- "Peer interactions make it tough. People make comments, pick on me."
- "I could get along with the teachers but the issue was getting along with friends."